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“... victims of the war?” – two models of the resilience of educational institutions in temporary war theatres during World War I: The impact of the Romanian invasion of Hungary in 1916 on schools

<https://doi.org/10.51918/ceh.2023.1-2.4>

Abstract

It has always been an important task to settle and integrate refugees, at least temporarily. One of the key element of this process is to provide the education to refugee students. However, there is a relative dearth of literature dealing with the educational spaces created for refugees in the previous century and the personal experiences.

The Hungarian National Archives holds reports about the number and situation of refugee students. With the use of these, on the one hand, I intend to briefly present the conditions of Transylvanian refugee students who escaped from Transylvania to the safer parts of Hungary after the Romanian attack in 1916. I want to find out to what extent Hungarian state education and civil society contributed to the remediation of the refugees. On the other hand, I also focus on the question of returning to home.

I highlight that although life recovered in most areas of Transylvania after the defeat of the Romanian troops, various factors hampered the resumption of the education.

Keywords

World War I, Romanian–Hungarian War, Refugees, Civic initiative, State administration

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The impact of the Romanian invasion of Hungary in 1916 on schools¹

Introduction

Similarly to today, so too in the past a pressing issue for society was how to help refugees settle down and integrate them, at least temporarily. The literature on the history of education has highlighted the lack of research into the schooling of refugees.² In the last two decades, articles have tended to discuss education as if it only mattered for a transitional period in the case of refugees.³ Some works have also addressed the question of education during the First World War, but they only examined how the maintenance of education was envisioned in the areas occupied by hostile powers, and what opportunities students had within the conditions that the occupation created.⁴

- 1 The research was carried out with the professional support of two scholarships. Firstly, by the Új Nemzeti Kiválóság Program of the Innovációs és Technológiai Minisztérium (Ministry for Innovation and Technology of Hungary), code number ÚNKP-21-3, financed by the Nemzeti Kutatási, Fejlesztési és Innovációs Alap. Secondly, by the Erasmus+ Short Doctoral Mobility Programme regarding for the contracts of 21/1/KA131/000003804/SMT-727 and 21/1/KA131/000003804/SMT-739.
- 2 In this regard see, for example, Kevin Myers’s study on the Spanish Civil War orphans resettled in Cambridge or Vera Sheridan’s article on the scholarship program for university students who emigrated to Austria and then to the USA after the 1956 revolution in Hungary. Myers, *National identity, citizenship and education for displacement*, 313–325.; Sheridan, *Support and surveillance*, 775–793.
- 3 Myers, *The hidden history of refugee schooling in Britain*, 153–162.
- 4 For the Russian occupation of Galicia: von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland*; Ruszala,

For Hungary, the story of the Transylvanian⁵ refugees who had to leave their homes with the invasion of the army of Romania in the summer of 1916 is one of key themes of the historiography of World War I. This is due to the number of people who fled, the role that the state played in managing their relocation as well as because of its long-term impact. At the same time, the access of Transylvanian students to education in 1916 and 1917 is one of the neglected aspects of this research, with only very little attention having been paid to it so far.⁶ Knowing more about these kinds of personal experiences and concerns is ever more important and relevant in the light of current events in Ukraine.

In the first part of this paper, I will present the history of the evolution of the Transylvanian front as this was a major determinant of the timing and changes of the refugee crisis. I will then outline the general conditions of the refugees' arrival in the more westerly regions of Hungary. Within this discussion, I will focus on the accommodation and relief of Transylvanian refugee students, highlighting the conditions of their return to Transylvania, as well as the situation of those students whose schools were closed due to the war.

The research was carried out by processing the archival fond labelled '*Cases of Transylvanian refugee students*'⁷ found in the Hungarian National Archives. This source mostly consist of the regulations of the Minister of Religion and Public Education, the reports prepared by the school principals and the principals of the school districts, as well as the requests for tuition exemption that refugee students submitted. Although I have estimated the number of affected schools at 120, the documents in the fond referred to only two Transylvanian schools. This circumstance explains why I deal only with those schools in my paper. The two schools for which documents were available

The evacuation and flight of galician refugees, 331–347. On the occupation of Serbia by the Central Powers see: Scheer, *Kitűnő lehetőség nemzeti jelképek kialakítására*, 419–436. On the occupation of Italy by the Central Powers see: Boisserie and Mondini, *I disarmati*.

- 5 Although Transylvania was not an administratively separate region, I define it as a part of historical Hungary which had a certain independence.
- 6 Kocsis, *Erdélyi menekültek Debrecenben*, 88–95.; Buczkó, „Szállást adtunk hűséges magyar véreinknek”; L. Juhász, *Amikor mindenki a háborús állapotok igája alatt roskadoz*, 29.; Szabó, *Az erdélyi menekült tanulók helyzete és sorsa*.
- 7 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltára (MNL OL). K 500 Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium (VKM). 1917-11-181. I–II. rész. Erdélyi menekült tanulók ügyei.

were the State Real School in Brassó (today's Braşov in Romania) and the State High School⁸ in Gyergyószentmiklós (today's Gheorgheni in Romania).

Therefore, while explaining why it was at the Real School of Brassó where the schoolyear was able to start after the return of refugee students, I investigate the differences and reasons behind teachers' individual choices and the administrative responses to these decisions, as well as the differences between local conditions. From this point of view, I attempt to investigate the lives of the main characters. Why were students more fortunate and successful in reaching their goal in Brassó than in Gyergyószentmiklós even though the initial conditions of the two schools were similar in the autumn of 1916? Reflecting on the motto in the title of the paper, is it really reasonable to assert that the students in Gyergyószentmiklós became victims only because of the war? If it is indeed true, to what extent can we generalize this statement?

Comparing the two schools gains significance in a wider sense as a basis for understanding later events from a socio-historical point of view. The approaches tried in 1916–17 or the behavioural attitudes of that time could serve as a model for the period from 1918 to 1920, after the end of the First World War. The experience may be a relevant for some educational institutions during the change of regime, as well as for students and teachers who (had to) left their previous home to flee to the smaller Hungary. One of the most important analogies between the two periods was that local communities played an important role in preserving the educational culture.⁹

8 The two types of secondary schools were 'high schools' which prioritized the humanities and 'real schools' which focused more on modern languages and natural sciences. Successful completion of the high school graduation exam entitled students to admittance to colleges, while the real school graduation exam allowed to apply to the university of arts and the faculty of mathematics and humanities of the universities of science, as well as to the mining, forestry and economic academies. Az 1883-dik évi törvények gyűjteménye II. M. Kir. Belügyminisztérium, Budapest, 1883. 332–392.

9 To the historical significance of the question, regarding higher education institutions see the thematic issue of *Gerundium*. *Gerundium*, 32–124.

Transylvania as war theatre: the first phase

Although the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy had foreseen the possibility of war with the Romanian Kingdom since the outbreak of the European war on 28th July 1914, reassuring reports in this regard and a lack of weapons and resources,¹⁰ meant that no action was taken to defend the Eastern border of Transylvania. Hence, a great panic broke out when the Romanian army (approximately 250000 soldiers) crossed the Hungarian border in the early hours of 28th August 1916.

While the 4th, 1st and 2nd Romanian armies planned to occupy Transylvania and the Great Plain without any help from the allied countries, the 3rd Romanian army assumed a defensive stance in Dobruja until the arrival of Russian reinforcements. The initial success of the Romanian army can be explained by its numerical superiority and the element of surprise¹¹ in the first phase of the war in Transylvania (28th August–18th September).¹² By the middle of September 1916, the Romanian forces had advanced 60–80 kilometres.¹³

The settling of the Transylvanian refugees

The Minister of the Interior prepared a draft decree no. 4340/1916 dated 15th of August, 1916 to regulate the possible evacuation and the temporary resettlement of the civilian population living in the various counties lying close to the Romanian border in case of a war against Romania.¹⁴ The place of temporary settlement was preliminarily designated according to the place of residence of the refugees.¹⁵ Torontál County was assigned for refugees from Brassó County, Csanád County for refugees

10 In order to stop the front breakthrough in Luck on 4th June 1916 (so-called Brusilov offensive), all units were needed on the Russian front. Thus, despite the request of the Hungarian government, the gendarmerie was the only armed force on the Transylvanian border. Bihari, *1914. A nagy háború száz éve*, 301.

11 Hajdu and Pollmann, *A régi Magyarország utolsó háborúja*, 223–225.

12 Szijj and Ravasz, *Magyarország az első világháborúban*, 157.

13 Galántai, *Az I. világháború*, 298.

14 Nagybaczoni Nagy, *A Románia elleni hadjárat*, 74.

15 Csóti, *A vasút szerepe*, 31–34.

from Fogaras County, Bács-Bodrog County for refugees from Szeben County and Alsó-Fehér County, Hajdú County and Szabolcs County for refugees from Hunyad County and Krassó-Szörény County, while Békés County and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County were assigned for refugees from Háromszék County, and Csongrád County for refugees from Kis-Küküllő County (Fig. 1).¹⁶ The resettlement plan basically took into account the possibilities offered by the railway network, and designated the western counties bordering Transylvania as the final destination for the refugees.¹⁷

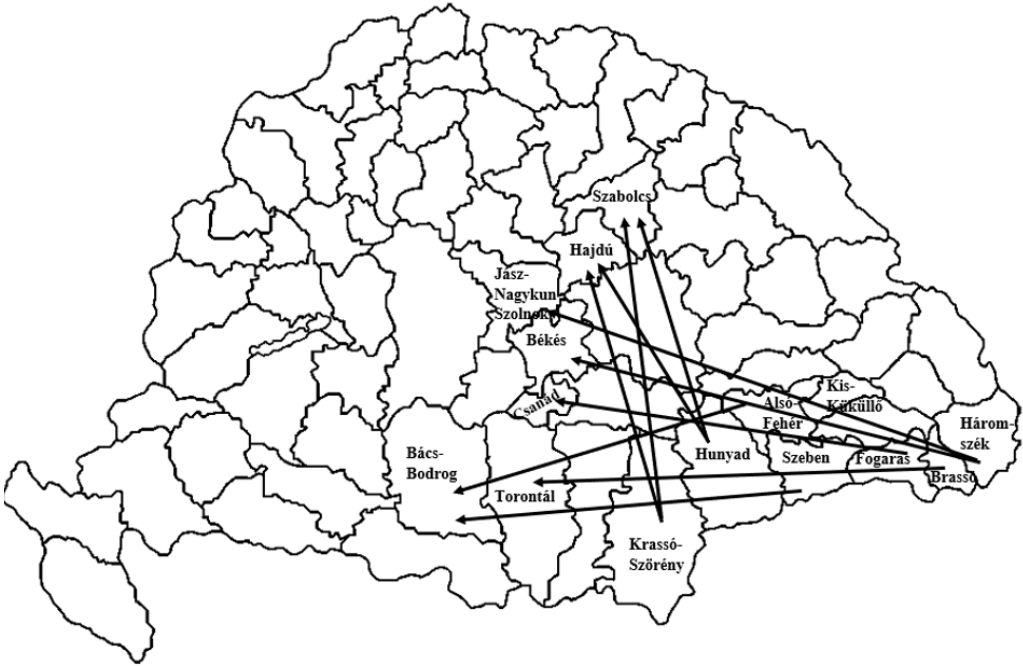


Fig. 1: The links between place of residence and place of temporary settlement of the refugees according to the plan

Defining the precise number of the Transylvanian refugees is a difficult task as there are different opinions about it. On the one hand, according to Miklós Betegh, the commissioner for Transylvania appointed by the Hungarian government, the war affected an area where approximately 1.3 million people resided. Based on contemporary statistics, Betegh wrote about 206 000 refugees who crossed the Király-hágó (today’s Pasul

16 Segítsük az erdélyi menekülteket! *Magyarország*, 1916. szeptember 1. 7–9.

17 Erdélyi menekültek Szegeden. *Szeged és Vidéke*, 1916. szeptember 6. 4.

Craiului in Romania), which is considered the gateway to Transylvania from a geographical perspective.¹⁸ On the other hand, according to János Sándor (Interior Minister between 1913 and 1917), only a half a million people set off from their homes. In contrast, the commandant of the 1st Hungarian army estimated that there would be one to two million refugees.¹⁹

After defining the numbers involved, the first and most important question was how to settle the numerous refugees who headed from Transylvanian counties to the interior parts of Hungary. There were differences within the executive about how to approach this issue. While the government was in favour of setting up camps for the refugees near the border in order to save money,²⁰ the government commissioner for Transylvania²¹ recommended that the refugees be moved to accommodation further away, in the safer interior of the country.²² Eventually, the latter option was chosen. Although transporting refugees by trains was costly, this method made it possible to enlist the aid of the hinterland's population. Consequently, providing for the refugees became an important objective not only for philanthropically-minded people, but for the whole of society.²³

In accordance with the directives of the Minister of the Interior, several state and civil organizations (the Transylvanian Refugees Protection Committee, the Relief Committee, the Székely Committee etc.) were founded, which dealt with gathering money for the refugees, as well as helping to find homes for them. Apart from the church and the various social organizations, educational institutions were notably involved in these welfare-related tasks, so teachers and students also played a significant role in helping refugees.²⁴

18 Betegh, *Erdély a háborúban*, 70–82.

19 L. Juhász, *Amikor mindenki a háborús állapotok igája alatt roskadoz...*, 29.

20 Csóti, *Az 1916. évi román támadás*, 227–233.

21 The government-appointed commissioner for Transylvania was Miklós Betegh who had been the head of the administration of Torda-Aranyos County. See Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Az oláhok betörése Erdélybe*, 43.

22 Csóti, *Az 1916. évi román támadás*, 232–233.

23 Bihari, *1914. A nagy háború száz éve*, 305.

24 L. Juhász, *Amikor mindenki a háborús állapotok igája alatt roskadoz...*, 51.

The reception and resettlement of the Transylvanian students

As most of the refugees were women and children,²⁵ the Minister of Religion and Education gave instructions about the method of their settlement before the end of September 1916. According to a regulation (111663/1916) by the Minister of Religion and Education, dated 18th September, schools had to accommodate refugee students, despite the extremely high numbers involved. The poorest students were exempted from paying tuition fees. Moreover, students could attend schools even in the absence of the required documents (birth and school certificate) or the yearbooks issued annually by schools. It was enough for them to prove their earlier school grades by parental declaration.

Beside the task of caring for and accommodating the refugees, schools were also responsible for providing refugee students with the basic necessities for their schooling. Under the above-mentioned regulation, schools had to supply refugee students with books.²⁶ Additionally, *A gyermekek Érdekes Újságja* drew attention to the importance of collecting stationery and clothes, as well.²⁷ Clothing was especially necessary in autumn, so the Minister of Religion and Education ordered schools to collect newspapers (158889/1916) on 24th November. Based on previous experience, newspapers were suitable for the thermal insulation²⁸ of the light summer clothes²⁹ worn by refugee students when they had been forced to flee.³⁰

25 Szijj and Ravasz, *Magyarország az első világháborúban*, 158.

26 Kalocsai Főegyházmegyei Levéltár (hereafter: KFL), VI.1. Egyéb intézmények iratai, Kalocsai Érseki Főgimnázium. 163. 506/1916.

27 *Az osztálykassza*. Érdekes Újság. A gyermekek Érdekes Újságja. 1916. október 22. 35.

28 KFL VI.1. 213. 643/1916.

29 This was especially important for footwear, as many of the Transylvanian children did not wear either shoes or boots during the summer in peacetime. Buczkó, “*Szállást adtunk hűséges magyar véreinknek*”, 39–40.

30 Buczkó, “*Szállást adtunk hűséges magyar véreinknek*”, 39–40.

The impact of developments in the Transylvanian theatre

The second period of the war in Transylvania (18th–25th September) was the time when Austro–Hungarian reinforcements (the 1st, 3rd and 7th army) arrived at the front-line, while the 9th German army started a counterattack against the Romanian troops.³¹ Thanks to this,³² the Central Powers advanced on the Romanian front. The Romanian army was defeated in numerous battles including a decisive engagement near Nagyszeben (today’s Sibiu in Romania) from 26th–29th September, the battle of Persány (today’s Perşani in Romania) from 5th–6th October and the battle of Brassó (7th–9th October).³³ By the end of October, forty days after the Romanian troops had crossed the border, they had been expelled from the territory of Hungary.³⁴

After the troops of the Central Powers crossed the Romanian Kingdom’s border on 10th October, the issue of returning the refugees to their homes came to the fore. However, according to a decree issued by the Interior Minister’s (33000/1916) on 21st October, only some of the refugees were allowed to return home, as the eastern part of Transylvania was still declared an operational area.³⁵ Consequently, while the first larger group of refugees returned home already on 18th November, the second had to wait another five months.³⁶

According to the above-mentioned decree, refugees who were administrative workers and food producers, that is,³⁷ those who worked in agriculture or were the leaders and workers of factories and plantations, as well as independent craftsmen and tradesmen, along with members of the clergy, doctors and pharmacists were given priority when it came to gaining permission to return home. In contrast, the non-productive social groups such as the urban population, teachers and students, pensioners, the sick, the elderly and the incapacitated were the last who could return home.³⁸

31 Szijj and Ravasz, *Magyarország az első világháborúban*, 157.

32 Hajdu and Pollmann, *A régi Magyarország utolsó háborúja*, 226.

33 Szijj and Ravasz, *Magyarország az első világháborúban*, 157.

34 Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I.*, 107.

35 Csóti, *Az 1916. évi román támadás menekültügyi következményei*, 227.

36 Buczkó, “*Szállást adtunk hűséges magyar véreinknek*”, 123.

37 Csóti, *A vasút szerepe*, 35–36.

38 A magyar kir. belügyminiszter 1916. évi 33.000. eln. számú körrendelete valamennyi

Despite the official prohibition, a significant number of refugees returned home without official permission. Parents who returned home often took their school-age children with themselves.³⁹ In doing so, they risked their schoolchildren losing the validity of the ongoing school year (i.e. “missing a year”). To avoid this, they had to request that their previous schools reopen before the end of the autumn semester.

The example of the State Real School in Brassó

Due to its closeness to the Romanian border, Brassó became involved in the war already on the first day of the Romanian attack.

Within a few weeks, approximately 20 000 people had fled the city, which amounted to half of all the citizens of Brassó.⁴⁰ At the same time, the Romanian pastor reported that Brassó had survived the ravages of the war without serious damage, even though fierce street battles took place.⁴¹ The only exception was the railway station, which had been blown up before the arrival of the Romanians,⁴² after the last refugee train (packed with administrative officers) left the city on 28th August.⁴³ During the Romanian occupation, looting by soldiers was a significant problem,⁴⁴ so the Romanian city command announced a prohibition on it.⁴⁵

törvényhatóság első tisztviselőjéhez, az erdélyrészi menekültek visszatelepítéséről. In: *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1740–1744.*

39 *Kataklizma*, 69–70.

40 *Brassóba visszatér a normális élet.* Szeged és Vidéke. 1916. október 11. 4.

41 Erdélyi Református Egyházkerületi Levéltár, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Igazgatótanácsának Levéltára (EREL IgtanLvt), Menekülni kényszerültek jelentései (I. 63/1916.) III/76.

42 *A románok támadása.* Népszava. 1916. szeptember 1. 3.

43 Szádetzky-Kardoss, *Az oláhok betörése Erdélybe*, 44.

44 EREL IgtanLvt I. 63/1916. III/76.

45 *A románok menekülése Brassóból.* Az Est. 1916. október 17. 2.

Brassó was under Romanian occupation for five weeks⁴⁶ until it was liberated on 10th October.⁴⁷ Although some students returned home after the battle of Brassó, their school was not able to reopen⁴⁸ as the army had reserved some parts of the school buildings for use as a field hospital.⁴⁹ This caused difficulties, especially for those families who could not escape,⁵⁰ and for those who returned home in October.

In order to help the returnees, local (Calvinist, Unitarian and Jewish) priests and religious education teachers⁵¹ started to take classes even if they had no formal qualifications to teach the subjects. Besides these, a Calvinist assistant pastor also taught various subjects in the school, holding 24 lessons weekly. Descriptive geometry was taught in the sixth and seventh classes by an engineer. The only qualified teachers were two teachers⁵² from the Roman Catholic High School in Brassó.

In addition, due to the lack of a school building, the main task facing the school was to find classrooms and start the children's education in them. Two rooms and an office of the Calvinist congregation were used for this purpose. Thanks to the above-mentioned activity and the temporary teaching venue, teaching could be started in the first seven grades, for 122 students, at the beginning of January 1917,⁵³ with the aim of preparing the students for their examinations at the end of the year.

To obtain official approval for what had already been carried out, Ernő Tőkés (1883–?), the course leader, wrote a letter to the Minister of Religion and Education. However, a report of the Nagyszeben's school district director suggests that due to an adminis-

46 *Cím nélkül*. Pécsi Napló. 1916. október 11. 2.

47 Ujabb részletek Brassó visszafoglalásáról. *Szeged és Vidéke*. 1916. október 10. 3.

48 Szépréthy, *A Brassói Magy. Kir. Állami Főreáliskola harminckettedik évi értesítője*, 7–8.

49 The school building functioned as a military hospital until 1 September 1917. However, according to the school's headmaster, it was still reserved on 12 September 1918, because later it was the office of the 1st army's quartermaster. MNL OL K 500 1918-45. Középkiskolák épületének katonai igénybevétele. III. rész. 173858/1918.

50 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 67975/1917. Nagyszebeni Főigazgatói Jelentés a brassói Állami Főreáliskola tanévnyitójáról.

51 They were Ernő Tőkés Calvinist, Lajos Kovács Unitarian and Lajos Pap Israelite pastors.

52 Sándor Tersztyánszky was the teacher of mathematics and physics, while György Zsigmond taught history and geography.

53 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 44339/1917. A nagyszebeni főigazgató a brassói állami főreáliskola tanulóinak tanítása tárgyában.

trative mistake, the letter was delivered only a few weeks later.⁵⁴ Therefore, the school district director had to go to the town to look into the situation there. Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, he supported the operation of the course with 147 students⁵⁵ at the end of March 1917. It is likely that in taking his decision he was positively influenced by the fact that priests and Religious Education teachers asked for payment only for the Religious Education lessons, while holding the other lessons free of charge.⁵⁶

At the school district director’s suggestion – ‘*despite the extraordinary affairs and the passage of time*’ – the Minister ordered the continuation of this extraordinary way of education until June, when the entire teaching staff was supposed to return. After the headmaster and three teachers⁵⁷ returned to Brassó, the opening ceremony was held on 5th May. At the same time, the Roman Catholic High School allowed the students of the Real School to use its classrooms in the afternoons. The term finished on 14th July and the end-of-year examinations were organised for between 16th and 26th July.⁵⁸

The example of Brassó shows what a significant role the level of local autonomy played in the restarting of various areas of life, in this case in education. Religious studies teachers – especially Ernő Tőkés – who took a proactive role in the community significantly increased the chances of reopening the school. The initiative from the Catholic Church may be related to the fact that there was also a Catholic High School in Brassó. Although there were difficulties, it was possible to obtain the support of the state to achieve their goal thanks to their preliminary proactive actions.

54 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 67975/1917. Nagyszebeni Főigazgatói Jelentés a brassói Állami Főreáliskola tanévnyitójáról.

55 Only 69 were those who returned home as refugees, while the others had not been able to leave Brassó or its neighbourhood. K500, 1917-11-181. I. rész. 44339/1917. A nagyszebeni főigazgató a brassói állami főreáliskola tanulóinak tanítása tárgyában.

56 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 44339/1917. A nagyszebeni főigazgató a brassói állami főreáliskola tanulóinak tanítása tárgyában.

57 They were Béla Szépréthy, the headmaster, Árpád Berenkey, the mathematics and physics teacher, Károly Jahn, the chemistry and mineralogy teacher and Emil Unger, the teacher of German and French grammar and literature.

58 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 67975/1917. Nagyszebeni Főigazgatói Jelentés a brassói Állami Főreáliskola tanévnyitójáról.

The example of the State High School in Gyergyószentmiklós

Although Gyergyószentmiklós did not become a battlefield, almost 10 000 of its entire population (11 000) fled from the city during the Romanian advance.⁵⁹ Fortunately, the occupation had not caused any damage: the favourable situation of the city is indicated by the *Székely Napló* newspaper which reported that ‘*Gyergyószentmiklós probably suffered the least of the cities affected by enemy invasion.*’⁶⁰ The only problem was the looting of Romanian soldiers as their superior officers did not have any success trying to stop it.

Romanian troops were stationed in the city for only three weeks until it was liberated on 11th October.⁶¹ Although the administration of justice and the financial sector had already been reactivated at the beginning of 1917,⁶² the approximately five hundred refugees were only able to return home to Gyergyószentmiklós in May and June. The battles at the ridge of the Carpathians were still raging in the first part of 1917.⁶³

Students from the State High School in Gyergyószentmiklós who returned with their parents wrote that almost all the amenities were functioning in the town with the exception of the school.⁶⁴ The 60–70 students were confused about why it was impossible to reopen the school. They wrote ‘*it would be devastating if the students from Gyergyószentmiklós were the victims of the second siculicidium*’. (The students identified the Romanian war with the mass murder of the Székelys in 1764 –the so-called Massacre at Mádéfalva, today’s Siculeni in Romania.) Although the army had requisitioned the school building previously, the students asked for the reopening of their school as well as the return of the headmaster and a few teachers. To fulfil the request of students, the Minister ordered the headmaster and two teachers⁶⁵ to return home. However, Henrik

59 *Gyergyószentmiklós az oláh uralom alatt*. Magyarország. 1916. november 4. 6.

60 *A sértetlen kassza*. Székely Napló. 1916. október 22. 1.

61 *Gyergyó felszabadulása*. Székely Napló. 1916. október 21. 1.

62 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 28466/1917. A gyergyószentmiklói állami főgimnázium tanulóifjúsága az intézet megnyitását kéri.

63 Buczkó, „*Szállást adunk hűségesek, magyar véreinknek*”, 130.

64 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 28466/1917. A gyergyószentmiklói állami főgimnázium tanulóifjúsága az intézet megnyitását kéri.

65 Elek Farczády was a teacher of history and Latin grammar and literature, while György Kereszturi taught mathematics and physics.

Gruppenberg-Fehrentheil (1869–?) and Erik Farczády (1890–1974) remained at their temporary accommodation.⁶⁶

Fehrentheil’s personal character and approach to life came to play an unexpectedly important role in how the events unfolded in the town. According to a health certificate written by a doctor, he changed school four times between 1893 and 1911 (working at the Catholic High School in Brassó between 1893 and 1898, the Real State School in Sopron between 1898 and 1900, the State High School in Erzsébetváros (today’s Dumbrăveni in Romania) between 1900 and 1910, the State High School in Budapest between 1910 and 1911). Since the yearbooks did not detail his career during the aforementioned period, all that is certain about his actions is that he was disciplined several times. In 1914, when he was sentenced to a 1st degree disciplinary penalty in a disciplinary investigation for having committed multiple misdemeanours. The investigation also found that he had behaved tactlessly which had led to the possibility of disturbing the peace of the institute and of his teaching colleagues. In 1916 he carried out an illegal procedure without higher permission. He was sentenced to an 11th disciplinary penalty with a fine of 300 Korona.

In the light of this background, it is not surprising that Fehrentheil used various excuses to stay in Debrecen where he was temporarily quartered. At first, he claimed that he had to wait for authorization to leave his accommodation at the students at dormitory in Debrecen. Secondly, he highlighted the importance of his job there (he worked as a deputy of the Debrecen school district director). Finally, he mentioned that *‘due to the insecure situation in Gyergyószentmiklós, there is not any pedagogical need from the state (for him) to leave his temporary residence’*. When these arguments were not sufficient to convince the school district director of Kolozsvár (today’s Cluj Napoca in Romania), he referred to a medical certificate in which a doctor had recommended that he take a six-month-long holiday. Specifically – according to the archival document – he suffered from hearing problems in his left ear and his nervous system was exhausted because of the hardships he had suffered while fleeing from Transylvania. Due to his resistance to return home, along with the above-mentioned reasons, the school district director asked for his exemption and employment in an *‘easier office job’*.⁶⁷ Fehrentheil

66 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 28466/1917. A gyergyószentmiklósi állami főgimnázium tanulóifjúsága az intézet megnyitását kéri.

67 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 25017/1917. A kolozsvári tankerületi kir. főigazgató-

refused to return home, but at the same time he wanted to improve his negative image in the school's 1917–1918 yearbook. In this regard, the yearbook – edited by him – stated that *'although the headmaster visited the town twice in order to restart the education'*, due to the above-mentioned difficulties and *'the lack of teachers'* he *'could not implement his plan.'*⁶⁸

Considering Fehrentheil's attitude to the question, the school district director of Kolozsvár suggested an alternative solution to the Minister on the 20th of February 1917. On the one hand, he suggested that there was urgent need to send Farczády and one more person to Gyergyószentmiklós to carry out their pedagogical duties there. On the other hand, he proposed that the other teacher should be made the headmaster temporarily. As they had already created suitable conditions for education (in terms of lighting and heating) at the Roman Catholic clergy-house for the 41 students, the technical conditions had been met. The problem with this was that the school in Gyergyószentmiklós could only be reopened if there were at least two teachers (one of history and Latin grammar and literature, the other of Hungarian and German grammar and literature).⁶⁹

However, only one teacher returned to Gyergyószentmiklós since Farczády was needed⁷⁰ in the Real School of Szakolca (and its dormitory). As the school district director's attempts to have Fehrentheil and Farczády return to Gyergyószentmiklós were unsuccessful, he wrote disappointedly that *'these students are the victims of the war'*. According to a report he made on 17th February, because of the shortage of time and the need for students to do agricultural duties in the spring, there was no longer a realistic prospect that the school would reopen.⁷¹ Eventually, the school reopened for the next academic year on 21st October 1917.

In summary, even though the physical conditions (classrooms and heating possibilities) would have been adequate to reopen the State High School in Gyergyószentmiklós,

ság pótlólag felterjeszti Fehrentheil Henrik gyergyószentmiklói áll. főgimn. igazgató tisztiorvosi bizonyítványát, s ennek kapcsán jelentést tesz a visszatért tanulók tanításügyéről.

68 Fehrentheil, *A Gyergyószentmiklói M. Kir. Állami Főgimnázium tizedik évi értesítője*, 3–4.

69 MNL OL K500, 1917-11-181. I. rész. 26090/1917. A kolozsvári főigazgató jelentése a gyergyószentmiklói főgimnáziumi tanulók tanulása tárgyában.

70 MNL OL K500, 1917-11-181. I. rész. 28466/1917. A gyergyószentmiklói állami főgimnázium tanulóifjúsága az intézet megnyitását kéri.

71 MNL OL K500, 1917-11-181. I. rész. 25017/1917. A kolozsvári tankerületi kir. főigazgató-ság pótlólag felterjeszti Fehrentheil Henrik gyergyószentmiklói áll. főgimn. igazgató tisztiorvosi bizonyítványát, s ennek kapcsán jelentést tesz a visszatért tanulók tanításügyéről.

due to the lack of teachers this only happened with so much delay that the 1916–1917 schoolyear was invalid for Gyergyószentmiklós’s students.⁷² To identify the reasons for the considerably less fortunate outcome than in Brassó, one is that there were no schools managed by the Catholic Church in the town, which played an important role in the case of Brassó. Secondly, the low number of people who remained in Gyergyószentmiklós after the Romanian invasion meant that fewer students made the effort to assert their will.

Conclusions

Although daily life restarted in Transylvania after the mass resettlement, certain factors hampered the reactivation of education in some places. Due to the lack of a competent government in the evacuated areas, initiatives to reopen schools came from below.

The time that had passed since the beginning of the school year caused problems in both cases. Namely, students submitted their request with the difference of only one month in the Winter of 1916/1917. On the other hand, the army had occupied both school buildings, which meant that not only the school in Gyergyószentmiklós but also the school in Brassó had to find temporary venues for education. The difference between the two cases discussed here cannot be explained by the different war situation of the two cities as they were liberated one day apart. Consequently, returning home to Gyergyószentmiklós (in Hunyad County) and returning to Brassó (Brassó County) became possible at approximately the same time.⁷³

What, then, can serve as an explanation for lack of successful in reopening the school in Gyergyószentmiklós? With the help of the church and the city authorities this problem was solved successfully in Brassó. The recommencement of the school year was possible thanks to the active cooperation of the teachers and the Church, as well as the gradually recovering administration. In Gyergyószentmiklós the personal reactions, attitude and character of the headmaster and the teaching staff made this impossible. Presumably, Gyergyószentmiklós represents an extreme case where individual self-interest or fear caused additional difficulties beside the existing problems.

⁷² Fehrentheil, *A Gyergyószentmiklói M. Kir. Állami Főgimnázium tizedik évi értesítője*, 4–5.

⁷³ *Tilos területek a menekülteknek. Szeged és Vidéke*. 1917. május 3. 5.

Examining the restorative activity that characterized the Transylvanian school system in late 1916 and 1917 after the withdrawal of the Romanian troops, it is reasonable to assume that the local events in Gyergyószentmiklós were different from the general situation. In Déva (today's Deva in Romania) the schoolyear started on the 10th November,⁷⁴ although the majority of Hunyad county was a restricted area and could only be crossed with a special ID-card (it was the so-called internal operational area) according to a regulation (33000/1916) issued by the Interior Minister, dated 21st October, 1916. The same was true for the entire county of Szeben,⁷⁵ although the schoolyear had already been started on 27th November in Nagyszeben.⁷⁶ On the other hand, we can also find counterexamples: schools did not reopen until the autumn of 1917 in Petrozsény (today's Petroșani in Romania).⁷⁷

It is unclear why the headmaster and one of the teachers decided not to return. While in the case of the teacher this could even be explained by the physical distance, this was less likely in the case of Fehrentheil, who was temporarily settled in Debrecen, not especially far away. It is possible that they were afraid of war conditions, and they wanted to avoid risking their own and their family's lives. They might have predicted that Hungary and its allies would lose the war and that Romania would eventually prevail. Therefore, it is possible that they feared the requirements of the new power and no longer wished to return to an uncertain existence instead of a temporary station they considered safer from a geopolitical point of view. This scenario played out in 1919 so we may juxtapose their case with the fate of those social groups (foresters,⁷⁸ postmen⁷⁹ etc.) who were expelled or lost their positions because they refused to take the oath of loyalty to the new authorities. Their motivations, then may not have been purely

74 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 162705/1916. A nagyszebeni tanker főigazgatóság előterjesztése a tanker. tartozó három menekült középiskolai tandíjainak fizetése tárgyában.

75 A m. kir. belügyminiszter 1916. évi 33.100. eln. számú körrendelete valamennyi törvényhatóság első tisztviselőjéhez, az erdélyrészi menekültek visszatéréséhez szükséges igazoló okmányokról. *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára. Ötvenedik folyam. 1916.* Budapest, 1916. 1744–1748.

76 MNL OL K 500 1917-11-181. I. rész. 162705/1916. A nagyszebeni tanker főigazgatóság előterjesztése a tanker. tartozó három menekült középiskolai tandíjainak fizetése tárgyában.

77 Ablonczy, *Petrozsényi tanárok és az impériumváltás.*

78 Ásványi and Balogh, *Trianoni menekült erdész életsorsok*, 179–182.

79 Szeghy-Gayer, *Trianon és a kassai postások.*

‘patriotic’.⁸⁰ Knowing Fehrentheil’s background this would not surprise us. We do not know a great deal about his later life. He never returned to Transylvania. According to the school yearbook, he worked as a teacher in Felsőgalla in the 1925–1926 school-year.⁸¹ It seems that he finished his school teaching career soon afterwards, as he was recorded as a tobacconist in the telephone directory in 1929.⁸² His life took different turns than his colleague’s. Farczády continued to work as a teacher from 1919–1940 and rose to the rank of headmaster (1940–1950) in Marosvásárhely (today’s Târgu Mureş in Romania).⁸³

Whether they foresaw the fate of Transylvania or behaved in an unpatriotic manner, the example of Fehrentheil and Farczády could serve as models for the behaviour exhibited by refugees after 1918. This is especially true of teachers from other Transylvanian cities. At one extreme, in the industrial town of Petrozsény all but one teacher left due to the loss of job opportunities.⁸⁴ The situation was quite different in Déva and Szászváros (today’s Orăştie in Romania). Due to their local ties, most teachers agreed to stay on after the change of regime in Déva.⁸⁵ Almost all the teachers also stayed on in Szászváros, with only one exception. In addition to the changes caused by town coming under Romanian control, the opportunities offered by the ecclesiastical framework also played a role in this latter case.⁸⁶

Overall, the two cases presented here demonstrate that the time it took to reopen the two schools depended primarily on the teachers. The ‘go or stay’ mentality was able to significantly influence the situation of the schools that became part of another sovereign state after the First World War.

80 Regarding the example of Fiume it becomes clear that the loyalty assumed by the state towards the teachers was not impeccable not only after the war, but also during the war years. Due to the workload and difficulties, as well as the indifferent attitude of the state, many teachers chose the new authority instead of the Hungarian state. Ordasi, “*Hazaszeretetből jeles?*”, 69–74.

81 Kokas, *A Felsőgallai Polgári Fiú- és Leányiskola évkönyve*, 11.

82 *A Budapesti és Budapest környékén lévő M. Kir. távbeszélő-hálózatok előfizetőinek és nyilvános állomásainak betűrendes névsora*. Pallas Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság. Budapest, 1929. május. 12.

83 Kenyeres, *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, 190.

84 Ablonczy, *Petrozsényi tanárok és az impériumváltás*.

85 Ablonczy, *Impériumváltás a dévai várhegy alatt*.

86 Ablonczy, *A szászvárosi kollégium és az impériumváltás*.

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