

GREEK CATHOLIC VICARIATE OF TÂRGU MUREȘ (1940-1944)

The Vienna decision of 30 August 1940, with the new border, divided Transylvania into larger and smaller administrative units. The same happened with the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș, of which six dioceses (Gheorgheni, Odorhei, Râciu, Reghin, Târgu Mureș and Teaca), in whole or in part, remained in the ceded territory. The Odorhei diocese also took over the administration of the parishes of the Brașov diocese in Treiscaune county, and together with the other five dioceses formed a new vicariate, headed by the bishop of Târgu Mureș, Iosif Pop. The new vicariate was subordinated to the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Cluj-Gherla from 6 September 1940.

Since the early days after the Vienna Arbitration-Decree, there has been a fear among Romanians about their future. Some of the clergy took refuge from the very first days. After the installation of the military administration, hostile actions against the remaining Romanian elite intensified. Among them, the priests were mainly targeted, as the Romanians were not allowed to represent them in the Budapest legislature. Statistics confirmed that hostility against Romanians intensified in November. It was the time when the military administration was about to end its mandate. Most expulsions and expulsions of priests took place in Szeklerland, the dioceses of Gheorgheni, Odorhei and partly Târgu Mureș. Also in this area, attempts were made to subordinate the Greek Catholic Church to the Hungarian Greek Catholic diocese of Hajdúdorgh. These attempts were doomed to failure, as there was no support from the political class or the higher leadership of the Catholic Church in Rome.

The first actions directed against the two Romanian churches, starting in September 1940, concerned economic issues. The churches' agricultural land, acquired following the 1921 land reform, was the first to be targeted, as it was taken without a legal basis and was taken differently

from one administrative unit to another. The law which provided for the possibility of taking over these lands only appeared in February 1941. Along with the land taken, the autumn harvests were also confiscated in some parishes, and the Hungarian state's salary of the remaining Romanian clergy was delayed compared to the time of the Hungarian cults' salaries. The salary norms were different from previous years, which created financial difficulties for the clergy and efforts on the part of the leadership of the United Romanian Church. A private pension fund also had to be set up. The modest income of priests led to delays in paying contributions to this pension fund. The big problem for the Greek Catholic Church in this area has been the demolition of seven churches built in recent years, some still unfinished. The arguments for the demolition of these churches were the unsuitable image they created in the localities concerned and the use of funds from Hungarian communities to build them. Five of them were located in Ocand, Odorhei county, and were demolished or burned down in the first weeks after the military administration was established. The Greek-Catholic church in Ditrău was the only one to receive the necessary documentation for a demolition procedure that some considered unjustified. The last church to be demolished was in Pănet in June 1941. In order to create a homogeneous ethnic Hungarian image, regulations were issued to change the Romanian architecture. The parishes in this geographical area also lost parish houses and school buildings, which were occupied by gendarmes or border guard units.

One of the aims of the new administration was to create an ethnically homogeneous Hungarian image in the ceded territory. This desire was implemented mainly by reducing the number of Romanians. Some of them fled, some were expelled, but most were pressured or enticed to switch to one of the Hungarian denominations. This change of confession took place mainly in the same three dioceses in Szeklerland. The gendarmerie, notaries, mayors and in some cases the Hungarian priests of the respective parishes worked together to implement this aim. The main reasons for the changeover to the Hungarian denominations were the lack of previously expelled priests and threats from the authorities. The result was as desired. The parishes in the Szeklerland were left first without priests and then without believers, and in the Ocand net also without churches. Of the three dioceses of Szeklerland, Odorhei was the most affected, followed by Gheorgheni and Târgu Mureș.

Primary education was an instrument through which the next generations could be educated on the basis of Hungarian cultural and national values. To this end, regulations were issued to provide for the conduct of primary education. The first problem faced by the new administration was the shortage of teachers, and to make up for this shortage, retired teachers were hired and

transferred to the ceded territory, teachers from Hungary. The vast majority of the teachers were Hungarians, and some of them did not know Romanian at all. Romanian teachers who did not take refuge were not used in the teaching process, except for a very small percentage. The school year was scheduled to start one month late, but in some localities the delay was two months. Compulsory eight-grade education was introduced in Hungary, but in the ceded territory it could not be introduced from the 1940-1941 school year. With a very small number of Romanian teachers and Hungarian teachers who did not speak Romanian, the United Romanian Church took on the role of taking the necessary steps to establish denominational schools. The efforts were enormous and there were about 500 such applications throughout Northern Transylvania. In order to prevent the establishment of these denominational schools, none of the applications submitted to the Ministry received a response. At the same time as attempts were made to set up denominational schools, steps were taken to open Romanian-language departments. In this case there was some chance of success, but much less than necessary. The only time when Romanian was spoken exclusively in Romanian with Romanian pupils was during religious classes, which were the responsibility of the clergy. It was also the clergy who reported a decline in the quality of education since 1942.

The Greek-Catholic and Orthodox churches were the only institutions that tried to represent the Romanians remaining in the ceded territory. The many problems faced by the Romanians came first to the priest. Through the leaders of the two churches, the problems of the Transylvanian Romanians reached the representatives of the local and central administrations. However, promises from the government were not implemented by the local administrations. The latter decided the fate of the Romanians according to different criteria from one administrative unit to another.