

**STATEMENTS OF THE PhD THESIS**

**THE HISTORY OF THE SZÉKELY ACTION, 1902-1914**  
THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SZÉKELYFÖLD

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## I. THE OBJECTIVES AND THE SUBJECT OF THE THESIS

After the Compromise in 1867 Hungary underwent a huge economical and social development. However not the whole area and population of the country was considering the general boom. Especially the peripheries characterized by poor natural sources and more archaic social organization suffered from lagging behind, which reached such a level in some decades that the handling of these problems needed the inevitable inference of the government.

After the previous occasional governmental aids the encouragement of the underdeveloped areas' progress started to become official around the turn of the centuries. The „aid actions” of the Ministry of Agriculture appeared to be the most efficient with the most longterm effects among all the governmental aids. In 1897 in Kárpátalja – the East-Carpathian areas – the „Rutén” the later so called Mountainous Action had been established „in County Bereg, the centre of the future activities planned to be elaborated on the whole area of the Carpaths”, then in almost the whole mountainous periphery separate actions were inaugurated. In 1902 the „Székely(föld) Action” was launched, its scope was expanded firstly on the areas of Transylvania populated by the Hungarians, Székelys and Csángós and later on its whole counties. The number and scope of these aid actions were continuously extended: in 1913 six branch offices were working for the Mountainous areas, Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely, Felvidék / the Northern Carpathian areas, Temesvár, Nagyvárad – with the sphere of 31 counties, defined according to the budget justification of the given ministry „it cannot be regarded as an »Aid Action « but real administrative, official task, since the scope of the work of these offices is the intensive, tailored to the local needs execution of the governmental programme of the Ministry of Agriculture.”.

The assessments of the history and the importance of the separate governmental actions differ in both depth and quality, however their evaluation concerning them as a whole would require their perspicacious study. Only the so called Mountainous Action has been analysed to a certain extent based on archive sources, nothing or just partial problems – such as the Székely emigration or the events of the Székely Congress in (Csík)tusnád(fürdő), have been scrutinized by the science of history. Attributable to this lack of assessment the summarizing studies either did not take these events into consideration or regarded as contributing with minor importance.

*The present dissertation aims to convey the first complex, monographic summary of the notion, reasons, activities and results of the Székely Action based on the printed literature, contemporary (statistical) data, official reports, never published – and forgotten – archive sources, and contemporary printed media sources. Concurrently the goal of the assessment has been to introduce the underlying responsibility of the government in raising the underdeveloped, deficient areas mainly to be found in the peripheries, and what kind of means and contrivances can be applied by the government in advancing the regions.*

The thesis introduces the economic and social circumstances of Székelyföld during the dual-monarchy, summarizes the main problems resulting in the underdevelopment of the region, and which as the result or reaction to these problems, such as the mass emigration, reinforced the social, economic crisis in Székelyföld (Chapter 2).

In consequence of the lack of previous summaries the introduction of those social movements were inevitable which revealed the rootcauses of the problem, as well as attempting solution or supplying suggestions for them. Their different intensity operation is characteristic of the period of time, and they played an important role in making the liberal government – no matter however liberal they had been – realise the necessity and convey governmental interference (Chapter 3).

As a result of the social movements the government started to develop the areas lagging behind. Although on the sittings of the Parliament the MPs did not consider these Székely issues as major problems and in other occasions they remained on the level of verbal enthusiasm and intentions, the official executing institutes showed their initiative and attempted to advance the underdeveloped, mountainous areas. One of the best activities among the ministries were performed by the Ministry of Agriculture, the minister of the field, Darányi Ignác, who although being a liberal politician was open to the conservative values as well, and his reputable successors (Tallián Béla, Serényi Béla) personally paid attention to supplying the underdeveloped areas with additional aids regarding agricultural problems.

Other ministries were not so greatly attentive to the problems of Székelyföld, but they were also open to contribute to the regional development. The most important input was delivered by the Ministry of Commerce, however the industrial activity launched in 1905 due to the start of WWI. could not reach significant results. The preparation of the necessary measures for rearrangements of the landed properties and the amendment of the land-register system by the Ministry of Justice between 1902 and 1909 should also be mentioned (Chapter 4).

In a separate chapter the study reveals and assesses the work, scope of work and achieved results of the Székelyföld, (Transylvanian) ministerial branch office of the Ministry of Agriculture, under the narrowly interpreted name of the „Székely Action” (Chapter 5).

## II. ACQUISITION OF DATA, TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH

No summarizing study has been made about the governmental actions, including the Székely Action. The modern historical criticism has focused only on a few specific questions, the introduction and evaluation of the Mountainous Action (BOTLIK JÓZSEF), the partial analyses of the activities of the congress in Tusnád, which is regarded as one of the immediate antecedent of the Székely emigration as well as the Székely Action. (EGYED ÁKOS, GIDÓ CSABA, KÁNYA JÓZSEF), the introduction of a few actions of the branch office in Székelyföld (RÓTH ANDRÁS LAJOS), the Székely middleclass nobility (GARDA DEZSŐ), and the essay about the co-operative movement (BALÁZSI DÉNES). The study has used the competent data and results of several studies with overlapping topics (about prominent persons, like Darányi Ignác, Bethlen István, Gidófalvy István, etc., about the agricultural policy, and institutes, like the Museum of Industry in Székelyföld, etc.)

The printed materials, articles of the era have supplied with a more significant amount of information about the analyses of the thesis. The amount of them is so huge that even in the given years (1904) an independent „repertorium” was compiled about the literature of the Székely Action. The printed media provided necessary information about the activities of the branch offices in Székelyföld/Transylvania, with major emphasis on daily papers like *Székely Világ*, *Csíki Lapok*, *Maros-Torda*, *Szabadság*, *Székely Ellenzék*, *Székelyföld*, *Székely Lapok*, *Udvarhelyi Híradó*.

The administrative statistical data and official reports of the dual-monarchy also played an important role in gaining information. Several data not available from other sources, regarding the emigration, agriculture and commerce, have been supplied by the National Statistics Institute. The study has used the official, governmental reports provided by the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the mountainous and the Székely Actions, the reports written by the deputy lieutenant of the Székely counties, as well as the annual/intermittent reports by the Chamber of Commerce and Trade in Marosvásárhely.

Some of the printed media (minutes of the Székely assemblies, press

articles) were not or just partly reachable in Hungarian libraries so the research was made in part in the library of the University in Kolozsvár.

The official writings of the Parliament, such as the parliamentary diaries, the governmental budget and its argumentation served as sources about the activities in the Parliament between 1896 and 1915.

The National Archive treasures an important cluster of sources which has hardly been exploited. The archive which due to the demolition of the wars as well as official selections are only available in fractions, has also been utilized.

### **III. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY (STATEMENTS)**

1. The study has defined the notion and the profoundness of the meaning of the „Székely Action” which had been used vaguely, based on the classification of the governmental/social institutes due to their participation in the development of the living conditions of the Székelys via the Székely Action.

The „Székely Action” (1) in its widest sense covers all of the social and governmental activities that from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century attempted to develop the conditions of the Székelys. (2) In a wider sense the action covers all the governmental, that is by the government and legislation, policies disposed by different ministries (the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce and Justice) as well as the legislative authorities in the furtherance of the development of the region, first of all to realize the resolutions of the congress in Tuzsád in 1902. (3) The narrow meaning of the notion covers the measures and actions of the government while (4) the cohabitants regarded the Székely Action mainly as the branch office of the Ministry of Agriculture, and its activities in Székelyföld.

2. The necessity of the Székely Action had been based on the stagnation of the region’s economy and sales, the loss of the conventional living standards, and with a significant emphasis on the impact of the liberal economic measures (legislation for the rearrangements of the landed properties which hardly complied with the circumstances in Székelyföld, especially the Forestry law, segmentation and balancing). The main and returning topic for the introductory essays about the Székely debate, flourishing on the turn of the centuries, was the declining economic state in Székelyföld, the one-sided and self-sufficient agricultural system, the extensive stockbreeding, economic conservatism, the crisis of the Székely handicraft.

3. The general public realized the unsolved problems of these regions

due to the mass emigration to Romania, and then from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to North America, and labour transfer into Romania. The study aims to summarize the researches utilizing the abundant literature about the Székely emigration, as well as the sources of the printed media and statistics, stating that between 1880 and 1913 60 000 emigrants left Székelyföld, the peak of the emigration was during the years of 1904 and 1907 and 1912–1913.

4. The region's solid governmental development programme had been antedated by a social movement starting in 1870s and flourishing at the turn of the centuries.

The study defines the main stages of the social movement, in view of the lack of research introduces the activities of the Székely societies with a major emphasis on the Székely Society in Marosvásárhely, the so called mother society. By using archive sources it reviews with full particulars the history of the first congress in Tusnád in 1902, which has been regarded by the researches as one conveying outstanding importance, its decisions served as the summary of the development suggestion of the region documenting that the Székely debate is a national debate and its solution needs governmental and social co-operation.

From 1904 the collective organization of these social movements was the Alliance of the Székely Societies based in Marosvásárhely, founded by middleclass intelligentsia principally those with national feelings, not being satisfied with the politics of the government about the nationalities. From 1904 the activities of the society were mainly concentrated on the aid of the scattered Hungarian groups. The self-organization and movement in the society existed in the public life- in spite of its being ignored- until the World War: the Székely congresses and conferences held almost every year worked on the status of the economy and culture of Székelyföld-ransylvania.

5. Examining the activities of the MPs from Székelyföld it can be stated that throughout the whole era they did not represent efficiently the regional needs of the electors. However between 1896–1910 the so called Székely-lobby evolved in the circle of the supportive politicians of the Székely debate, independent from their political views. During these years a few MPs had the floor in the Parliament about the problems of Székelyföld or the branch offices but they came mainly from the opposition side in the forms of interpellations and proposals.

In the light of the above mentioned the memoire written in 1897, which is the first comprehensive summary of the attempts for the

solution of the Székely problem, should be regarded as one possessing a specific importance, that is why besides the introduction of the study also the memoire should be introduced in its full length.

6. Darányi Ignác, Minister of Agriculture between 1895–1903 and 1906–1910 launched a comprehensive and unified economy development programme for the expansion of the economy of the economically underdeveloped areas using central sources but also counting on selfaid, internal initiative and entrepreneurship and development based on own labour. Under the solid approach and conception of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1897 in Kárpátalja/East Carpathian areas, in 1902 in Székelyföld ministerial branch offices had been established, and then driven also by the success of the two previous offices from 1908 in Felvidék/North Carpathian areas and Transylvania, from 1913 in Bánát other ministerial branch offices were opened, which from “folk aid actions” turned into intermediary level specialised offices serving for the fulfilment of the agricultural organizational tasks in these areas. Consequently the statement that the new branch offices including the one in Székelyföld were only founded due to the success of the previously established ones is false.

The scope of the action significantly narrowed during WW I. and then the Romanian occupation. The offices were closed at the end of 1919.

7. The establishment of the ministerial branch office in Székelyföld had been negotiated by the Minister of Agriculture, Darányi Ignác and the Prime Minister, and on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1902 the Cabinet decided about its launch with the validity from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1902. Sándor János the lord lieutenant of several counties were appointed as the representative of the government. He made proposals about the policy and fulfilment of the governmental aid actions, and the practical (administrative) tasks were delivered by the branch offices under his leadership. The branch offices were not only executive institutes but possessed own decisive rights as well as own scope of margins in Székelyföld, although especially in case of personnel and financial decisions the approval of the ministry had to be asked.

8. The Székelyföld branch office started its real activities after the Székely Congress in Tusnád. Dr. Koós Mihály, who had been working for the office since the beginning and since 1904 had been the manager of the branch office prepared his schedule and work plans based on the motions and analyses of the congress complemented with his own views. (*Jelentés vizeki Tallián Béla v. b. t. t. m. kir. földművelési miniszter ő méltóságához a*

*tusnádi székely kongresszusnak a földművelésügyi minisztérium ügykörét érintő határozatairól és a székelyföldi földművelő nép gazdasági felsegítésére irányuló javaslatok/Report for vizeki Tallián Béla Minister of Agriculture about the Decisions of the Székely Congress in Tusnád Regarding the Scope of the Ministry of Agriculture and Proposals for Economic Aid for the Agricultural Population in Székelyföld).* The 27-sheet documentation was unknown by the researchers that is why in 2004 together with the other annual/serial documents it was published in full length as the first volume of a series about the Székely Action.

9. According to the assessment of the governmental budget that had not been taken into consideration, within the agribusiness budget which was the 5% of the total governmental budget the amount spent on the fulfilment of the governmental aid actions continuously increased, parallelly the ministerial branch offices' budget which were included were also risen and then stabilized. Conclusively it can be stated that in spite of the sometimes the proportionally falling budget of the ministry and its increasing deficiencies the expenditures on the aid actions of the peripheries were not reduced accordingly, though they were even increased. It could mean, not counting on the need for increased expenditure due to the growing competence, the enhancement of the regard of the ministry about the governmental actions.

10. The exploration of archive data made the compilation of the full personnel data possible, that can serve as a basis for a future construction of a career history. The prepared maps made upon the prompt definition of the competence and the changes of the action highlight visually the national importance of the governmental actions.

11. Scrutinizing archive sources the study reveals the office history of the ministerial branch office in Székelyföld, its acception, the social encouragement, the ministerial management and the local, Székely conduct.

Comparing the work schedule of 1904, the reports of the branch offices and the ministries as well as the archive sources the economy development policy of the branch offices, its changes, even the shifting of the emphasis (the aid of the scattered Hungarian groups, specifically the development of the agriculture) can be learnt.

The offices served for on the one hand a simple financial aid, on the other hand by the establishment of profitable institutes as well as economic system for the recovery of the area by itself, counting on the selfaid and initiative of the society.

By categorizing the tasks of the action, which reflect the several aims

of the activities of the branch offices, based on the data of the available sources (reports of the deputy lieutenant, the archive sources, printed media) the general introduction of the activity segments could be obtained broken down and detailed by counties. During the Székely, Transylvanian action it put the major emphasis on changing the agriculture into a more internal one, the establishment of an economic system based on stockbreeding and the organization of the rural society. Besides increasing the economic knowledge and the development of the rural library system the branch office achieved great success in systematic pasturage economy and water management: hence due to the field fertilizing committed for the first time in Hungary the possibilities for stockbreeding increased, several agricultural experiments were accomplished (with some specific weeds, usage of artificial fertilizers) The action enlarged the possibilities for living by renewal the area of vineyards, development of fruit- and vegetable growing, cottage industry and apiary. Before 1909 to counteract the emigration the action completed a labour contact function, and before 1905 dealt with the mining, spa baths and the development of the infrastructure.

In the long run the action contributed to the spread of a developed economic culture, to prevail the lethargy and aversion in Székelyföld, as well as to the changes in approach of the local population. The cohabitants appreciated that by their systematic work the branch offices could gain "great, to the far future effecting" results: "(the farming community)'s ... basics ... have been organized, the sources for living have been opened as it showed the way for fruitful work our people have been taught to work for the success of their own as well as our homeland... Vividity and dynamics have been brought into the abandoned villages and the hopeless people learnt that they can earn their living at home as well."

**12.** In the scope of the Székely Action the work of other ministries have been assessed by the study. From the 1880s occasionally, from 1901 in a wider economy-supporting system in the framework of the Székely action the Ministry of Commerce encouraged the Székely cottage industry, handicraft, manufacture and education. The 1905 programme planned by the economy development commissioner appointed in 1913, was just partly realised before WW I. In 1906 the Ministry of Justice appointed a Székely section that prepared the necessary measures for rearrangements of the landed properties and the amendment of the land-register system. No co-operation or work was undertaken by any other ministries.

Based on the statements of the study a more general conclusion of the Székely Action can be derived as well, the both acknowledgement and remedy of the economic problems and the deduced social problems require the attention, realization, problem solving and last but not least the permanent co-operation of the different social and political powers, so that in the given political era the personal, regional and national needs should be extorted by mutual agreement, consideration of the others and mutual help.

#### IV. PUBLICATIONS

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