The Banat Swabians and The Austro-Hungarian Empire

Mihai Alexandru Voicu[1]

Abstract

The Banat Swabians are a German-speaking ethnic group originated from the migration of German and Western European settlers in the Banat region during the Austrian Empire. They were part of the German ethnic archipelago of Eastern Europe that was largely dismantled at the end of the Second World War, but their influence in the regions runs deep and can still be felt to this day. This study analyses the nationalistic tendencies of both the Swabian and Romanian populations of Banat, from the inception of the dual state until the eve of its dissolution, with a focus on the national minorities policies adopted by the Hungarian government and the dynamics of minority nationalism during the First World War.

Keywords: *World War I, Ethnic Minorities, Nationalism, Hungary, Germans*.

[1] Alexandruvoicuwq@gmail.com. Student at Sapienza – Università di Roma, Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Art, Performing Arts. Rome / ITALY, orcid.org/ 0009-0009-1285-2896. +39 347 690 3056

Introduction

What is Banat? Or rather, what is a banate? In the Middle Ages, a banate was the territory administered by a ban, a title found throughout the Balkans and parts of Central Europe, designating the governor of a province or a nobleman whose rank was comparable to that of a count or duke in Western Europe. The origin of the term is probably Slavic, Avar, or even Turkic-Mongolic, and may ultimately go back to the word khan,[1] though the debate remains open. What is certain is that the region known today as Banat is only one among many banates that dotted the Danube basin over the centuries: among them the medieval state of the Banate of Bosnia, the Serbian Banate of Macsó within the Kingdom of Hungary, or the banates created as administrative subdivisions by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between 1929 and 1941.

The area now called Banat owes its name to the Banate of Temeswar, officially designated as such after the Habsburg conquest of the territory during the Sixth Austro-Turkish War (1716–1718).[2] Yet the region around the city of Timișoara had never before been part of a banate, except for small portions once belonging to the medieval Banate of Severin. In fact, it seems to have acquired the name "Banate of Temeswar" precisely in connection with the Banate of Severin, which actually corresponded to present-day Oltenia, or Little Wallachia, a region southeast of Banat.

The name probably arose from a mistake made by an Italian officer in the service of Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg: Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli[3] incorrectly attributed Timișoara as the seat of the medieval bans of Severin.[4] He claimed that "Hungary […] is subdivided into upper and lower parts, and the latter were governed by a Ban, hence the name Banate of Temeswar".[5] According to the Romanian historian Sorin Forțiu,

[1] P. Skok, *Etimologijski rjecnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* [Etymological dictionary of the Croatian and Serbian language], Zagreb, Académie Yougoslave des Sciences et des Beaux-Arts, 1971, p. 104.

[2] D. Pârvu, *Ocuparea si anexarea Banatului (1716-1718). Organizarea administrativă a acestuia* [The occupation and annexation of Banat (1716-1718). Its administrative organization], Timișoara, "Quaestiones disputatae", N. 2 - 2004, Universitatea de Vest, pp. 1-6.

[3] He was a Bolognese nobleman who served as an officer of the imperial army during several military campaigns against the Ottomans between the late 17th and early 18th centuries. He was also a scientist and, throughout his journeys, he described among other things, the history and the endemic species of the Danubian region.

[4] I. Haţegan, L. Savulov, *Banatul medieval* [Medieval Banat] in "Analele Banatului", S.N., Arheologie – Istorie, Vol. V, 1997, p. 186.

[5] From his manuscript *Primo Abbozzo del Compendio Storico dell'Ungaria* [First Draft of the Historical Compendium of Hungary], wrote at the beginning of the 18th century and never published, but preserved at the Library of the University of Bologna and cited by Sorin Forțiu in *Despre prima atestare a denumirii Banatvs*

however, Marsigli had wrongly located the centre of power of the Banate of Severin in the city of Timișoara, whereas in reality it lay in the fortress of Severin itself, destroyed by the Turks in 1525. Marsigli, lacking that reference, likely identified Timișoara as an alternative capital among the principal towns of the region.[6]

From Marsigli's accounts, the name "Banate of Temeswar" appears to have taken root in Habsburg administration. Since, at the beginning of the 18th century, the region was the only banate included among the possessions of the Archdukes of Vienna, the term "Banat" came to be used for the region surrounding Temeswar.

Having examined the etymology and the origin of the name, it is worth clarifying where Banat actually lies, with it being arguably one of the European historical regions with the clearest and most geographically defined borders, excluding islands.

Banat is a region covering about 28,500 km² (an area comparable to modern-day Albania) and roughly rectangular in shape. It is bounded to the north by the Mureș River, to the west by the Tisza River, to the south by the Danube, and to the east by the Southern Carpathians.[7] Its historical capital, and also its largest city, is Timișoara (German: Temeswar). Today, the lands historically belonging to Banat are divided among three nations: about two-thirds of the territory lie in Romania, one-third is part of Serbian Vojvodina, and just over 1% of the original area of the Banate of Temeswar falls within Hungary's Csongrád County.[8]

Despite the population exchanges that followed the Second World War, Banat remains one of the most ethno-linguistically diverse areas in Europe. It still hosts many historic communities other than Serbs, Romanians, or Hungarians, including Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Roma, Croats, Czechs, and Germans.[9] The latter were largely members of the Danube Swabians, a broader group encompassing not only the German-speaking settlers of

Timisvariensis (1685) [About the first attestaion of the name *Banatvs Timisvariensis* (1685)].

[6] S. Forțiu, *Despre prima atestare a denumirii Banatvs Timisvariensis (1685)* [About the first attestaion of the name *Banatvs Timisvariensis* (1685)] in "Analele Banatului", S.N., Arheologie – Istorie, Vol. XIV, 2007, pp. 67-70.

[7] Hațegan, Savulov, Banatul..., p. 186.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 179.

[9] From the 2011 Serbian and Romanian censuses: *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011; *Recensamantul Populatiei si Locuintelor* [Population and Housing Census], https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rpl-2011/rezultate-2011/.

Banat, but also all the German-speaking communities established along the Danube east of Bratislava. The history of the Danube Swabians under Austro-Hungarian rule, and of the Swabians of Banat in particular, will be the focus of the following analysis.

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867

In the years from 1849 to 1866 Vienna launched a massive reform effort concerning its administrative and executive apparatus. This initiative was characterized by the rigid determination not to satisfy any demand put forward by the most influential groups among the 1848 revolutionaries, those being the Magyar nationalists and the German radicals.

A sign of this Austrian endeavour is the fact that in 1849 the previously granted Hungarian autonomy was revoked and a centralization attempt began to take shape in the Empire. However, the numerous defeats suffered by Austria between 1859 and 1866 in the context of the German and Italian unification wars, severely weakened the ability of the Habsburg emperors to control what has been defined as the "Hungarian monster". Hungary, a land agitated by rebellious sentiments and a desire for independence, revealed itself to be tough to administer from outside of the Carpathian basin, and was on the verge of repeating the riots of 1848. A few Hungarian radicals even tried to negotiate with Prussian prime minister Otto von Bismarck the creation of an anti-Habsburg coalition, not achieving the desired result in the end. The situation didn't seem sustainable for Vienna, and in fact the imperial government, heavily weakened by the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, found itself forced to open negotiations with the German radicals and the Magyar nationalists, the very same groups it tried not to strengthen in the previous years of reforms.[10]

The compromise reached in 1867, also known as the *Ausgleich* [Compensation], made Hungary and Austria two legally distinct states, united only in their foreign policy (and therefore in matters of war) and in their common monarch figure: the Habsburg emperor.[11] The Magyar nationalists sacrificed their aim for total independence in order to obtain a privileged status in a two-headed country, which in turn guaranteed

[10] S.W. Sowards, *Twenty-five lectures on modern Balkan history: The Balkans in the Age of Nationalism,* 1996, Lecture N. 7.

[11] L. C. Tihany, *The Austro-Hungarian Compromise, 1867-1918: A Half Century of Diagnosis; Fifty Years of Post-Mortem*, "Central European History", 1969, Vol. II, N. 2, pp. 114-115.

them remarkable freedom in the management of linguistic and ethnic minority issues in their half of the Empire. The Compromise meant for the Hungarians the reestablishment of the autonomy and self-determination briefly obtained in 1848,[12] though expressed in a more moderate and less revolutionary manner.

The only "reigning" nations from 1867 onwards would have been the Germans in Austria and the Magyars in Hungary, and, despite the presence of laws guaranteeing the protection of minority rights within the country, the German and Magyar supremacy remained evident and indisputable throughout the rest of the existence of Austria-Hungary.[13]

The Magyars though had a huge obstacle in their administration as the dominant nation in Hungary: they weren't the majority in the territories they administered. According to the 1910 Austro-Hungarian census, even after years of policies aimed at the repression of non-Magyar languages and cultures,[14] speakers of Hungarian as a first language, who presumably constituted a smaller percentage of the population than the properly ethnically Hungarian, made up approximately 49% of the population of the kingdoms of Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia (those being the territories controlled by the Budapest Parliament). A narrow majority of the inhabitants of the Pannonian basin was thus made up of the non-Magyar nationalities of Hungary, among those the Slovaks, the Croats, the Italians, the Ukrainians (or, as contemporary sources refer to them, "Ruthenians") the Rusyns, the Romanians, the Germans and the Bulgarians.[15]

Unlike the Austrian half of the Empire, which maintained fourteen first-level administrative subdivisions, in Hungary the government opted for greater centralization. Most of the land within Hungary's control was placed in a vast, single administrative region, with a land area comparable to that of the Kingdom of Italy at the end of the 19th century: the Kingdom of Hungary. The only exceptions, those are territories still ruled from Budapest but not falling under the direct rule of the Kingdom of Hungary,

[12] J. Bérenger, *The History of the Habsburg Empire 1700-1918*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2014, p. 211
[13] Sowards, *Twenty-five*….; A. Gerö, *Nationalities and the Hungarian Parliament (1867-1918),* London, British Academy, 2014, pp. 8-10.
[14] W. Marin**,** *Unirea din 1918 și poziția șvabilor bănățeni* [The Unification of 1918 and the position of the Banat Swabians]**,** Timișoara, Editura Facla, 1978, p. 23.
[15] *1910 ÉVI NÉPSZÁMLÁLÁS 1. A népesség főbb adatai községek és népesebb puszták, telepek szerint* [1910 Census 1. Main demographic data by village and inhabited center], Budapest, Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, 1912.

were the city of Fiume (now more widely known by its Croatian name of Rijeka) and the already mentioned Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia. Together Fiume and Croatia-Slavonia reached approximately one seventh of the population of the Kingdom of Hungary.[16] While Austria was able to guarantee a greater, although limited, autonomy to the ethnic minorities residing in its territories, Hungary adopted a centralizing policy not unlike the Austrian one that failed in the management of minorities following the 1848 riots.

In the regions administered by Vienna, Poles and Ukrainians had very limited autonomy in Galicia, and the same was true for the Romanians of Bukovina, the Italians and the Slavs in the Julian March and the Croatians in Dalmatia. In Hungary, excluding Fiume with its fifty thousand inhabitants and the Croats in their kingdom with Zagreb as a capital, there were millions of Romanians, Slavs and Germans who were deprived of the little autonomy they were granted before the 1867 dualistic turning point. The centralizing reforms implemented by Budapest marked the end of the centuries old autonomy that Transylvania enjoyed abolishing the political prerogatives of the *Unio Trium Nationum* [Union of the Three Nations] implemented in 1437,[17] and they brought to an end the Military Frontiers in the Pannonian lands, which were rapidly integrated in the Hungarian county system. Those special administrative subdivisions stood in place for centuries on the borders of the Austrian dominions. The administrative centralization of the Crown of Saint Stephen[18] also meant the end of other internal subdivisions of the Habsburg Empire, such as the Banate of Temeswar, which has been split among the three newly forged counties of Torontál, Temes and Krassó-Szőrény.[19]

Seeing as the Compromise was supposed to please some of the demands of the 1848 revolutionaries, an enthusiastic adhesion to the changes brought by the *Ausgleich* could have been expected from the Germans of the newly instituted Hungarian state, but in reality the only Germans close to the revolutionary ideals that were, partially, satisfied by the 1867 deal were the Germans in the Austrian half of the Empire. This happened because of the fact that some years after the Compromise there has been

[16] *Ibidem.*
[17] C. A. MacArtney, *The Habsburg Empire: 1790-1918*, London, Faber & Faber, 2014, p. 110.
[18] Name used to refer to the Budapest-administered half of the Habsburg state, of which the Kingdom of Hungary was only a portion.
[19] Gerö, *Nationalities*…, p. 3.

an institutional crystallization of the Magyarization and the ethnicization of the privileges, with the difference that this time, unlike the similar process that unfolded during the first decades of the 19th century, there has been an outright exclusion of the Hungarian Germans in order to solely favour the Magyars.[20] The new repressive policies imposed by the Budapest Government, especially starting from the 1870s, triggered a national and nationalistic awakening of the Danube Swabians, which led some Swabian intellectuals, specifically in Banat, to an ideological and almost anthropological interest in the Romanian population, that together with the Serbs constituted the most hostile opposition to the Hungarian Government's nationalistic approach.[21]

Here some questions naturally arise: what led the Hungarian nationalists to betray the Danube Swabians, considered "brothers" before the 1848 riots?[22] Why did the Magyar elites opt for a Magyar-dominated Hungary instead of the proposed Danubian Confederation of Peoples?[23] Not considering the Confederation, why not at least try to obtain the support of the Hungarian Germans, who demonstrated, ever since the 18th century, a fierce loyalty to Hungary even when going against their German Compatriots from Austria proper?[24]

The reason is far more trivial than it may seem: everything is easily explained by 19th century nationalism and a widespread chauvinistic tendency, stained with a stereotyped romanticism common among Kossuth's successors. What can be called a cult was created around the leader of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution Lajos Kossuth, who was seen as the personification, according to this ideology, of a legendary, impetuous and indomitable Hungary, subjugated for far too long but finally ready to return to the glory of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Naturally this idealized notion was nothing but a delusion, because de facto Hungary wasn't completely autonomous even in the context of the 1867 Compromise, it existed as a part of Austria-Hungary, save for some aspects

[20] Marin, *Unirea*..., pp. 21-23.
[21] *Ibidem.*
[22] A. Maxwell, *Hungaro-German Dual Nationality: Germans, Slavs and Magyars during the 1848 Revolution*, "German Studies Review", Vol. XXXIX, N. 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the German Studies Association, 2016, p. 25.
[23] Tihany, *The Austro-Hungarian*…, p. 125.
[24] M. Constantinescu, Ș. Pascu, *Desăvârșirea statului național român, unirea transilvaniei cu vechea Românie* [The Completion of the Romanian national state, the unification of Transylvania with Old Romania], Bucharest, Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1968, pp. 448-451.

of internal policy.[25]

In this ideological construction there was no room for the Danube Swabians, with them being seen potentially as an alternative elite to the Magyar one, and with whom the Magyars were reluctant to share power and influence in their half of the Empire. It was no coincidence that in the years following the *Ausgleich* the Budapest Government strongly favoured a heavy Magyar immigration towards Banat.[26] This region bordered the Magyar heartland, in which Magyars constituted the clear majority, it was thus fairly easily colonizable, also due to the extreme multi-ethnic nature of the cities. In practice, a small number of colonists only needed to move a few tens of kilometres to gain a Magyar plurality within the urban settlements. On the contrary, in the countryside, there was an overwhelming Serbo-Romanian majority, that was maintained until the end of the First World War, despite the quasi-colonial efforts.[27]

The 1867 Compromise can be identified as the definitive death of the Hungaro-German nationalistic ideology. From that point onwards many of the non-magyarized Banat Swabian and Transylvanian Saxon leaders cut off any collaborative relationship with the Magyar nationalists, by then too prone to chauvinism.[28] The new main allies of the Danube Germans became the Romanian nationalists, who, starting from 1881, had as a point of reference a nation-state led by a German noble family thanks to the creation of the Kingdom of Romania. On the throne of this young nation reigned a cadet branch of the Hohenzollerns[29], the German imperial family. During the second half of the 19th century the foundations were laid for the future Swabian adhesion to the Romanian *Marea Unire* [Great Union] of 1918.

Magyarization

Magyarization can be defined as a process of assimilation, carried out in Habsburg Hungary from the 19th century onwards, through which non-Magyar portions of the Hungarian population adopted Magyar culture and language, whether voluntarily or not. Many of Hungary's non-Magyar

[25] Tihany, *The Austro-Hungarian*…, p. 125.
[26] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 15.
[27] R. Creţan, *Cultural heritage highlighted by the Habsburg colonisations – A particular view on the Romanian Banat area*, "Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics", vol. IV, N. 7-8, 2009, pp. 106-109.; from the Romanian and Serbian censuses of 2011.
[28] Marin, *Unirea*..., pp.. 30-39.
[29] Marin, *Unirea*..., pp.. 30-39.

inhabitants had a neutral stance toward nationalism (consider, for example, the Danube Swabians, disillusioned by the failure of the Hungaro-German nationalist project), and therefore saw assimilation into the Magyar nation as advantageous. However, governmental pressures from the Budapest Parliament were not absent;[30] although nationalism often prevailed, that parliament nonetheless represented the government which, at least on paper, offered the greatest protections to ethnic minorities in Europe.[31]

Despite these formal protections within the Pannonian Basin, many Hungarians began to view Magyarization as a civilizing mission, a sort of "Magyars' burden": the moral duty to rescue the Kingdom's other nations from a condition of extreme backwardness, thereby creating a strong and loyal population capable of safeguarding the autonomy of the Kingdom. This vision materialized in coercive methods of assimilation, which accompanied voluntary personal initiative as well as numerous institutional measures, not always openly repressive but nonetheless aimed at hindering the public exposition of non-Magyar languages and cultures.[32] It must be acknowledged that Hungarian politicians in the early years of Austria-Hungary granted considerable autonomy and tolerance to minorities, specifically from 1867 to 1875. Examples of this are evident in laws passed in 1868, through which the Romanian Orthodox church received a Statue of Autonomy, and Jewish people were recognized as completely equal to Christians in civic and political matters.[33] Yet exactly from 1875 the Liberal Party, led by Kálmán Tisza, came to power in Budapest. Tisza belonged to a generation of politicians who, in the words of Lyon, "forgot the great lessons of 1848–49 and which regarded the situation of the country exclusively from the point of view of their momentary interests".[34] From 1875 onwards, therefore, Hungary's primacy as a bastion of tolerance diminished, and Magyarization became more rigid and less tied to voluntary adherence.

The countryside was much less affected by Magyarization, which mainly concerned urban elites, especially Swabians outside of Banat. A negative consequence of the magyarizing policy, however, was visible across

[30] P.W. Lyon, *After empire: ethnic Germans and minority nationalism in interwar Yugoslavia*, University of Maryland, 2008, p. 60.
[31] J. Hévizi, *Autonomies in Hungary and Europe,* Corvinus Society, 2004, p. 35.
[32] Lyon, *After Empire*…, pp. 60-61.
[33] C. A. MacArtney, *The Habsburg Empire*…, p. 110.
[34] Lyon, *After Empire*…, p. 62.

Hungary's villages: the low level of literacy both in Hungarian and in native mother tongues, achieved by many rural students, was likely the result of learning two languages simultaneously. Naturally this stemmed from the imposition of Hungarian as the mandatory language of education.[35]

The Budapest government attempted to resolve the problems caused by bilingual education in the peripheral regions of the state through two laws: the 1879 Elementary Education Act and the 1883 Secondary Education Act. These laws did not formally prohibit teaching in languages other than Hungarian, but represented the government's nationalist attempt to reduce the use of Romanian, German, Slovak, and Serbo-Croatian in schools, in favour of the Magyar language.[36] The government succeeded: between 1880 and 1913, the number of schools using Hungarian exclusively doubled, while the number using minority languages was nearly halved.[37] Another vehicle for spreading Magyarization was the Hungarian Catholic Church, which supported government efforts to encourage assimilation into the Magyar nation, to the point of coining the motto "the good Lord speaks only Hungarian".[38] Yet, given the Kingdom's religious composition, ecclesiastical pressure was not universally effective. While Slovaks and Germans were largely Catholic (and thus under the influence of the Catholic clergy), Romanians and Serbs were almost uniformly Orthodox, and thus paid little heed to the bishop of Budapest's support for Magyarization.[39]

Hungary radically changed its policy toward other nationalities: from being among the most progressive countries in Europe in terms of minority rights, it became a kingdom whose relative ethnic majority regarded the assimilation of other nations into the Hungarian one as a political dogma, essential for preserving autonomous, even if Habsburg, Hungary.[40]

The Danube Swabians' response to Magyarization is particularly interesting. As mentioned, many Swabians, especially elites and intellectuals, spontaneously assimilated into the Magyar nation after the failure of the Hungaro-German project, facilitating social mobility and

[35] *Ibid*., p. 60-61.
[36] R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change*, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 366.
[37] I. Romsics, *A History of Hungary in the 20th Century*, Budapest, Osiris, 1999, pp. 85–86.
[38] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 24.
[39] Lyon, *After Empire*…, pp. 63-64.
[40] *Ibidem.*

integration into the power system.[41] By contrast, German-speaking rural communities resisted Magyarization: there was little personal initiative to embrace it, and coercive methods only reinforced what would become the strong identity of Germans in South-eastern Europe.[42]

In the years between Tisza's political turn of 1875 and the 1910 Austro-Hungarian census, about half a million Hungarian Germans adopted a Magyar identity and Hungarian as their primary language. Yet this phenomenon mainly affected Budapest and central Hungary, while Germans in Banat and other peripheral regions largely kept their distance from Magyarization.[43] Despite the efforts and political imperative of its advocates to assimilate minorities seen as "harmful to the survival of the homeland", the 1910 census still showed that Magyars "only" made up slightly more than 49% of the population of the territories administered by the Kingdom of Hungary.[44]

The Germans of the city of Timișoara and its surroundings did not follow the trend of their German-speaking compatriots east of the Tisza River. Unlike central Hungary's Danube Swabians, Banat Swabians lived in a region dotted with German villages, where close commercial and cultural ties existed between German bourgeois city dwellers and German-speaking peasants.[45] This socioeconomic environment, together with the relatively small Magyar population of the region, greatly weakened the drive for Magyarization. Towns in the Serbian Banat, such as Vršac and Pančevo, even became, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, small centres of the emerging Swabian nationalist movement. However, the scope of this phenomenon should not be overstated: German nationalism in southern Hungary did not become a significant movement until the First World War. Moreover, both in Banat's cities and in its villages, some individuals did embrace Magyarization, though often only partially with "shades of assimilation".[46]

[41] Lyon, *After Empire*…, pp. 60-61
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[43] G. Schoedl, *Die Deutschen in Ungarn*, in *Deutsche im Ausland, Fremde in Deutschland: Migration in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [The Germans in Hungary, in „Germans Abroad, Foreigners in Germany: Migration in History and the Present"], Munich, Ed. Klaus Bade 1992, p. 82.
[44] *Bundesministerium fuer Vertriebene, Fluechtlinge, und Kriegsgeschaedigte, Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Ungarn* [Federal Ministry for Expelled, Refugees, and War Victims, The Fate of the Germans in Hungary], Munich, Ed. Theodor Schieder, Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus OstMitte, 2004.
[45] Lyon, *After Empire*…, p. 66.
[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

Assimilationist tendencies, though not widespread, were more common among the Banat Swabians, Catholics of recent settlement, than among the Transylvanian Saxons. The latter were more "nationally conscious", mostly Protestant, and proud of a centuries-long history distinct from that of Hungarians or Székelys in Transylvania.[47] Thus, the various German communities of the Hungarian kingdom were fragmented due to geographic isolation and a weak sense of ethnic unity, an obstacle that would only be overcome with the emergence of an alternative to the Hungaro-German ideal: a new Swabian nationalist ideology, portraying the Danube Swabians as one branch of the larger, monolithic German *Volk* [People], alongside the Transylvanian Saxons which represented another parallel branch. As mentioned earlier, these ideological constructs would not fully mature until the First World War; before 1914, they merely provided some Swabians with a means of resisting Magyarization.[48]

The process of national awakening among Germans and other nationalities of the Kingdom was overshadowed by the Millennium Celebration of 1896, a celebration of Hungarian rule in the Carpathian Basin, during which Magyar elites emphasized Hungary's economic, cultural, and political supremacy. This claim predictably provoked a negative response among the non-Magyar public.[49]

But what concrete measures did the Hungarian government and administration take to promote Magyarization?

There were the aforementioned laws on primary and secondary education, enacted in 1879 and 1883 respectively, along with the 1907 Apponyi Law, which imposed Hungarian as a mandatory subject in every school in Hungary and stated that "all pupils of any nationality must be able to express themselves in Hungarian, both in writing and orally, by the end of the fourth grade".[50]

In 1898, Telbisz, the Hungarian mayor of Timișoara, banned performances in any language other than Magyar in the city's theatres.[51]

[47] Schoedl, *Die Deutschen*..., p. 365.
[48] Lyon, *After Empire*…, p. 68.
[49] Gerö, *Nationalities*…, pp. 10-11.
[50] I. Romsics, *A History of Hungary in the 20th Century*, Budapest, Osiris, 1999, pp. 85-86.
[51] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 24.

Non-Hungarian newspapers were not prohibited outright, but nearly every independent paper came under the control of Hungarian politicians. For example, the Temesvarer Zeitung, the most important Swabian newspaper in Timișoara ever since 1852, was transformed at the end of the 19th century into a mere instrument of pro-Magyar imperial propaganda.[52]

Increasing pressure was also applied to magyarize Slavic, Romanian, or German names, both for places and for individuals. For instance, the Romanian name Victor was replaced with the Hungarian Viktor, and every non-Magyar toponym was substituted with a Hungarian equivalent where one existed. In the absence of a Hungarian name for a village or town, one was invented from scratch in order to erase the non-Magyar designation.[53] Hungary's electoral law had been census-based since the 1848 revolution, broadly reflecting the country's ethnic composition in the active electorate. For example, in 1906 Hungarians, or at least those with Hungarian as their first language, made up 54.4% of the kingdom's population[54] and 56.2% of the electorate. Germans, with 10.4% of the population, made up 12.7% of the electorate, while Romanians, about 16% of the population, accounted for only 11.2%. These discrepancies reflected differences in wealth among the Kingdom's nationalities. The real injustice and favouritism toward Hungarians, however, was most evident not in voting rights but in representation. In 1906, in a parliament of over 400 deputies, the Slovaks, who made up 11.4% of voters, elected just one representative (instead of about 40, had proportionality been respected). And 1906 was actually an exceptional year for minority representation compared to the history of the Hungarian parliament from the Compromise to 1910. In 1900, non-Hungarian deputies in Budapest numbered just 26 out of 413; in 1905 there had been 10, and in 1910 they would fall to only 8, in a parliament that always had more than 400 seats. Despite its democratic and egalitarian façade, it is thus clear that the Hungarian electoral system was skewed in

[52] *Ibidem.*

[53] R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1934, p. 408.

[54] It may seem contradictory that in the Kingdom of Hungary the majority of the population was indeed Hungarian, when just a few paragraphs earlier it was stated that, even on the eve of the First World War, the Magyars did not exceed 49% of the population administered from by Budapest. This is because it is necessary to distinguish between the Kingdom of Hungary proper and the "Hungarian half" of the Habsburg Empire, also known as Transleithania or the lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen. In the Kingdom of Hungary itself, from the lathe 19th century onward, there was a real Hungarian absolute majority. But if one includes the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and the Free City of Fiume, both territories under Budapest's jurisdiction and subject to the Hungarian parliament's control, the data shows that the Hungarian speakers made up just under half of the inhabitants of their half of the Empire.

favour of Magyar over-representation at the expense of other ethnicities.[55] Beyond laws and governmental measures, some historians also classify the Černová massacre, in present-day Slovakia, within the framework of Magyarization: Hungarian soldiers killed fifteen and wounded fifty-two Slovaks. Yet it remains uncertain whether ethnic tensions from Magyarization were truly the cause, especially given that many of the soldiers themselves were Slovak.[56]

Whether or not the Černová tragedy was linked to Magyarization, the Austro-Hungarian Pannonian plain clearly displayed the same symptoms of a Europe infatuated with nationalism. From the Atlantic coast to the Caucasus and the Urals, the entire continent was gripped by nationalist incidents and rhetoric. Hungary, with its Magyarization policies, was no exception, nor was Banat within it. All the tensions accumulated since the Spring of Nations in 1848, alternately expressed or repressed over the decades straddling the 19th and 20th centuries, erupted in the Great War, caused, not coincidentally, by the gunshot of a Serbian nationalist.

And Serbian nationalism was only one of the many nationalisms of Banat, awakened or fuelled by Gavrilo Princip's shot. Around Timișoara converged the aspirations of Romanians, Serbs, Germans, and Hungarians, entangled first in humanity's bloodiest war to date, then in Hungary's second civil war in seventy years, and finally in a series of offensives against the corpse of what had once been the Kingdom of Hungary. The First World War was a turning point for the dozen peoples inhabiting Habsburg lands, it was a turning point for the World, for Europe, for Hungary, and for Banat.

Banat during the First World War

In the years before 1914, the isolation of Hungarian nationalists and the Magyarization policies led to increasing cooperation between the non-Hungarian ethnic parties of the Kingdom of Hungary, so much so that in 1905 the association between the Timișoara branch of the Social Democratic Party, largely composed of Germans, and the Romanian National Party was formalized.[57] On the occasion of a political assembly between some leftist parties held in Timișoara on December 18th 1905, the secretary of

[55] Gerö, *Nationalities*…, pp. 6-8.

[56] L. Katus, *A modern Magyarország születése. Magyarország története 1711–1848* [The birth of modern Hungary. A History of Hungary 1711-1848], Pécs, Pécsi Történettudományért Kulturális Egyesület, 2010, p. 570.

[57] Initially known as the "National Romanian Party in Transylvania and Banat" it was a political party whose purpose was the ethnic representation of the Romanian subjects of the Kingdom of Hungary.

the SDP in Banat, Iulius Freund, and the president of the local section of the RNP, Aurel Cosma, emphasized the common effort of Romanians and Swabians in the struggle for the right to universal suffrage.[58]

Although many members of the two parties were not fond of the government in Budapest, the independentists made up, in the first decade of the 20th century, only a small minority in both political groups. The official policies of both parties remained aligned with Habsburg rule until the summer of 1914.[59]

Romanian opinions regarding participation in the war that had just broken out were far from unanimous, both in the Kingdom of Romania and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Besides the Romanian nationalists who were fighting for the annexation of Transylvania and Banat to the Kingdom of Romania and were opposed to any alliance with the Austrians, in Bucharest there were also many pro-Habsburg non-irredentists, even interventionists on the side of the Central Powers. The Romanian Transylvanian intellectual and politician Valeriu Braniște, director of the newspaper *Drapelul*,[60] wrote the following after a dinner with some Romanian politicians of the Kingdom of Romania in his memoir:

> The World War surprised us. About a week before [its outbreak] I was in Bucharest. Minister and friend Vasile G. Morțun organized a dinner with a small circle of people in Capșa in my honour. He was surprised when I told him that [in Austria-Hungary] the arrests of Serbian intellectuals were a daily occurrence and the atmosphere was very oppressive, with the expectation of an imminent storm. [The guests] still placed their trust in Vienna. Hypnotized by the illusions raised by Archduke Franz Ferdinand, killed in Sarajevo, they expected, as with the new heir, that the then king-emperor could be our "friend". […] Thus, with the rapid escalation of events, we were caught unprepared and disoriented.[61]

There were therefore, among Romanian politicians, people who trusted the project of a Danubian empire free of minority oppression, and for this reason were willing to honour Romania's promised participation in the war

[58] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 28.
[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
[60] It was a daily newspaper published in Romanian in the town of Lugoj, a city in Banat. Its director Valeriu Braniște was a fervent Romanian nationalist.
[61] V. Braniște, *Amintiri din închisoare* [Memories from prison], Bucharest, Tritonic, 2002, p. 461.

effort alongside the Triple Alliance.[62] Among the political figures "who placed their trust in Vienna" was also the then King of Romania Carol I of Hohenzollern, who wanted to join the conflict alongside the other German monarchs (the German Kaiser was even a member of his own noble house), but the opposition of the Romanian liberal government led by Ion Brătianu, more aligned with France and England, led to Romanian neutrality, justified in Berlin and Vienna in the same way the Italians did for themselves: the Triple Alliance was a defensive alliance, but in the case of the war that broke out in 1914 the aggressor was Austria-Hungary, and thus there was no obligation of co-belligerency.[63]

On the other side of the Carpathians, despite the death of Franz Ferdinand,[64] there was still hope, both among the Swabians and the Transylvanian and Banat Romanians, for a state that could guarantee more autonomy to its minorities. For this reason, the Swabian intellectuals of various German parties, together with the loyalist wing of the RNP, supported Vienna's war against Serbia.[65] Dissent was not lacking, especially among ethnically Romanian and Serbian soldiers recruited to fight for Franz Joseph. *Drapelul* was increasingly censored as the war progressed, since it attempted to publish poems and testimonies critical of Vienna coming from Romanian soldiers on the frontlines.[66]

Unlike the Romanians, the Swabians remained much more ideologically compact, and, at least during the first year of war, there was an almost unanimous enthusiasm for the conflict.[67] 1914 saw a massive mobilization of men from Banat, and a conversion to a wartime economy. The press was dominated by state propaganda, and in the cities the Hungarian and German population enthusiastically proclaimed "Long live the war! Long live the king! Long live the homeland!",[68] while two anti-Serbian slogans spread among all Magyars and Germans of the Empire like wildfire, repeated from Vienna to Timișoara: in German,

[62] In 1883 king Carol I of Romania signed a secret treaty with the Triple Alliance members, which would have guaranteed Romanian military support in the event of aggression against one of the three countries by another state.
[63] J. Becker, *A Companion to World War I*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012, p. 208.
[64] The heir to the Habsburg throne was one of the fiercest supporters of Danubian federalism. For him the state shoulnd't have been limited to Austro-Hungarian dualism, instead it should have included every nation within the Empire in its administration as an equal member.
[65] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 43.
[66] Braniște, *Amintiri*..., p.49.
[67] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 43.
[68] Temesvári Hírlap, July 29th 1914.

Serben müssen sterben [All Serbs must die],[69] in Hungarian, *Megai Kutya Szerbia* [Serbia, big bitch].[70]

In the cities, dominated by the two imperial nations, there was therefore great support for the punitive war against the "vile Serbs" who had defiled the honour of the country by killing the heir to the throne. This was not reflected in the Orthodox countryside, where many Serbs and Romanians, especially in the border areas, failed to show up for mobilization and deserted to Serbia and Romania.[71] In *Ţinutul Almăjului*, a region of eastern Banat inhabited mainly by Romanians, 6,641 soldiers were recruited from a total population of 24,196, more than a quarter of all inhabitants and more than half of the men, all conscripted into the imperial army.[72] The rate of compulsory conscription was much higher in non-Swabian or non-Magyar areas. An example is the village of Charlottenburg, not far from Timişoara and 80% Swabian in population,[73] which saw 100 men recruited from a total of 700 people. The rate of recruitment was almost double in Romanian-majority areas compared to those dominated by Germans, and this probably contributed to maintaining support for the war among the Swabian population. Moreover, where Romanians and Serbs were recruited, the same enthusiasm of the large urban centres was not present. The Romanian teacher George Cătană wrote about the Romanian-speaking village of Valeadeni (in Krassó-Szörény County) where he taught:

> It was a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1914. The whole village was at the dancing event in front of the church and great celebrations were underway, when the order of mobilization arrived, announced by the beating of the drum. The next day, not only those who had been called up but the whole village, young and old, gathered at the town hall; they then entered the holy church, and the divine mass was served with holy communion. The old priest Ioan Meda […] gave them encouraging speeches about the fear of God and love for one's neighbour. Fifty strong men then departed. Afterwards, further announcements were made. Grief overwhelmed the

[69] G. Regler, G. Schmidt-Henkel, R. Schock, G. Scholdt, *Werke* [Works], Göttingen, Steidl, 2007, p. 46.
[70] V. Dudaş, *Aspecte privind situaţia Banatului în anii Primei Mari Conflagraţiei Mondiale* [Aspects regarding the situation of Banat in the years of the First World War] in "Analele Banatului", S.N., Arheologie – Istorie, Vol. XV, 2007, p. 242.
[71] Dudaş reports that in 1914 an organization made up of Romanian refugees from Banat, Transylvania and Bukovina formed in Bucharest, and began a campaign to push Romania to join the war on the Entente side, with the aim of liberating the Romanian "ancestral lands" from Habsburg rule.
[72] Dudaş, *Aspecte*..., p. 242.
[73] *1910 ÉVI NÉPSZÁMLÁLÁS 1. A népesség főbb adatai községek és népesebb puszták, telepek szerint.*

village. Sad news arrived at home.[74]

This testimony, together with the high number of Romanian and Serbian defectors, highlights the widespread discontent among a portion of the Kingdom of Hungary's population regarding the war that broke out after the events of Sarajevo.

Tens of thousands of soldiers were recruited in Banat, and the men were sent mainly to fight on the Eastern and Balkan fronts.[75] The Timișoara region did not see much fighting during the conflict; the most significant military events that took place in Banat between 1914 and 1918 were the meetings in Timișoara between German general August von Mackensen and the representatives of the Bulgarian and Turkish general staffs, held in October 1915 following the opening of the Italian front in May of that same year.[76]

Banat did not directly suffer the atrocities of war, but naturally the consequences of the conflict on the region were devastating, as in the rest of Europe. The extremely high rate of compulsory recruitment (half of all men in some regions, even outside the *Ținutul Almăjului*) caused a severe shortage of agricultural labour, and this, together with a series of floods in 1916, crippled Banat's agricultural sector. This was particularly harsh due to Banat being the breadbasket of the Viennese Empire alongside the rest of the Kingdom of Hungary.[77] A terrible inflation of all food products followed: in Banat between July 1914 and December 1916 the price of flour rose by 690%, potatoes by 1566%, and rice by 4257%. Between 1915 and 1919, the average price of the twenty-five main consumer goods increased by 989%.[78] In 1915 rationing began for the civilian population, but by 1917 the rations assigned for a week were barely enough for two days.[79]

It was not only agriculture in Banat that went through a disastrous period, but industry was also put under great pressure to sustain the war effort. To increase production, the work week in Banat factories rose from fifty-

[74] Dudaș, *Aspecte*..., pp. 242-243.
[75] *Ibidem.*
[76] *Ibidem.*
[77] Dudaș, *Aspecte*..., p. 245-247.
[78] J. Geml, *Emlékiratok polgármesteri működésem idejéből* [Memories from my time as a mayor], Timișoara, 1924, p. 65.
[79] Dudaș, *Aspecte*..., p. 247.

seven to sixty-five hours; moreover, in some cases Sunday as a day off was abolished and strikes and protests by workers were banned.[80]

The shortage of raw materials, all destined for the war industry, together with the forced conscription of a very large percentage of the male population, destroyed the civilian economy. Many businesses in both cities and villages were forced to shut down due to lack of products, staff, and customers.[81]

In addition to the economic crisis, the Serbian and Romanian populations (the latter only starting from Romania's entry into the war in 1916 on the side of the Entente powers)[82] also became victims of institutionalized discrimination by the Budapest government led by István Tisza, which, on charges of high treason and conspiracy against the homeland, arrested and tried before martial courts hundreds of Romanian and Serbian intellectuals, peasants, and workers.[83] Three-hundred and eleven Romanian schools in Transylvania and Banat were closed and replaced with Hungarian schools. In 1916 the Hungarian government asked the leaders of the Romanian movements in Hungary to sign a declaration of loyalty to the dual state. Many refused and were consequently arrested.[84]

In this climate of deep crisis, food shortages, ethnic discrimination, extreme poverty, and exhausting working conditions, despite the prohibitions, protests and workers' strikes began in all of Banat's industrial centres starting in 1916. On May 1st 1917, large celebrations for Labour Day took place in Timișoara, Lugoj, Anina, and Reșița; the Russian revolutionary events were observed with interest by socialists of every ethnicity, and after Lenin's Bolsheviks succeeded in the October Revolution, the hope and ambition for peace and self-determination spread among the Banat population. Four thousand workers, Swabians, Magyars, Romanians, and Serbs, poured into the streets of Timișoara on December 2nd 1917, loudly demanding an end to the conflict.[85] Soon similar protests were organized throughout Banat, especially by local branches of the SDP, so much so

[80] *Ibidem.*
[81] *Ibid*., p. 248.
[82] Made possible by Carol I's abdication in October 1914, and by treaties signed between Romania and the Entente Powers, which promised great territorial expansion to Bucharest by annexing Habsburg-owned lands, all in exchange for the small Romanian Kingdom's entry into the war against the Central Powers.
[83] Marin*, Unirea*..., p. 45.
[84] *Ibidem.*
[85] Duda*ș, Aspecte*..., pp. 248-249.

that in the town of Reșița, in Krassó-Szörény County, the Hungarian local authorities reported in a note on the December 16th protests that "if drastic and urgent measures are not taken, what happened in Russia will happen here".[86]

Discrimination against Orthodox Christians, the terrible conditions in which the entire Banat population versed and Lenin's success, led many Swabians to distance themselves from their initial enthusiasm for the war, especially in leftist circles. One of the Swabian newspapers of Timișoara, *Volkswille*, with its clear socialist orientation, published, despite heavy censorship, the following appeal to the German-speaking masses of Banat:

> Tisza can no longer be convinced. There is nothing left to do but to overthrow this embittered opponent of the people's rights. Let us bring him down and sweep him away together with his party! All our forces, all our means must be concentrated for this struggle.[87]

After the publication of these words, the Hungarian authorities temporarily shut down *Volkswille*, but other Swabian voices critical of Tisza's government and Vienna's conduct of the war were not lacking. An example is Otto Alscher, journalist and Swabian nationalist far from the left, who between 1915 and 1917 in the newspaper *Deutsches Tageblatt*, criticized "the chauvinistic abuses and oppressions of the Magyar government".[88] The satirical works against the war by Franz Xaver Kappus, Peter Jung's opposition to "the massacre", or the pacifist verses published in both Romanian and German by poet Johann Schuster-Herineanu, also represented a sign of the changing opinion of many Swabians regarding the Kingdom of Hungary's conduct during the last years of the First World War.

Apart from the Hungarians, among all the peoples of Banat socialist or nationalist movements were strengthened, united in their hostility towards the Budapest government: the former to carry out a communist revolution following the Russians' example, the latter for independence or the annexation of Banat to Serbia or Romania. Strikes and protests

[86] *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai 1917- 1919 március ötödike* [Selected documents from the history of ther Hungarian labor movement, 1917-1919, 5th of March], Budapest, 1956, pp. 45-46.
[87] Volkswille, April 28th 1917.
[88] Ș. Binder, *Deutsche Dichtung in Rumänien* [German poetry in Romania] in "Neue Banater Zeitung", Timișoara, 30 dicembre 1972.

against the war and for the dismantling of the Kingdom of Hungary increased dramatically throughout 1918. On January 20th a general strike was called by the SDP and associated unions in Timișoara and the other industrial centres of Banat; on May 1st large celebrations and a huge anti-war demonstration were organized by the SDP, with more than 10,000 protesters filling the streets of Timișoara; on July 22nd there was a general strike in Reșița, leading to demonstrations such that the Attorney General of Lugoj declared that more than a strike, what was happening in Reșița was "a rebellion with the symptoms of a revolution". The strike continued for four days until July 25th, when 160 demonstrators, including their leaders, were arrested.[89]

Aside from socialist demands, however, the pre-war cooperation between Romanian and Swabian parties was not revived until the outbreak of the Romanian-Hungarian War on November 13th 1918, and thus after the Austro-Hungarian surrender on the 3rd of November.[90] At the beginning of autumn 1918, with the World War nearing its end and the Austro-Hungarian imperial forces almost completely defeated, the unstable present and uncertain future of Banat and Hungary would plunge the entire Carpathian basin into chaos.[91] There was a war after the Great War, a devastating period of extreme turmoil that saw the old Habsburg Empire fragment into countless factions,[92] many of which had an ethnic character.

Conclusions

Perhaps the inadequate and oppressive Hungarian administration led to an explosion of demands from ethnic minorities, or perhaps the two-headed, multinational state of Vienna and Budapest was destined to collapse in the era of rampant nationalism. What is certain, however, is that the "self-determination" achieved at the twilight of the First World War by the peoples of Banat did not spare them from ethnic-based oppression and barbarity in the following decades: the Second World War also affected Banat, suffice it to recall that all the territories bordering Horthy's Hungary were the scene of ethnic clashes, and communist Romania did not treat its minorities well either, for example by selling (and de facto

[89] Marin, *Unirea*..., p. 53.
[90] *Ibidem.*
[91] Duda*ș*, *Aspecte*..., pp. 255-256.
[92] A. Chwalba, *Le quotidien difficile des terres polonaises, 1914-1918* [The hardships of daily life in the Polish territories, 1914-1918] in "Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains", Vol. IV, N. 260, 2015, p. 25.

deporting) a significant percentage of its German-speaking population.[93] In 1910 Banat counted just under 500,000 Germans;[94] in 2021, between Romania and Serbia, the German inhabitants barely exceeded 25,000, and it must be considered that many of these are not Swabians, but Transylvanian Saxons. Today, no municipality in Romania can claim a relative or absolute German majority.[95] At each Serbian or Romanian census, the number of Germans in the nations decreases,[96] probably due to emigration and the general trend of demographic decline in Eastern Europe.

In Romanian political life, however, the Germans have once again become protagonists in recent years. Suffice it to say that the Romanian president elected in 2014, and who remained in office until 2025, was Klaus Iohannis, a Transylvanian Saxon from Sibiu. The mayor of Timișoara elected in 2020 was Dominic Fritz, the first German speaker to hold the office since 1941.[97] The Danube Swabians may now be few, but their impact on Austro-Hungarian history and that of the Danube basin should not be underestimated.

[93] J. K. Murádin, *The Deportation of Germans from Romania to the Soviet Union in 1944–1945* in "Acta Universitatis Sapientiae", European and Regional Studies, No 7, 2015, p. 42.
[94] *1910 ÉVI NÉPSZÁMLÁLÁS 1. A népesség főbb adatai községek és népesebb puszták, telepek szerint,* 1912.
[95] From the 2021 Romanian census and the 2011 Serbian census: *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011; *Primele date provizorii pentru Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor, runda 2021* [Population and Housing Census, 2021 round], Bucharest, Institutul Naţional de Statistică, 2022.
[96] *Ibidem*; *Recensamantul Populatiei si Locuintelor*.
[97] S. Both, *Ce comportament putea avea primarul Timișoarei în urmă cu aproape 300 de ani* [What behaviour could the mayor of Timișoara have had almost 300 years ago?], in "Adevărul", October 19th 2015.