# THE REPUBLIC OF MARAMUREŞ AND THE STRATEGY OF ROMANIA'S SOVIETIZATION POLICY FROM THE WASHINGTON ADMINISTRATION PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract:*** *The "Republic of Maramureș" was a distinct state of affairs generated by the Soviets in their politics of subordinating East and Central Europe by installing communist regimes. In the political practice envisaged by Lenin and completed by Stalin, for the extension of communism outside the Soviet Union and its control over a large part of the world all possible actions were allowed, regardless of its immorality and absence of historical or legal foundation.*

***Keywords:*** *Sovietization, Republic of Maramureș, the Soviet Union, American observers, secessionism, communism*

The establishment of the communist regimes in Central and East Europe has been mostly simplified, being commonly assigned either to the famous "percentages agreement" or to the presence of the Soviet "liberating" army. Nevertheless, as historian R.J. Crampton shows, communist domination was achieved through complex processes, varying in form and duration from one country to the other[1]. In reality, at the end of the war, the renowned "percentages agreement" took place between Winston Churchill and Iosif Visarionovici Stalin, asserting that the territories between Germany and Soviet Russia were ceded to the Soviet dictator: 50% Hungary and Yugoslavia, 90% Romania, 75% Bulgaria, while Greece came in a proportion of 90% to the British. However, the agreement did not count in a decisive way, since the Poles and Czech-Slovakians also fell among the "captive nations"[2]. At the moment the Yalta meeting took place on 4-11 February 1945, the "Lublin Committee", representing the Polish Communist Party",

[1] R. J. Crampton, *Europa Răsăriteană în secolul al XX-lea... și după*, București, Editura Curtea Veche, 2002, p. 239.
[2] Tony Judt, *Epoca postbelică. O istorie a Europei de după 1945*, Iaşi, Editura Polirom, 2008, p. 105-1947.



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had been already installed in Warsaw, Practically, the fate of the Eastern countries was decided by Stalin's cynicism.

One has to mention the fact that several decisions regarding the frontiers of the Eastern countries had been already taken by the USSR since the outbreak of the war, partly with Great Britain's agreement. In June 1940, the British Ambassador S. Cripps' mission to Moscow took place in order to obtain a readjustment of Great Britain's relationship with the Soviets[3]. Cripps' mission envisaged the Balkan and Far East problem, the preservation of the Balkan states' independence in front of the Italian or German aggression and the USSR's co-interest in the coordination of European common policies[4]. In an ample report sent to the British Office, Ambassador Cripps also suggested among possible solutions for gaining Soviet confidence, "the recognition de facto until the end of the war of the Soviet sovereignty on the Baltic states, as well as on the Polish territories and the acceptation of Bessarabia and Bukovina's occupation"[5].

The East and Eastern countries' borders problem represented a permanent concern of the Great Powers during the war period. We have concretely in mind Romania's situation in perspective of the future borders, both with Hungary and the USSR. The American administration from the White House, although not favoring the idea of an official debate on borders during the war, it analyzed Transylvania's problem in the framework of the Consultative Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 1943. The inter-department commission on Balkan-Danube issues within the State Department and the Committee on Post-War Program in the period 19 April-26 July 1944 showed that *the United States prioritize the modification of the Hungarian-Romanian border along an ethnic line, restoring Hungary a small strip of territory North of Arad up to Satu-Mare*[6]. According to the plan advanced by the *Office of Strategic Services* on 23 October 1944 in order to abate irredentism a new Romanian-Hungarian border was proposed, which was situated 30-50 miles east of the border established at Trianon. If such solution did not entirely agree with the ethnic borders, the Hungarians and

[3] Roger Moorhouse, *Alianța diavolilor. Pactul lui Hitler cu Stalin 1939-1941*, Târgu Mureș, Sebastian Publishing House, 2015, p. 177.

[4] Mioara Anton, "Planificarea postbelică britanică pentru o nouă Europă Central-Răsăriteană (1940-1945)", in *România. Supraviețuire și afirmare prin diplomație în anii Războiului rece,* vol.1, Coordinator Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu, București, Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2013, p. 44.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 45.

[6] Fűlőp Mihály, *Pacea neterminată. Consiliul Miniştrilor Afacerilor Externe şi tratatul de pace ungar (1947),* Iaşi, Institutul European, 2007, p. 50



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Szeklers' displacement to the territory west of Piatra Craiului and the Romanians' relocation in the territories left by the expatriate Hungarians were to be considered[7]. Officially, within the Conference of the Foreign Affairs ministers or their adjuncts, USA's position was much more reserved with regard to border adjustments. The Americans backed the necessity of the Vienna "arbitration", insisting that the possible border revision should be the direct outcome of the Bucharest and Budapest governments' agreement. Thus, USA mentioned each time that the final solution regarding the borders between Romania and Hungary should belong to the Peace Conference. At the London Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers, J. F. Byrnes, State Secretary of the USA, considered that through a minimal correction of the border with Transylvania, more than half a million Hungarians would have gone to Hungary. If the modification proved to be impossible, the American delegation would give up insisting upon it[8].

England, both during the war and after its end, firmly backed the cancelation of the Vienna "arbitration". It preferred instead a minimal border adjustment. In 1942-1943, the British proposed *the creation of an independent state of Transylvania, after the Swiss cantons' model*[9]. After the London Conference of the Foreign Ministers, which took place between 11 September and 2 October 1945, England stopped proposing the adjustment of the borders established at Trianon[10]. The question of Transylvania as part of Central and East Europe appeared at the end of 1940 on the agenda of the Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), which until the end of the conflagration has analyzed different projects of political-territorial re-organization of Central and East Europe on federative bases. The British specialists, the Americans as well, considered that the fall of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was a mistake and they had hopes in organizing the space into a federation, placed between Germany and the USSR. Proposals were advanced for the foundation of two federations, one Central European and one South-East European[11].

In the case of the Soviet Union, the decisions regarding post-war borders have been taken in the East already since 1940, the case of the border

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 81.

[9] Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România şi Ungaria de la Trianon la Paris (1920-1947). Bătălia diplomatică pentru Transilvania*, Bucureşti, Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1996, p. 193

[10] Vida István, *Chestiunea maghiară la Paris,* in Vol. *Transilvania văzută în publicistica istorică maghiară,* Miecurea-Ciuc, Editura Pro-Print, 1999, pp. 389-390.

[11] Mioara Anton, *op. cit.,* p. 54.



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between Romania and Hungary included. In a correspondence transmitted in the summer of 1946 from Warsaw to Vice Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, Romania's Ambassador to Warsaw, I. Raiciu, described his meeting with Lebediev, the USSR's Ambassador in Poland: "I want to describe you particularly my conversation with Mr. Lebediev, the Ambassador of the USSR. His Excellency showed one more time an extreme goodwill and understanding for our country and told me textually: 'in order to reassure you for the apprehensions you could have this moment, I want to make a confession to you: the USSR' point of view in the issue of Romania's rights over Northern Transylvania have not been decided now, but in 1941. When your troops were enemies on our territory, I had the opportunity to hear Generalissimo Stalin saying that the Vienna Dictate must be canceled and Northern Transylvania must be returned entirely to Romania. In these conditions you can see that your concern cannot be founded'" [12].

Concerning the Vienna Dictate, by means of which Hitler forced Romania to cede Northern Transylvania to Hungary, together with its population of 2. 667. 007 inhabitants, out of which 50,2 % were Romanians, 37,1 % Hungarians and 3% Germans. The Soviet Union was discontent from the very beginning, first of all, because it had not been consulted. Next day after the signing of the Dictate, during a meeting with Germany's Ambassador in Moscow, F. von Schulemberg, V. M. Molotov declared that through the Vienna arbitrage Germany infringed the 23 August Convention (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact)[13]. In a new discussion with Ambassador Schulemberg on 9 September, Molotov reminded him that Germany had a disloyal attitude towards the USSR, by breaking article III of the Convention, namely: "The decisions taken at Vienna refer to those very problems that demand consultation and information, since in the respective case the issue that was decided regarded two neighboring states of the USSR. Among others, the information of Germany had already been done after the arbitrage decision"[14]. After the beginning of the military operations on 22 June 1941, in the hope of achieving Hungary's neutrality, the URSS supported Budapest's claims. In just a few days, Hungary broke its relations with Moscow and entered the war alongside Germany, fact that caused the

[12] Cornel Sigmirean, Corneliu Cezar Sigmirean, *România și Ungaria în fața Conferinței de Pace de la Paris,* Tîrgu Mureș, Editura Universității "Petru Maior", 2010, p. 171.

[13] *Problema transilvană. Disputa teritorială româno-maghiară și URSS 1940-1946. Documente din arhivele rusești,*: Onufrie Vințeler și Diana Tetean (Eds), Cluj-Napoca, Editura EIKON, 2014, pp. 93-94

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 98.



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USSR' change of attitude towards Hungary[15].

Moscow's politics towards Romania, as in fact towards the entire Eastern space, would acquire during the war a political stake, the subordination of the "liberated" country to the Soviet Union. Although Stalin was determined in what Transylvania's status was concerned, he identified in the Transylvanian question a blackmail instrument towards Romania and, partly, towards Hungary. For the research of the post-war order, Moscow founded the "Maxim Litvinov Commission", composed of three deputy commissioners for foreign affairs, together with some experts. On 5 June 1944, through a document called *On Transylvania*, Litvinov transmitted the evaluations regarding the future allocations of the Romanian territry, to I.V.Stalin, Viaceslav Molotov, Iefremovici Kliment Voroșilov and Andrei Ianuarovici Vîșinschi. The best solution, he argued, was "the recognition of Transylvania, outside any alliances and federations"[16]. The solution was also embraced by the Romanian communists at Moscow, as for example Valter Roman, responsible at that moment for the Romanian language broadcast of the Komintern radio[17].

When the commission was assembled, on 8 June, Litvinov appreciated that the integral cession of Transylvania to Hungary was excluded. Nevertheless, Romania could seek regaining Transylvania "in exchange of total and definitive renunciation of Bessarabia and Bukovina", "with our total control over Romania's future politics". Moscow's strategy towards Transylvania was also enunciated, as a blackmail weapon pointed to Romania: Transylvania's independence "could be temporary, until we reach an agreement with Hungary or Romania, or on a long term, taking into account that this small state might need a protector, which could be none other than the Soviet Union, the closest power"[18]. The "Litvinov project", trading Transylvania for the communist regime establishment, would be perfectly applied in Romania's case.

After 23 August 1944, Romania took the side of the Allies, turning the arms against Germany, establishing a new government in Bucharest led by general Sănătescu. Most of the portfolios were held by military men, but, for

[15] Florin Constantiniu, *Între Hitler și Stalin. România și Pactul Ribbentrop-Molotov,* București, Editura Danubius, p. 91

[16] Larry L. Watts, *Ferește-mă, Doamne, de prieteni. Războiul clandestin al blocului sovietic cu România*, București, Editua Rao, 2011, p. 147.

[17] Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania roșie. Comunismul român și problema națională 1944-1965,* Cluj-Napoca, Kriterion, 2010, p. 49.

[18] Larry L. Watts, *op. cit.,* p. 148.



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the first time in Romania's history, representatives of the Communist Party also joined the government. On 29 august 1944, a government delegation led by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, a Romanian Communist Party member, left for Moscow to negotiate the provisions of the armistice with the Allies.

After two weeks, the Romanian delegation received the text that would become the document of the armistice Convention, signed by Romania with the Allies in the evening of 12/13 September. Article 19 of the Convention provided that: *the allied Governments consider the Vienna Arbitrage regarding Transylvania as null and void and agree that Transylvania (or its greatest part) should be returned to Romania under the condition of validation through the Peace Treaty …*[19]

The equivocal manner in which Northern Transylvania's return to Romania was formulated generated a feverish diplomatic activity, while numerous speculations were feeding hopes at Budapest and anxiety at Bucharest. Until the moment the post-war configuration of borders was completed, numerous solutions were formulated and re-formulated in relation with the border between Romania and Hungary and regarding Transylvania's political-administrative status: the division of the province, the integral restitution to one of the states that were claiming it, autonomy or independence in the frame of a larger confederation[20].

In September and October, the Romanian army alongside the Soviet army liberated the territories incorporated to Hungary in 1940. On 10 October 1944, King Mihai promulgated Law 487, which decreed the foundation of the Romanian Commissariat for the Administration of Transylvania's Liberated Regions, which had to represent the Romanian Government's authority in this territory. In November 1944, under the pressure of the Romanian Communist Party and its allies, the Constantin Sănătescu Government resigned. The Russians hoped imposing a Communist regime. However, the King requested the same General Sănătescu to form the government. From that moment on, Transylvania became a means of political blackmail, its belonging to Romania being conditioned by the installation of a communist government in Bucharest, according to the "Litvinov Project". Consequently, Stalin decided Transylvania's removal from under Romania's authority and he introduced the Soviet administration exerted through an Executive

[19] Ion Enescu, *Politica externă a României în perioada 1944-1947*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1979, p. 349

[20] See for details Cornel Sigmirean, Corneliu Cezar Sigmirean, *op. cit.*



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Committee for Northern Transylvania[21]. The region, which comprised the former counties ceded to Hungary in 1940, was called the "North-Transylvanian Republic".
The Romanian administration would be re-installed on 9 March, after the nomination of the Petru Groza Government.
A similar scenario worked in Maramureș, where a government led by the local Ukrainian movement was organized on 4 February 1945[22].
Part of Moscow's strategy of Sovietization of the East, the installation of a Ukrainian pro-Soviet government at Sighetul Marmației, which was meant to annex the territory into Ukraina, was closely watched by the Washington administration. The documents transmitted to Washington by the American observers with reference to the the secessionist movement in Maramureș mentioned that they contained "information affecting the national defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Act, 50 USC 31 and 32"[23]. The American observers' *account* transmitted to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in the frame of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Department of State in April 1945, described the substrate of Moscow's politics in the case of Maramureș: *The interval between the liberation of northern Transylvania in the fall of 1944 by Soviet forces and its restoration to the administrative control of the Groza government of Rumania in March 1945 was exploited by the Ukrainian Communists of Maramureş judetz (district), bordering on Carpatho-Ukraine, to carry on a determined campaign for the incorporation of this district into the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.*
Initially, after the liberation in October 1944 of Transylvania's northern region, historically known as Maramureș, a new coalition committee was installed comprising representatives of the Democratic Front and representatives of the historical parties. The elected mayor was Teofil Borca, former member of the National Liberal Party. Nevertheless, in the circumstances caused by Bucharest's delay in inastalling a pro-communist government, the secessionis movement broke in Maramureș. Beginning with January 1945, the Soviet authorities were encouraging the replacement of the town committee in Sighetul Marmației by the secessionist leaders, coming

[21] Marcela Sălăgean, *Administrația sovietică în nordul Transilvaniei (noiembrie 1944-martie 1945*), Cluj-Napoca, Centru de Studii Transilvane, 2002, pp. 71-72; Idem, *Transilvania în jocul de interese al Marilor Puteri (1940-1947),* Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2013, pp. 95-114.
[22] For the manner the history of the "Republic of Maramureș" was written, the British Government's perspective included, see Florin Müller, „Tentative de rapt teritorial și de sovietizare a regimului Maramureș în anii 1944-1945", in *Revista istorică*, Tome IV, Nr. 7-8, July-August 1993, pp. 699-710.
[23] Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, *Fond MCF SUA*, R. 363, f. 1



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from the Ukrainian population. In order to enforce the secessionists' movement in the region, Ukrainian people from Carpatho-Ukraine were brought there. On 20 January, the secessionists held a meeting in Sighetul Marmației, with the attendance of at least 300 people, mainly Ukrainians, the admission being by invitation only. At this meeting, speeches were delivered by the local communist leader, Ivan Odovichuk, and a mayor in the Soviet army, called Svetchnikov. A manifesto presented and endorsed by the meeting declared Maramureș part of the Soviet Union. A campaign of collecting signatures was started in order to support the union of Maramureș to Ukraina. The American observers reported that *... In making their house-to-house canvass for signature the Ukrainians are alleged to have threatened residents with deportation and blacklisting.*[1] *In the course of the week, according to the local Communist Journal, Poporul (28 January), over 7000 signed. The members of the town council, constituting the local committee of the Democratic Front, were among the signatures and there is little doubt that many other residents signed under pressure. According to two local Rumanian residents, Major Svetchnikov stated art a Communist meeting held on 22 January that any person refusing to sign would be "liquidated". On 28 January Poporul announced that those who had not yet signed could do so at Communist Party headquarters*[24].

The secession movement in Maramureș totally ignored the ethno-demographic situation: according to the 1930 census the Romanians represented 57% of the entire population, 20 % were Jews (their number in 1945 was smaller as consequence of the Holocaust), 6,9% were Hungarians, 2,9 % were Germans and only 11,9 % were Ukrainians.

Nevertheless,on 28 January another popular meeting was held, which was attended by 2500 people. Opening the meeting in the name of the Democratic Front, N. Cumnacu declared that "the town of Sighet united in its desire, following the example of Subcarpathian Ukraine, to be annexed by the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic." Under the pressure of the authorities, the Romanian physician Dr.Iuliu Hodor also spoke in favor of the so called union. The meeting adopted a resolution that confirmed that the secessionist manifesto was signed by over 8000 out of the total 11000 inhabitants of the town of Sighet. The central feature of the program was the reading and adoption of long messages addressed to Stalin and to the leaders of the Soviet Ukraine, asking them to incorporate Maramureş as well as Carpatho-Ukraine within the borders of the Soviet Union.

[24] *Ibidem*, f. 1



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During the meeting of 28 January a new town council was elected, which consisted of 32 members, most of them chosen from Ukrainian and Hungarian population, in order to replace the former officials, who had been ousted by Odovichuk and Captain Davidenko. The new council formed a committee of 15 consultants with regard to the municipal affairs of Sighet. A Ukrainian president and two vice-presidents were elected, among whom the Romanian physician Iuliu Hodor. A committee of five persons was going to take over the executive leadership of the town. Upon the installation of the new administration, Odovichuk declared: "From now on we belong to Russian Subcarpathian Ukraine".

According to the American observers' account, in the period between the end of January and the second week of April, the Ukrainian communists governed Maramureş as an integral part of the Soviet Union. Concrete measures were taken in order to integrate Maramureş into the new political space: a committee was organized for the administration of the region and for the ratification of the decision on 28 January; a new identity was created by stressing the "Slavic past" of Maramureş; a message addressed to Stalin urged that Maramureş should join "forever the fatherland mother country /sic/: Soviet Ukraine"; places of business were ordered to change their sings into the Ukrainian language; the authorities announced "the inauguration of Ukrainian schools, and made it obligatory for the Rumanian and Hungarian grade schools to devote six hours weekly to the study of Ukrainian in each grade"; an official flag of the county was adopted, "a red flag with hammer and sickle in the upper left-hand corner, bearing the slogan: 'Long live the union of Maramureş with Soviet Ukraine'"; an agrarian reform was decreed, to be accomplished "in conformity with the procedure in Carpatho-Ukraine"; all lands belonging to Hungarians and Germans who were evacuated together with the retreating enemy troops were confiscated etc.[25]

In reply to the created situation, the pro-Romanian elements tried to organize a meeting in Sighet on 5 March. Initially approved by the Soviet Command, the meeting was finally forbidden. Some of the Romanian guests, who were not announced about the cancelation of the meeting, still headed for Sighet, but they were stopped by the Soviet guards and the Ukrainian militia. Two persons were shot and three were wounded. On the same day, the Ukrainian militia arrested a considerable number of Romanian people at Sighet and raided their homes. Among them there were Iuliu Ardeleanu, a priest in Șugatag, Titus Berinde, priest, professor Iuliu Epure, Lupuțiu Paul,

[25] *Ibidem*, f. 5-9



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Petre Mihalyi, former prefect, Dr. Eugen Salca, Mihai Ghera, Vasile Nistor, Gheorghe Oros etc.

On 9 March 1945, after the installation of the Petru Groza government, the Soviets accepted the installation of a Romanian administration in Northern Transylvania, part of Romania, which Maramureș belonged to. The Ukrainian officials from Maramureș ignored the new situation created after 9 March, continuing to consider the region as belonging to the Soviet Union. On 28 March the communist newspaper *Poporul* continued to display on its frontispiece the slogan: "Long live the union of Maramureş with the Soviet Ukraine!" The town and county officials of Sighet refused to acknowledge the representatives of the Romanian National Bank, who arrived on official business on 29 March. In the second week of April, the new Romanian prefect arrived and the Ukrainians, brought in Maramureș in support of the secessionist movement, alongside the Ukrainian minority, withdrew to Ukraine under the cover of the Soviet army.

Resulting from the American observers' account, the secessionist movement in Maramureș was meant to blackmail Romania to accept the installation of a communist regime, on the one hand and to put into practice Sub-Carpathian Ukraine's annexation into Ukraine, more precisely into the Soviet Union, on the other hand. On 9 April, the Prime-minister of Czechoslovakia, Zdenek Fierlinger, stated publicly that the proposal for the incorporation of Carpatho-Ukraine into the Soviet Ukraine was to be settled "by us in conformity with the will of the Ukrainian population of Carpatho-Ukraine in a democratic way and in full friendship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union". The Premier's statement was based on an understanding reached by President Eduard Benes and Stalin regarding the organization of a plebiscite concerning the future of Sub-Carpathian Ukraine[26].

The "Republic of Maramureș" represented one of the numerous special situations created by the Soviets in their politics of subordinating East and Central Europe through the installation of communist regimes. In the political practice imagined by Lenin and perfected by Stalin for the attainment of their aims, the expansion of communism outside the Soviet Union and its control over a large part of the world any kind of action was allowed, irrespective of its immorality and lack of historical or judicial foundation.

[26] *Ibidem*, f. 12.



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## ANNEX

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# THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN MARAMURES (TRANSYLVANIA)

Description

An account of political developments under Soviet occupation in a Rumanian border district which was dominated for several weeks (until April 1945) by Ukrainian Communists.

Washington
24 May 1945

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SUMMARY



Until the second week of April the Maramures judetz (district) of northern Transylvania was governed by Ukrainian Communists, who, with the encouragement of some of the local Soviet military officials, declared that the district no longer formed a part of Rumania, but had been joined to the neighboring Carpatho-Ukraine, which they assumed to have been incorporated into the USSR. This secessionist movement collapsed on the arrival of a prefect appointed at Bucharest, but the facts regarding the local situation throw light on the present that may be/exerted/locally by Soviet officials stationed in a European territory adjacent to the Soviet Union. With Soviet support the secessionists coerced their opponents into signing a manifesto calling for incorporation of Maramures into the Ukrainian SSR, and on 28 January ousted the Rumanian town council at Sighet. Rural delegates were mobilized to give movement a popular character, and the new officials set to work under the slogan: "Long live the union of Maramures with Soviet Ukraine!" Message which ignored the existence of the Hungarian and Rumanian nationalities were sent to Stalin and to the head of Soviet Ukraine in the name of the entire population, requesting admission into the Soviet Union, and relations were established with the National Council of the Carpatho-Ukraine. The Soviet authorities are said to have taken repressive measures against the Rumanian opposition, and the secessionists continued to ignore the Soviet-sponsored left-wing Groza government at Bucharest even after the restoration of northern



Transylvania to Rumanian administrative control. When Bucharest appointed prefect arrived, however, the Soviet authorities apparently withdraw their support from the secessionists. By installing the prefect in office they apparently acknowledged that Soviet policy toward the area had changed, presumably as a result of the decision to establish a left-wing Rumanian central government.



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SECRET

# THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN MARAMURES (TRANSYLVANIA)

## I. INTRODUCTION

The interval between the liberation of northern Transylvania in the fall of 1944 by Soviet forces and its restoration to the administrative control of the Groza government of Rumania in March 1945 was exploited by the Ukrainian Communists of Maramures judetz (district), bordering on Carpatho-Ukraine, to carry on a determined campaign for the incorporation of this district into the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. Rumanian observers who visited Maramures at the beginning of April received presumably reliable reports that the secessionists' movement was openly fostered by some of the local Soviet authorities, even after Moscow had formally authorized the Groza government to administer northern Transylvania. During the second week of April, however, on the arrival of the prefect appointed at Bucharest, the Soviet officers in charge of Maramures are reported to have ousted the secessionists and to have installed the new prefect at Sighet, capital of the district. The reversal of the Soviet officers' previous attitude has caused the Ukrainian secessionist movement to collapse. Nonetheless, the newly available data on the course of the movement are still instructive. If Northern Transylvania had not been returned to a left-wing Rumanian government, on Marshal Stalin's orders, or if Rumania had remained under a right-wing Rumanian government, it may be conjectured that the movement would have continued.

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The judetz (district) of Maramures forms part of a larger area, also calling Maramures, in which three other judetzes (districts) – Satu Mare, Somes and Salaj – are usually included. The judetz of Maramures proper is bounded on the northeast by former Rumanian and Polish territory already annexed by the USSR, and on the north by the Carpato-Ukraine, the easternmost portion of Czechoslovakia, whose in-corporation into the USSR is now generally expected. A small, poverty- stricken area of 3381 square kilometers, the Maramures judetz is isolated from the rest of Rumania by a mountainous



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barrier, the Rodna Mountains, whose peaks run to 2300 meters in height. Maramures forms the southern part of a naturally hilly basin which extends across the Tisa River political boundary into Czechoslovakia. The valley of the Tisa and that of its chief tributary, the Visa, runs through the basin, and forms the unit, through the hills to the west, to Husi in the Carpatho-Ukraine. The solo link by railroad to other parts of Rumania consists of a single-track line which has its terminus at Borsa, runs up the valley of the Visa, crosses the Tisa into Czechoslovak territory before re-entering Rumania near Satu Mare. One unpaved road runs from Sighet through the mountainous terrain southeastward to Moldavia, while another winds to the southwest to connect with the main road from Cluj to Satu Mare.

The modest natural resources of Maramures include four small silver and gold mines, a salt mine, various quarries, and forests which cover 43 percent of the total area. The industries (in 1935) were

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essentially limited to two flour mills, two knitting mills, and seventeen sawmills, with a total personnel of 1450. Maramures normally ex-ported timber, livestock, leather and fruit, but the market town of Sighet was economically handicapped by the Tisa River political frontier. The elimination of all but a small remnant of the Sighet Jews, the most active urban element in the district, has undoubtedly led to considerable change in local business activity.[1]

According to the 1930 census the composition of the population was as follows:

Population of Maramures by Ethnic Groups in 1930

| Nationality | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Rumanians | 93.207 | 57.7 |
| Jews | 33.888 | 20.9 |
| Ukrainians | 19,230 | 11.9 |
| Hungarians | 11,174 | 6.9 |
| Germans | 3,239 | 2.9 |
| Others | 1,096 | 0.6 |
| | 161,574 | 100.0 |

The present population, which has been considerably reduced as a result of wartime events, is probably 130,000 at most; and the Ukrainian ratio, about 12 percent in 1930, has undoubtedly risen as a consequence of the departure



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of many Rumanian, Jewish, and German inhabitants since 1940. The only town in Maramures is the district capital, Sighet, situated as the Tisa River boundary, were, in 1930, there were 9698 Rumanians in a population of 27,270; in the present reduced population of some 13,000 the Rumanian ratio is probably much smaller.

1. Enciclopedia Romaniei, II, 272

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(…), Maramures would lie between two blocs of Soviet territory; Carpatho-Ukraine itself and the Soviet–annexed Rumanian province of northern Bucovina, together with a small wedge of former Polish territory. The local territorial question is, however, a minor aspect of Rumanian-Hungarian conflict over Transylvania, and the settlement of the boundary presumably will be reserved for the Peace Conference.

## II FIRST PHASE OF SOVIET OCCUPATION [1]

After the arrival of the Soviet army in the fall of 1944 the town of Sighet was first governed by a coalition committee comprising representatives of the Democratic Front and conservatives, which opposed the secessionist tendency. The mayor Sighet was a Rumanian lawyer, Teofil Borca, a former member of the Liberal Party. Although it is unlikely

1. The account presented here is based chiefly on a report by American observer who visited Maramures at the beginning of April 1945, as well as information published in the Sighet secessionists' journal, Poporul.

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That they were following instructions issued on a higher level, the Soviet authorities in Maramures, in order to encourage the secessionist movement, undertook during January 1945 to arrange for the replacement of this town committee by the secessionist leaders. It is reported that Ukrainian men were brought in from Carpatho-Ukraine to reinforce the Maramures secessionists' program. On 20 January the secessionists are said to have held a meeting at Sighet, attended by at least 300 persons, chiefly Ukrainians, admission to which is said to have been by invitation only. Speeches were delivered by a local Ukrainian Communist leader, Ivan Odoviciuk, as well as by a major of the Soviet army named Svetchnikov. A manifesto presented to and endorsed



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by this meeting declared Maramures part of the Soviet Union. The town was then canvassed for signatures.[1]

According to ex-major Borca, who fled the district on 7 March, Captain Davidenko, a Soviet officer, arrived at Sighet about the time of the meeting mentioned above and informed the prefect, Teodor Bocotei, that the district had become part of Carpatho-Ukraine and that he would have to get out. The prefect and his staff of twelve are then said to have been coerced into signing the manifesto advocating such a "union,"[2] On 27 January, according to a report received by the British Mission in Bucharest, the prefect and the town council were warned that unless they signed they

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1. OSS source S, 2 April 1945 (report dated 13 April 1945)
2. Interview with Borca; OSS source D, 19 March 1945.

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would be in danger of arrest. In making their house-to-house canvass for signature the Ukrainians are alleged to have threatened residents with deportation and blacklisting.[1] In the course of the week, according to the local Communist Journal, Poporul (28 January), over 7000 signed. The members of the town council, constituting the local committee of the Democratic Front, were among the signatures and there is little doubt that many other residents signed under pressure. According to two local Rumanian residents, Major Svetchnikov stated art a Communist meeting held on 22 January that any person refusing to sign would be "liquidated". On 28 January Poporul announced that those who had not yet signed could do so at Communist Party headquarters.[2]

In order to give the movement a popular character, another public meeting was held on 28 January and attended, according to Poporul, by a capacity audience of 2500. Opening the meeting in the name of the Democratic Front, N. Cumnacu declared the town of Sighet "united in its desire, following the example of Subcarpathian Ukraine, to be annexed by the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic." Dr. Iuliu Hodor, a local Rumanian physician, who seems to have been acting under pressure, also spoke in favor of the "union", and the meeting adopted a resolution stating that the secessionists (Poporul, 1 February 1945). The central feature of

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1 OSS, source D, 27 March 1945 (Tour of British Mission, 27 February – 8 March 1945).



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1 OSS, source S, 2 April 1945

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the program was the reading and adoption of long messages addressed to Stalin and to the head of the Soviet Ukraine urging them to incorporate Maramures as well as Carpatho-Ukraine within their boundaries.

Another result of the meeting of 28 January was the election of a new town council, consisting of thirty-two members, chiefly Ukrainians and Hungarians, to take the place of the incumbent officials, who were thereupon ousted by Odovichuk and Captain Davidenko. According to Dr. Hodor, Davidenko invited him to become a member of the new council for appearances' sake; Hodor says that he accepted against his will under threat of the liquidation of his family. The new council formed a committee of fifteen to consult regarding the municipal affairs of Sighet. This smaller committee in turn elected a Ukrainian President and two vice-presidents, one of whom vas Hodor. The officers co-opted three members of the committee of fifteen and, this time omitting Hodor, set up a committee of five to attend to the daily work of the town government.[1]

III MARAMURES UNDER THE SOVIET FLAG

At the time the new administration was installed, Odovichuk is quoted as declaring: "From now on we belong to Russian Subcarpathian Ukraine."[2]

Between the end of January and the second week of April, indeed, the Ukrainian Communists ruled Maramures on the explicit assumption that the district was an integral part of the Soviet Union. Mobilizing the rural

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1 Poporul, 1 February 1945

2 OSS source S, 2 April 1945

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Ukrainians of the district on 4 February, the secessionists held meeting of 485 delegates to set up a committee for the administration of Maramures as a whole and to ratify the decision taken on 28 January. As the principal speaker, Odovichuk stressed the "Slavic past" of Maramures. Although he denounced the pre-war Rumanian regime for its anti-Ukrainian policy, he made no reference to the more recent Hungarian rule of northern



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Transylvania (1940-44). After statements delivered by a number of delegates, the meeting voted to send another message to Stalin as well as to the head of the Soviet Ukraine, conveying the wish of Maramures as a whole to join "forever the fatherland mother country /sic/: Soviet Ukraine." It should be noted that the text of these parallel messages gives the Ukrainian population as 30,000, or about 10,000 more than the 1930 census while completely disregarding the much larger Rumanian population. After electing a district council of thirty-two members the delegates chose a smaller standing committee to govern the district, with Odovichuk as president.[1]

As far as the new administration was concerned, the incorporation of their district into the Soviet Union was an accomplished fact. Among the earliest regulations issued by Odovichuk, one ordered places of business to change their sings into the Ukrainian language, although permitting them to-display additional signs in another language. Another order emanating from the "competent authorities" reminded the public that rubles, as well as the special pengos issued by the Red Army as the equi-

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1 Poporul, 7 February 1945

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valent of the Hungarian currency, must be accepted at the fixed rate of exchange. With regard to the language problem in the schools, the officials, citing as their authority the Soviet Constitution, announced the inauguration of Ukrainian schools, and made it obligatory for the Rumanian and Hungarian grade schools to devote six hours weekly to the study of Ukrainian in each grade. Similarly, Rumanian was to be taught three hours weekly in the Hungarian schools, while the Ukrainian pupils were to devote two hours weekly both to Hungarian and to Rumanian. As the official flag the district adopted a red flag with hammer and sickle in the upper left-hand corner, bearing the slogan: "Long live the union of Maramures with Soviet Ukraine."1

At its session of 26 February the district council decreed an agrarian reform, to be carried out "in conformity with the procedure in Carpatho-Ukraine." All lands belonging to Hungarians and Germans who were evacuated together with the retreating enemy troops became subject to confiscation. The public was also reminded of their duty to help the Red Army reconstruct the communication facilities by contributing their labor. A warning was issued to those citizens, said to be in the minority, who



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allegedly tried to evade this service, thereby committing sabotage. In this connection the Sighet journal remarked that "it is more convenient to work near home than to be deported away from one's family."2

While it may be assumed that the majority of the Rumanian population of Maramures, opposed the secessionist movement, they were unable to make their opposition felt. Although the authorities permitted the Rumanian

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1. Poporul, 21 February 1945
2. Poporul, 28 February 1945

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to circulate their petition against secession, and many signature were probably obtained, it is reported that repressive measures were taken. The newspaper Maramuresul was suppressed, and the printing press used to print the circulars of the Rumanian opposition was closed. When representatives of pro-Rumanian elements applied for permission to schedule a meeting in Sighet for 5 March, the Soviet Command is said to have given oral consent. The Rumanian leaders thereupon summoned their supporters in the village to attend the meeting; but on 3 March the permission was withdrawn. The loyalists canceled the affair, and succeeded in informing some of those who were already en route. A few Rumanians, who were presumably not informed of the cancellation, nevertheless arrived at the outskirts of Sighet on the morning of 5 March. It is reported that Soviet guards and Ukrainian militia fired on them, killing two and wounding three. On the same day, according to this account, the Soviets in Sighet, and raided their homes. 1

Undeterred by the restoration of their district, as a part of northern Transylvania, to Rumanian jurisdiction on 9 March, the Maramures officials continued to work on the assumption that they were serving on Soviet territory. Thus on 28 March the slogan of the Communist Poporul still read as before: "Long live the union of Maramures with the Soviet Ukraine!"

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1. Source D, 27 March 1945. It is reliably reported that the Russians found weapons hidden in the carts of some of the Rumanians who were stopped outside the town on the day of the cancelled meeting. The Rumanians claimed that they intended to use their weapons against the Ukrainian militia rather than against the Soviet troops. OSS source S, 2 April 1945.



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Specking in the presence of a representative of the pro-Soviet National Council at Uzhorod, capital of Carpatho-Ukraine, Odovichiuk was quoted as saying that he expected Moscow and Uzhorod to confirm the annexation in the near future. He is further reported to have stated that if the prefect appointed at Bucharest should arrive in Sighet, he would not be recognized and would not be permitted to take over the administration of the district. 1 By the end of March, however, the Soviet officer representing the Allied Control Commission as Sighet as the local commanding officer was expecting the prefect's arrival, and viewed Odovenchuk's activities as near an end. Disregarding the position taken by the Soviet authorities, the town and district officials of Sighet refused to recognize the representatives of the Rumanian National Bank who arrived on official business on 29 March. The Bank's representatives was were instructed to leave town without delay.[2]

In the meantime, having consolidated its control of Maramures the old of the Soviet authorities, the Communist Party ceased to pretend that official functions were outside its competence. Thus Poporul, in announcing on 28 March that a committee for purging fascist elements had been set up, made it known that this government agency was located at Communist Party headquarters. All citizens were urged to submit in writing to this address charges against incumbent or former civil servants guilty of collaboration.

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1. OSS source S; 2 April 1945
2. Ibid



IV. COLLAPSE OF THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT

Although it is known that the new prefect arrived at Sighet during the second week of April and that he was duly recognized by the Soviet authorities, very little information has been received regarding the transition. Although Odovichuk is still in Sighet, it is reliably reported that he and his faction have been stripped of their powers, and that the secessionist movement has collapsed. The men who were re-ported to have crossed the border from Carpatho-Ukraine to reinforce the movement are said to have been escorted back across this line by the Soviets. It is, therefore,



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probable that the Soviet officers who backed the secessionists, have been over-ruled, and that all elements in Maramures will henceforth be required to comport themselves as Rumanian citizens.[1]

Until the installation of the prefect the temporarily effective, even if informal, Soviet encouragement of the Ukrainian Communists' movement was apparently part of the plan for the annexation of the Carpatho-Ukraine. On 9 April Premier Zdenek Fierlinger of Czechoslovakia stated publicly that the proposal for the incorporation of Carpatho-Ukraine into the Soviet Ukraine was to be settled "by us in conformity with the will of the Ukrainian population of Carpatho-Ukraine in a democratic way and in full friendship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union".[2] This statement, apparently based on an understanding reached by President Eduard Benes and Marshal Stalin during

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1. OSS source S, ca. 25 April 1945.
2. FCC Daily, 10 April 1945.



March,[1] has been taken to mean that a plebiscite is to be held, case however, the recent collapse of the secessionist movement, indicates clearly that the fate of that district will not depend on that of Carpatho-Ukraine but rather on the decision of the Peace Conference regarding the frontiers of Transylvania. The installation of the prefect at Sighet has apparently put an end to the anomalous situation created by the local Ukrainian Communists, who could presumably not have taken power without the support of the Soviet authorities. Whether the latter lent their support on instructions from their superiors or on their own initiative has not been as-curtained.

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1. OSS #1296, 27 March 1945.

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