

**Theses for doctoral thesis
(PhD)**

**Crisis situation in East-Hungary in
1918-1919. Military history,
local history and legal history aspects.**

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I. The aim of the research

The presentation of the history of Hungary between 1918 and 1919 reflects the re-politicization of the last hundred years of Hungarian historiography, with the interpretation of the period and the subject always meeting the needs of the political course and the state establishment in power. Accordingly, Hungarian historiography after 1945, following Marxist-Soviet patterns, presented the period in a fundamentally positive way, with all its aspects (local history, military history, legal history and others). All this also served to portray the post-1919 period (the Horthy era) in a negative light in comparison and in all respects, but it is also true that the historiography of the Horthy era also described the events of 1918-19 in the darkest tones. After 1989 and with the expansion of archival research opportunities, Hungarian historiography turned its attention to the topic again, as indicated by the increasing publication activity in this field and the establishment of a separate institute in 2017 (*Clio Institute*), one of the main profiles of which is the multifaceted research of the history of the Soviet Republic. In 2021, Pál Hatos published his summary work (*The World Revolution of the Bad Guys. The History of the 1919 Soviet Republic*), which not only places the topic in the international context of the era, but also takes into account the conditions and reactions of contemporary Hungarian society, and summarizes and uses the most important Hungarian and foreign-language historiography on the subject with great precision. Béla Bodó's work in English and Robert Gewarth's and John Horne's volume of international comparisons, also published in Hungarian, show that the subject has a wealth of international context, which fits well with the increasingly widespread research on the history of the forces.

Given the questions posed in my dissertation and the theses that reflect them, I seek answers to the following questions:

1. Where was the place and what was the role of the activities of the Székely Division in the period and in the region in the development of the situation in Eastern Hungary? In this regard, I will give a detailed overview of the military history of the unit, its national and international aspects and background, and I will also focus on the officer corps, especially on the activities of Károly Kratochvil. I will analyze the relationship between the Székely Division and the Red Army, the conflicts and the reactions of the population in Eastern Hungary. Closely linked to this was the fate and situation of the Székely refugees at the time, which was a key indicator of the crisis in the region.

2. What characterized the new political system (council power) and its reception in the region, in Hajdú-Bihar (Debrecen, Hajdúnánás)? This question required a thorough overview of local history, which has ample contemporary and more recent published sources, as well as literature, so here I have focused mainly on the regional emphasis of the question (the characteristics of council power in Eastern Hungary). Accordingly, I considered it important to emphasize that the Romanian occupation limited the proletarian power's room for manoeuvre in time and space, but at the same time did not mitigate the shocking impact of the crisis on the population, as the terror of the new political system was quickly replaced by the tyranny of the Romanian occupiers. The agrarian nature of the region's population and the importance of the Reformed Church led me to focus more on the agrarian and ecclesiastical policies of the proletarian dictatorship.

3. What were the characteristics of the Council's criminal policy and secret services? The criminal policy, the legal system and the organs of violence (political investigation department, secret service) of the new, in the parlance of the time "revolutionary order", were basically intended to stabilize and strengthen the system, but their successful implementation was frustrated for several reasons. On the one hand, the new regime did not have time to fully establish the new legal order, and on the other hand, the new, qualified legal apparatus could not be set up, not to mention the fact that the legal order and judiciary, which was entirely politically and ideologically driven, gave rise to widespread social discontent, which the political decision-makers, in order to alleviate, built into the system total inconsistency, contingency and amateurism, which resulted in a mass of professional errors.

4. How were the events of the time in the region related to the situation and foreign policy of the country? In connection with this question, and especially in the chapters on military history and local history, I have always followed the development of national politics and its impact on the region, as well as the historical events of international military and diplomatic relations in the last phase of the war and the first year of peace. My thesis, and in this respect I agree with what is now largely a consensus finding based on recent research, is that although the country was unable to make sovereign decisions due to the defeat of the war and the revolutions and internal collapse, at the local level, resistance (military and political), crisis management and the use of various forms of survival techniques did point in a direction of consolidation, although this proved insufficient to ensure territorial integrity.

II. Resources and working methods used

The genre of the dissertation (local history, military history, legal history) determines to a large extent the sources used (mostly in the form of published source publications) and the literature. For each chapter, I have also reviewed the relevant previous literature and attempted to bring their findings into line with recent research. The thesis deals comprehensively with the struggles of the Székely Division in the territory of present-day East Hungary, the new political establishment in Hajdú-Bihar, especially in Debrecen and Hajdúnánás, the criminal policy of the Hungarian council power, the legislation, the legal institutions, the political investigative bodies and the secret service of the new political establishment. The doctoral thesis includes research in military science, law and history (local history). In this respect, I have partly sought to summarize the findings of the older and more recent literature (at the level of thematic chapters) and partly tried to point out the main points of emphasis in the relevant historical sources and literature.

The first thematic chapter of the dissertation (The Székely Division in Eastern Hungary. An experiment in national defence and its consequences.), the contemporary works and reminiscences (Vilmos Böhm, Gusztáv Gratz, István Eördögh, Károly Huszár, Archduke József, Béla Kelemen, Endre Koréh, Károly Kratochvil, Lajos Szádeczky-Kardoss), there are also newer and useful summaries and studies (works by Tibor Balla, Péter Farkas, Olivér Fráter, Barna Gottfried, Mihály Laczkó, Péter Limpár, Szabolcs Nagy, Ignác Romsics, among others). At the beginning of this chapter, I thought it important to write more about the historical- geographical context of the activities of the Szekler Division (Transylvania and Partium) and the historical context of the peoples living there (Hungarians, Romanians, Saxons).

In the next chapter of my work (Proletarian dictatorship in Debrecen and Hajdúság. The path leading to the Soviet Republic and its regional effects), the historiographical material is also multi-layered due to the mixing of genres (local history and military history). On the one hand, I used older local history literature dealing with the region (Péter Gunst, András Fehér, Dr. Zoltán Varga, summaries edited by Gyula Tokody), because the political leaders of pre-1989 Hungarian historiography, although under tight control, allowed and supported local history and other targeted thematic research, which in many cases led to the publication of useful source material and/or gap-filling works (including the editions and writings of László Fogarassy, Tibor Hajdu, Andor Ladányi). I have supplemented this with the results of more recent research, some of it on local history (János Bene, Gergely Bödök, József Buczkó, Olivér Perczel, Gábor Ujváry and others).

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters (Military and civilian intelligence in the period of the Soviet Republic, with special reference to the procedure of the Political Investigation Department. The main features of the criminal legal system of the Soviet Republic. Criminal procedure in the Soviet Republic. In the development of the Criminal Prosecution of the Proletarian Dictatorship), as in the previous sections, it was inevitable to use volumes and treatments of documents from the period and before 1989, predominantly from legal history, but here I have also sought to focus mainly on the Political Investigation Department, and the history of the contemporary military police, I have also taken into account new research findings that have emerged as a result of the increasing accessibility of archival material (András Fejérdy, Péter Jagadics, Sándor Rajos, László Simon, Károly Szabó, Dalma Takó). As regards the general jurisprudential part, mainly Béla Sarlós (The Revolutionary Law Courts of the Soviet Republic. The formation of the legal system of the Soviet Republic), Pál Halász (Legislation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. *Tanulmányok a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság államáról és jogáról*) and Ferenc Rákos (State and Constitution in the Hungarian Soviet Republic).

The historiography of the subject has in places also reflected on the polemics of the subject and the period. One of the many examples of this is that the "betrayal" or, from another perspective, the proud taking up of arms of the Székely Division has been a frequently mentioned topos in the history of the Soviet Republic over the last hundred years. While the supporters of the Soviet Republic, influenced by the anti-Romanian sentiments of the Hungarian public (the internationalist proletarian dictatorship cleverly used nationalist rhetoric to mobilize), could find a scapegoat in the Székely Division that betrayed the Commune, the Horthy-era, in the official memory policy, at least one action of the counter-revolutionary mobilizations could be pointed out, which, if not in other respects, was at least quite certainly successful in the arms trade, and was not tainted by dubious cases such as the disappearance of millions stolen from the Viennese embassy. The accusation of 'treason' can also be found in the works of contemporary, 'right-wing' authors. The former military officer Mihály Gyurócsik Jászay Mihály Gyurócsik dealt in detail with the organization of the division and his role as sub-commander in its leadership, as well as the difficulties of his own heroic struggle. In his interpretation, the internationalist People's Commissars in Budapest did not develop a concept for the use of the nationalist Székely Division because they distrusted it, as the existence and glorious performance of "a strong army corps imbued with national feeling" did not fit in with the policy of the Soviet Republic. However, Mihály Gyurócsik Jászay did not idealize the Székely Division at all. He took issue with the military history of József Breit and criticized the arming of the Székely Division. In his memoirs, entitled *Lessons and Truths from the Recent Past*, published in 1926, he argued that it was the Székely Division that should have set an example and that all other 'red formations' should have

been 'the national by enthusiasm, to ennoble, to ennoble." First to expel the invaders and then to overthrow the proletarian dictatorship. And with this, Mihály Gyurócsik Jászay - even if from his own point of view - repeated the Székely Hadosztály the left-wing accusation of "betrayal".

The former commander of the Szekler Division, Károly Kratochvil, made the greatest efforts to refute the accusation of "treason", which could be found on both the left and the right. In 1923 he attempted to separate the activities of the Szekler soldiers from the military policy of both the Károlyi regime and the Soviet Republic, and to integrate the division into the counter-revolutionary narrative. Kratochvil countered Mihály Gyurócsik Jászay Gyurócsik's exaggerated view of the strength of the Székely Division, which argued that rather than surrender, the Székely Division should have crushed the Romanian army and then overthrown the Soviet Republic.

III. Results of the dissertation

The contemporary sources and literature of the period wrote about the activities of the Székely Division, its battles defending Transylvania, the perception and political role of the military corps, as much from subjective and political motives (revisionism, anti-Bolshevism) as from the historical works published between 1945 and 1990 (Marxism, internationalism). More recent evaluations also emphasise that the 1919 occupation of the Romanian interventionist army lived as a painful memory in the memory of Hungarians. Violent requisitions, robberies, internments, murders and total destruction lined the paths of the Romanian army. The Soviet government, headed by the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Béla Kun, who exercised almost total power, did everything in its power to prevent the formation of a kind of 'national Bolshevik' Hungarian Red Army, which was also fighting for the territorial integrity of the country. In the army, they persecuted ideas supporting the preservation of historical Hungary, including the prohibition of units to fly red flags in national colours.

In fact, the council power openly opposed the principle of territorial integrity, which had a demoralizing effect on the Székely Division. The terror of the Bolsheviks frightened the soldiers, who feared for their families, and deepened the antagonism between the members of the division and the Red soldiers. Due to their political unreliability, the People's Commissariat for War did not provide the division with the necessary clothing and ammunition to continue the fight. Red troop units, including the Internationalists, were in most cases routed at the start of the battle, despite being in possession of the best equipment. Unfortunately, the communist leaders considered the achievement of world revolution their most important goal and openly opposed the principle of the country's territorial integrity.

In connection with my questioning of the regional characteristics of the new political system, it should be emphasized that the political, economic and military crisis of the country from the autumn of 1918 to the summer of 1919 was almost entirely "mirrored" in the East-Hungarian region. However, some specific features must be added to qualify this statement. Firstly, the region came under Romanian military occupation very quickly (Debrecen on 23 April 1919), which can be seen as a positive aspect, since the period of Soviet rule in the region was much shorter than in Budapest or in the central and western parts of the country. At the same time, the situation in the region was aggravated by the large number of Transylvanian (Székely) refugees and the fact that the predominantly agrarian population opposed the revolutionary course from the outset (partly due to the lack of effective land distribution) as a reaction to the so-called revolutionary red terror, which was quickly replaced by a series of

atrocities against the civilian population by the Romanian military occupation.

With regard to the thesis related to the chapters on legal history dealing with the civil defence of the Soviet Republic, the political investigative department, and the criminal legal system, criminal procedure, their institutions, legislation and functioning of the regime, it is clear that the new political establishment wanted to break with the old legal practice in this area as well. However, this did not really succeed, because there was not enough time to fully establish, operate and consolidate the revolutionary legal order. In addition, the regime used this area essentially for political and ideological purposes, but mostly inconsistently, since the new members of the legal apparatus were mostly unqualified, and the members of the old legal establishment often sabotaged revolutionary lawmaking out of professional integrity. Although revolutionary terror permeated the entire legal structure of the Soviet Republic, the legislation, the implementation of laws and decrees and the judiciary were in many cases ad hoc and inconsistent, because the regime's rulers feared that unpopular judicial decisions would further erode the already fragile social support and popularity of the council power.

This was despite the fact that the new, Soviet-style regime was known to have been very popular at the beginning: the new socialist party, which was named after Béla Kun, soon swelled into a mass party. One of the reasons for this was that the people saw in the Soviet Republic the last chance to save the national borders, and with them the land, mines and factories. As they felt that the Western powers, especially the French, and the Romania, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serb-Croat-Slovenian supported by them, were interested in the dismemberment of Hungary, many people turned to Soviet Russia as a last resort when they supported the Soviet Republic, not out of fear, or not just out of fear. In this context, and in the light of recent research, and as an outlook, I have touched on the relationship between the Soviet system and the churches (focusing mainly on the Reformed Church in the region), and the perception of the Red Terror, which has subsequently fundamentally defined the place of the Soviet Republic in various historical narratives.

The relationship between the Soviet Republic and the churches can by no means be described in terms of the almost a dozen murders of priests and the rapidly alienating, albeit inconsistent and hasty, religious persecution of the peasant masses, which produced a number of absurdities, from the ridiculous ban on painting Easter eggs to the prohibition of Holy Communion (although Prohibition was universal during the period). Anti-clerical propaganda was not a communist invention either, because the growing social-democratic influence had already made it an official to the level of government policy. Later on, there were also many members of the Revolutionary Governing Council who did not want to disturb the religious

sentiments of the rural population, especially women. There is a broad consensus among experts on the summary of recent literature on the Red Terror. Partly that the White Terror that ushered in the Horthy era was much more widespread and severe than the Red Terror, and partly that the Red Terror of the Soviet Republic was much more random and irregular. The Bolshevik political violence in Hungary in 1919 showed quite different patterns in time and territory: it did not begin on 21 March but only in mid-April, peaking in June, and while in the central areas it claimed hundreds of lives, in the far reaches, such as communist Somogy, the Red Terror had only one fatality, similar to that in Nógrád County. The Palóc region remained almost free of terrorist rampages, with the exception of one local massacre. But terror remained limited mainly because the exercise of power has also met with fierce opposition in central forums.



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