

Iosif Siegescu, Commissioner for Romanian Affairs in Hungary

A Commission Reviewed Under the Magnifying Glass of Historiography and of Diplomatic and Ecclesiastical Documents

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APPROACHING THE activity or rather the role played by Iosif Siegescu (1873–1931) in the broader context of the efforts made by the Romanian elites (clergy and laypeople) in Hungary to set up a spiritual-cultural organization can be quite exciting. The bibliography, which is obviously rather scant (as the man is hardly a major historical personality), arouses our curiosity. A curiosity that can be sated, on the one hand, by the contemporaries of Iosif Siegescu (Octavian Goga, Iosif Popovici, Ilarie Chendi, or Octavian C. Tăslăuanu), the writings of the Romanian elites in Hungary at the turn of the 20th century (Maria Berényi, Teodor Misa-roş, Elena Csobai), and last but not least, by the dedicated current researchers of Transylvania (Remus Câmpeanu, Cornel Sigmirean, Gabriel Moisa).

For the exclusive purpose of reviewing the actions of Iosif Siegescu, we will highlight several defining aspects that stand out from each and every piece of information.

Who was in fact Iosif Siegescu? He was born in Secăşeni, today a township of Ticva-niu Mare, Caraş-Severin County, on 29 August 1873, and he died in Budapest on 12 November 1931. Maria Berényi also gives us the address where he used to live in Buda-pest: VII. Alpar u. 6.¹

He became interested in and interesting to the wider public (both during that time and, surprisingly, even today) due to the two offices he held, namely, lecturer at the Romanian Language Department at the University of Budapest starting with 1908,² and head of the Commissioner's Office for Romanian Affairs in Hungary after 1921.³ The role of the latter institution was to represent the interests of the Romanians in Hungary, more precisely, before the government of Budapest.⁴

On 15 May 1921, the Romanian diplomatic representative at the Foreign Mission in Budapest, Minister Traian Stârcea, informed Take Ionescu, the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, that the priest Ghenadie Bogoevici had also been nominated for the

position of commissioner. Stârcea asked Take Ionescu for his opinion on this matter, as to whether Bogoevici should accept this office or not.⁵ The diplomats in Budapest considered that Siegescu was far more suited for such office. However, the Hungarian archives indicate that on 4 August 1927 Iosif Siegescu was released from his position as commissioner.⁶

At the same time, Iosif Siegescu was a Greek Catholic priest. Moreover, in 1915 he was appointed as a papal legate by Pope Benedict XV himself. Therefore, he was a great defender of the interests of the union, appointed as the de facto head of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary.

The historiography describes his managerial activity at the helm of the two important institutions as tumultuous rather than peaceful. Father Siegescu, as he was called, aroused the indignation of his contemporaries. Iosif Popovici recalls that Siegescu “became a Romanian language professor at the University of Budapest. The reason, however, was explained by the minister of denominations: ‘I need a reliable politician. And what if Siegescu became worthy of the full confidence of the beak-nosed earl.’”⁷ Ilarie Chendi openly accused him of being “sly as a fox, completely spineless.”⁸ Octavian C. Tâslăuanu described his scientific competence:

*Then I met the Romanian language and literature professors who were teaching as the University of Budapest, the head of the department, Ioan Ciocan, and the lecturer Iosif Siegescu. They were both illiterate. Actually, they were pure politicians brought in to act as professors, although they definitely lack the necessary training and instruction.*⁹

And Octavian Goga found in Siegescu the entire range of obsequiousness, mediocrity, and so on.¹⁰

After the avalanche of harsh criticism delivered by the aforementioned contemporaries, Siegescu was later on depicted by the Hungarian researchers as an impostor. Maria Berényi unequivocally called him “the most controversial teacher.”¹¹ Moreover, she accuses him of having deliberately blocked the requests of the Romanian leaders in Hungary on the matter of receiving of didactic materials, teachers and other things from Romania. Moreover, the lack of priests and teachers is also attributed to Siegescu, as Maria Berényi admits that “many young Romanians would have wanted to continue their studies in theology in Arad, and then return as priests and teachers. But unfortunately, everything was forbidden.”¹²

Elena Csobai mentions his name several times, using relevant documents taken from the archives. For example, the Parish Office in Magyarcsanak received an official letter signed by Iosif Siegescu announcing that István Bethlen “has finally agreed to appoint me as the Romanian commissioner in order to act as your guardian father, to help and assist you in your time of need and misfortune.”¹³ She also makes reference to the power of attorney given by the eparchial centers of Arad and Oradea (Nagyvárad, Großwardein) in favour of Bogoevici but, in terms of the collaboration between Siegescu and Bogoevici, Elena Csobai admits only that “a sort of collaboration, for want of a better word, existed between the two leaders;¹⁴ “both leaders attempted to represent the Romanians’ interests in Hungary”;¹⁵ “they tried to solve a few minor problems,” but, basi-

cally, the problems of the Romanians falling within the competence/jurisdiction of the commissioner were “only apparently solved.”¹⁶

As it is generally known, Siegescu merely limited himself to indicate that he could do nothing, as Elena Csobai highlights when discussing the appointment of teachers Ágoston Papp and Ilona Papp to township of Magyarcsanád. The Romanians, deeply dissatisfied with these appointments, filed numerous complaints with Commissioner Siegescu, who emphatically replied that “they were both competent and that they should stay rather than let the students without any teachers.”¹⁷

Elena Csobai, while evoking the Romanian community from Magyarcsanád during the interwar period, mentions that after the withdrawal of the Romanian army, many teachers and priests left for Romania. In this context, Iosif Siegescu—the voice of the government in the Romanian communities—used to plead for the return of young people to their villages (unless they had committed major crimes). No such message was ever addressed to the teachers or priests who had gone to Romania.¹⁸

On the matter of the ecclesiastic organization of the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary, Elena Csobai presents in detail the (non-) involvement of Iosif Siegescu. On the one hand, the governmental commissioner asked the parish offices to draw up urgent reports on statistical data, events organized in the parish, etc. On the other hand, whenever the priests asked for something, Elena Csobai indicates that “their requests were always delayed, or they were only apparently solved.”¹⁹ This is exactly what had happened since the very first and complete official meeting of the priesthood. We are talking about the meeting that took place on 11 October 1927 in Békéscsaba. The minutes show that the decision to organize the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary into an archpriesthood was filed with the authorities but the “approval has never come and the priests were highly concerned.”²⁰ Specifically, the most worried was Simion Cornea, who found, on 29 March 1928 (about half a year after the meeting), that “no answer has been given until now.”²¹ The reply never came.

Elena Csobai also presents the petition prepared by Simion Cornea in 1928 and addressed to the bishops of Arad and Oradea. The bishops were informed that, until 1927, on several occasions, the Hungarian priests had asked for Iosif Siegescu’s help, to no avail.²²

Father Teodor Misaroş structured his narrative account in a clearly diplomatic form and limited himself to the mention that “their activity [of Iosif Siegescu and Ghenadie Bogoevici] leaved a lot to be desired, stirring up feelings of alienation among the few priests and the masses of the faithful.”²³

Cornel Sigmirean and Gabriel Moisa only list Siegescu among those who used to teach at the Romanian Philology Department of the University of Budapest,²⁴ with brief references to his appointment as the head of the Commissioner’s Office.²⁵

Remus Câmpeanu, adopting the voluble and expansive attitude which was rather characteristic for the historical school of Cluj, proposes a new perspective, in a dramatic/lyrical/humorous formula. His text, surprisingly well received by the readers, depicts a character who served both the Church, which he was supposed to serve with devotion (Greek Catholic), but first of all, the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary.²⁶ Iosif Siegescu is considered to be an opportunist. Basically, he authored a series of modest works,

mostly written in Hungarian, and, in relation to his anti-Romanian actions, he became the preferred choice for the rulers in Budapest. In this context, which is not at all coincidental, Iosif Siegescu made a stop at the Romanian language department of the University of Budapest.²⁷ The chair was offered to him as a reward “for fidelity and political services.” A reward for his support of the policy concerning the other ethnicities within the territories controlled by the Hungarian authorities.²⁸

Following his inferred career path, he joined the Hungarian National Labor Party (Nemzeti Munkapárt) and immediately after the beginning of the First World War, he managed to impress the rulers with his poetic creations (*Prayer for Soldiers*) that sought to cheer up and encourage the imperial soldiers.²⁹

The study “A magyarországi románok Szent Uniója” authored by Iosif Siegescu has, in Remus Câmpeanu’s opinion, some obvious shortcomings. This is because Siegescu considers that “without the confessional transfer from the beginning of the eighteenth century, those who are tolerated would no longer exist today as a distinct people or, in the best case scenario, they would all be Reformed.”³⁰ Thus, the positive elements of the Romanian society of Transylvania are unquestionably rooted in the union with Rome. Therefore, Câmpeanu identifies in the writings signed by Siegescu the essential idea that the religious union was nothing but “a life buoy thrown by the House of Habsburg to the Romanian people, at a very difficult time.”³¹

In addition to the religious aspects, Remus Câmpeanu identifies some flattering statements dedicated to the imperial power. Siegescu painted the portrait of a phantasmagorical Viennese Court, fair to the people that made up the empire, consisting of individuals “who sincerely want to protect them, and Leopold I acquires the attributes of a sweet-tempered emperor, astonished by the sad fate of the Romanian nation and its religion.”³²

Coming back to the aims suggested by the heading, after an extensive search conducted in the Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Gyula, we finally found a series of documents signed by Iosif Siegescu. We hope that, once published, they may raise the interest of other researchers willing to complete the image of the Romanian society of those times. Alongside Remus Câmpeanu, who has carefully analyzed the theological works of Siegescu, or other researchers who have disseminated fewer pieces of factual information,³³ all others may join the club of “general ideas.” By carefully going through all papers mentioned above, the reader may be able to infer the image of a malefic character. This is it, with no other mitigating circumstances. Therefore, a natural question arises... what did Iosif Siegescu actually do during the 6 years during which he ran the Commissioner’s Office? The answer to this question is certainly provided by the archive documents.

THE DOCUMENTS made available by the Archive of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Gyula depict an institution (the Commissioner’s Office for Romanian Affairs in Hungary) that controlled even the smallest details related to the spiritual, cultural and educational organization of the Romanian communities in interwar Hungary. Without making any references to other similar institutions that operated during different historical periods, the Commissioner’s Office was undoubtedly an incisive establishment.

The Greek Catholic priest Iosif Siegescu was probably the perfect man to run this institution designed to control a population which was largely Orthodox. However, not so perfect were the hierarchs (on whom the canon depended) who provided their consent and support in coordinating an institution that unfortunately acted against the interests of both the Romanian Church and the Romanian people.

It is clearly understood that, given those circumstances and having the necessary political and ecclesiastical approvals, Iosif Siegescu, who somewhat tended to fawn on the officials, began his career as a dignitary, a career that was inextricably linked to the strict enforcement of all orders delivered by the Ministry of Religion and Public Education in Budapest.

In relation to the patrimonial matter, Commissioner Iosif Siegescu knew and controlled every penny that entered or exited the Romanian Orthodox parish offices in Hungary. The wills of priests or parishioners became valid and enforceable only after the commissioner had endorsed them. In this regard we have several cases that stand out.

Under letter no. 363 of 12 December 1924, Father Toma Ungurean from Gyula I was requested by Iosif Siegescu to send a summary of the will of the late priest Petru Biberia. The summary was to contain only the section related to the donation of the late priest had made to the church of Gyula, a small Romanian town in Hungary.³⁴ Petru Biberia, who acted as a priest in Gyula II, had died in 1922.³⁵

Under the decree no. 41 dated 18 February 1925, the same priest, Toma Ungurean, was imperatively told that, “in order to make and deliver a final and enforceable decision in the case of the widow of Alexandru Ardelean, you are hereby requested to send us the will. Prior to delivering a final decision, we must ask for the opinion of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education.”³⁶

One month later, the parish of Gyula I could breathe a sigh of relief as it received the letter no. 76 dated 18 March 1925, which, among other things, stated: “You are hereby informed that the proposal put forth by the Honorable Committee and the parish council regarding the will of Alexandru Ardelean has been duly approved.”³⁷

On the matter of leasing the church land, the Honorable Parish Committee of Gyula was however deprived of power and authority. Father Ungurean was warned: “You are hereby urgently authorized to order the church representative, Florian Buiu, to lease the land according to the applicable regulation.”³⁸

Consequently, Toma Ungurean urgently sent the file with all potential church land tenants to Commissioner Iosif Siegescu. After a comprehensive analysis, the commissioner communicated that “the lease agreement of the church property entered into with Mihai Cserép is hereby endorsed and approved.”³⁹

This financial control may also be considered from the perspective of the alleged financial support offered by the Hungarian authorities to the Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary, which, in fact, did not happen. This truth is outlined by Simeon Cornea in one of his texts:

I saw that the memorandum signed “in support of the ethnic groups” made reference to the amount of 544,000 pengő, a sum from which we, the Romanian Orthodox Church set up in 1920, received not even a penny. There was nobody to claim and ask for money for and on behalf of us, so we did not get any. We know a case: in Bătania there are 16 Greek Catholic

families, who, through the intervention of Mr. Siegescu, are benefiting even today for a governmental subsidy, which is enough to support a chapel and a church singer, and which allowed them to buy a piece of land inside the built-up area and to build a parish house.⁴⁰

Two elements emerge from the account provided by Simeon Cornea. On the one hand, the fact that the priests did not see in Iosif Siegescu the man capable to ask for money from the government on behalf of the Orthodox Romanians, although he used to send them weekly letters to which the parish had to respond forthwith. On the other hand, the fact that Greek Catholicism was generously funded, despite the fact that a large number of Romanian Orthodox believers also lived in Hungary.

Controlling and managing the assets of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary was insufficient for Iosif Siegescu. Based on the information provided to him, Siegescu took all necessary steps to look over the fence and get his hands on the movable and immovable assets located in Romania. Under the decree no. 170 of 22 July 1926, he asked the parish priest Toma Ungurean to send an official report in this regard:

Since it is my intention to solve the issues related to the assets of both the Hungarian citizens and parishes, I hereby ask the parish to provide me with an urgent report on personal and church deposits that were made on the Romanian territory. If such deposits do exist, I request a report on the measures taken for their free disposal and the result that has been obtained.⁴¹

However, in this context of financial transparency, Iosif Siegescu was puzzled by the information that the plot of land assigned to the teacher of Gyula I in 1926 had been increased from 16 to 25 jugera. The dilemma that baffled Iosif Siegescu's chancellery was that no one knew where the land was coming from. Therefore, Father Ungurean was requested to provide coherent explanations.⁴²

Last but not least, unlike the Greek Catholics who benefited from financial support, as Simeon Cornea acknowledges, the Orthodox priests were bound to pay, as usual, all their retirement contributions to the minister's fund (although almost all died in office and did not benefit from such contributions).⁴³

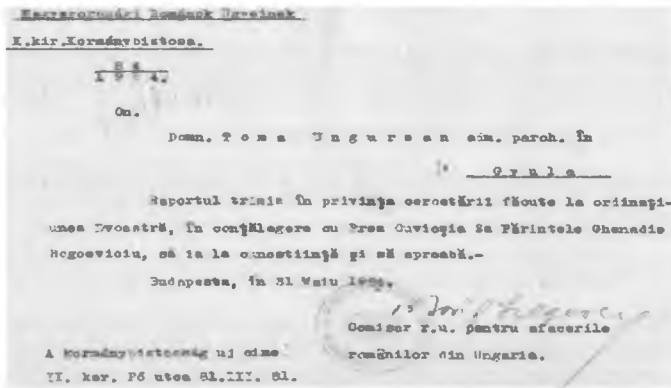
The so-called decision-making bodies operating at the parish level were supervised by Siegescu by means of the letters and decrees he used to send. Where the letters had no results, the solution was the police intervention in the church.

A special case is in fact the conflict between the parish committee and the church representatives in Gyula II. After the death of Father Petru Biberia in 1922, the parish of Gyula II remained vacant until 1927, when Father Petru Mândruțau was appointed.⁴⁴ Therefore, from 1922 to 1927, the parish had no priest. In this context, in the absence of a leader (priest), someone complained to Siegescu, expressing a series of grievances in relation to the church. On 6 February 1924, Siegescu called up Father Toma Ungurean from Gyula I to assign him the following tasks:

For a while now, the church of Gyula has been in pain, with disagreements between the members of the committee and the Epitropy, and such sad circumstances do much damage to the love and wellbeing of all the people in this community. In order to put an end to this

*ugly and condemnable crisis, upon the proposal of Fr. Ghenadie Bogoevici, you are hereby authorized to personally go there and conduct a thorough investigation.*⁴⁵

Consequently, Toma Ungurean was formally assigned to restore order and discipline in the town of Gyula II, upon Bogoevici's proposal, as Siegescu acknowledged. It seems that Father Ungurean failed to solve the problems in the neighboring parish, because the disagreements continued for more than a year, fuelling the discontent of the Central Committee run by Siegescu.



SOURCE: Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Hungary; coll. Gyula I, 1924, no. 84/31 May 1924.

The same methodology may be found in another letter. Upon the proposal of priests Vasile Beleş and Ghenadie Bogoevici, the police was formally authorized to restore order and discipline where the church had failed. Obviously, the assistance of the police was institutionally requested by... Siegescu. This time, Father Vasile Beleş (the titular of the parish of Kétegyháza) was empowered by Siegescu to attempt to settle the matter:

*In a last attempt to establish constitutional peace, you are hereby required, on the second day of Easter, to personally travel to Gyula and summon the synod as scheduled. . . . I have arranged with the competent bodies who agree that you may ask for and benefit from the support of the police in respect to your attempt to restore peace and order. As some people would try to disrupt the normal course of the synod, you are hereby empowered to use force and remove those who do not obey the synod.*⁴⁶

The so-called “autonomy that was provided for the community by law” was, of course, regulated and supervised by Siegescu. The file of grievances in Gyula II ends with letter no. 216 of 26 June 1925, by means of which Iosif Siegescu informed the priest Toma Ungurean that “the decision that was brought to the attention of the committee of Gyula, a small Romanian town, is hereby legally approved.”⁴⁷

Even the parishes with priests were subject to thorough controls and inspections. Each and every meeting (with the proposed agenda) had to be announced to the commissioner, who had to give his approval for that meeting to be effectively held. Otherwise, the meeting was cancelled. Here are several samples from Gyula I (the letters were addressed to the parish priest Toma Ungurean):

*The proposal submitted under No. 25/926 of February 1926 is hereby acknowledged and approved, and therefore we hereby approve that the synod should be called on the 2nd day of February 1926 . . .*⁴⁸

*We hereby inform you that, under the proposal submitted by priest Bogoeviciu Ghenadie, we hereby approve the elections made by the parish council during the meeting organized on 6 February 1927.*⁴⁹

*Please be informed you that we have taken note of the council scheduled on April 3 and its proposed agenda.*⁵⁰

The Romanian Orthodox confessional school in interwar Hungary was also supervised by Iosif Siegescu.

Under letter no. 147 of 12 June 1924, priest Toma Ungurean from Gyula I was allowed by the commissioner and by Bogoevici to teach religion within this parish.⁵¹

The endorsement of the method used to elect the parish teacher came two months later. The final approval of the Commissioner's Office was required after the actual and statutory election. Thus, this endorsement of Commissioner Iosif Siegescu was the decisive piece in the file: "With regards to the parish of Gyula, you are hereby and legally bound to call on and set the election of a teacher for 7 September, and to send the election file for further examination."⁵²

The election of the teacher, scheduled for 7 September 1924 was not very successful, because on 8 February 1925 Toma Ungurean was again requested by Iosif Siegescu to call on a meeting to elect a teacher.⁵³

Meanwhile, Father Toma Ungurean did not have much time to rest because he had to prepare himself for a thorough inspection conducted by Commissioner Iosif Siegescu:

*Please be informed that on the 20th day of this month I plan to personally come to the city of Békéscsaba. Please find below the official schedule of the activities I am planning to carry out: 1. Arrival in Békéscsaba on the 20th day of the month (Saturday evening between 19 and 22 p.m.); 2. I will be staying at the Békéscsaba Agricultural School; 3. On Sunday, the 21st, I will travel, by car, from Békéscsaba to Gyula, where I intend to visit both parishes; 4. At noon or in the evening I plan to return to Békéscsaba; 5. On Monday I will travel to Békéscsaba and in the evening I will travel back to Budapest. During my stay there I will address the problems of the communities so that these aspects be later on reported to the Minister of Public Education and Religion.*⁵⁴

The parish of Gyula I was also dealing with major problems related to the parish library. The grievances recorded by Iosif Siegescu, in writing, made references to these shortcomings:

As a consequence of book donations you have repeatedly gained possession of certain literary works that, according to Ministerial Order no. 1054/1925, are not listed as books allowed in the elementary school libraries. Given the fact that certain books that should not be held in the elementary school libraries are listed among these books, I hereby request that no copies of such books be taken over by the elementary school libraries or be introduced into libraries before they are legally approved by the school inspector.⁵⁵

The appointment of teachers in the two parishes, Gyula I and II, after 1920, had become a delicate problem. Whereas in Gyula I this office was assigned to Gheorghe Botteu, from 1923 to 1926,⁵⁶ for Gyula II, the historiography makes no mention in respect to any confessional teacher during the interwar era.⁵⁷

In August 1926 Gheorghe Botteu left his position as teacher in Gyula. Iosif Siegescu knew of that, so he made the necessary arrangements to organize a competitive selection: “We hereby approve the organization of a synod on August 29 in order to appoint a teacher.”⁵⁸

Quite fascinating is the insistent concern of Iosif Siegescu to find a teacher for Gyula I in 1926. As the diplomas awarded to the young graduates of Arad were not recognized by the state, finding a Romanian confessional teacher was an impossible mission. However, in keeping with the law, he approved that the position be occupied by the parish priest: “We hereby inform you that I have approved the advertisement of the teacher vacancy in the following issue of the local newspaper *Néptanítók Lapja*. Until the end of the contest, I approve that this vacancy be filled by Ungurean Tamás.”⁵⁹

The lack of potential candidates, eligible and willing to fill the teacher vacancy, was a major concern. This was often made worse by inefficient actions and measures. The law clearly stated that the contest must be a statutory contest. “Decision No. 73 made by the Committee during the meeting held on 8 September 1926 is hereby approved. We managed to cancel the contest that has been advertised. The election must be made according to the applicable statutes.”⁶⁰

Therefore, Father Toma Ungurean acted as an official teacher in Gyula I from August to October 1926. Apparently, that summer period came with fewer educational and administrative problems. Surprisingly, from the letters below, we find that the rebellious priest Toma Ungurean took the luxury of not responding, within one month, to the requests of Commissioner Iosif Siegescu:

I hereby request the parish to ask for an official report prepared by the teacher in relation to the implementation of the academic curriculum in force for the school year 1926–1927.⁶¹

I ask the parish to convey to us, as soon as possible, the official answer regarding regulation number 232/926 of 10 September, a regulation that incorporates the directives delivered by

*His Excellency, the Minister of Culture and Religion concerning the implementation of the academic curriculum that was published last year.*⁶²

Father Toma Ungurean left the office of school teacher on 10 October, and the commissioner consented to the transfer of teacher Maria Purjea from Battonya to Gyula I.⁶³

Changing the staff at the confessional school in Gyula I in the autumn of 1926 did not put an end to the problems. Paying attention to details, Iosif Siegescu noted that Maria Purjea had managed to get 25 jugera of land offered by the parish of Gyula I, as compared to the salary package of the former teacher, who had received only 16 jugera. The salary increase of more than 50% puzzled the commissioner, as Siegescu had no knowledge about that land. The issue has been discussed above in the “patrimonial issues” section.

As the historiography acknowledges, the (dis)organization of the church was one of the commissioner’s priorities. Institutionally, Simion Cornea repeatedly received the refusal regarding the organization of the institution run by Iosif Siegescu. The reason for this refusal had to do with the fact that setting up a deanship would not have led to the elimination of the problems faced by the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary: “Your report, namely your opinion no. 152 regarding the church organization with which the commissioner is dealing, is welcome, but it is not possible to settle all church and school related problems by simply setting up a deanship.”⁶⁴

For information purposes only, we also make a brief reference to Siegescu’s deceptive words addressed to Virgil Emandity, who requested, in 1922, the commissioner’s opinion on attending the theological courses in Arad, so that he could subsequently apply for a position as priest in Hungary. Iosif Siegescu cautiously suggested that “he will be able to pursue his intention to become a priest only if he graduates with outstanding results.”⁶⁵ Eventually, Virgil Emandity continued his studies, attending the school of law and becoming a lawyer.⁶⁶

The temporary substitutions in parishes were also endorsed by Iosif Siegescu. For example, in 1920 Father Ștefan Munteanu, a theology teacher in Oradea, left for Romania, and until the appointment of Toma Ungurean in 1923 the parish was temporarily served by Petru Biberea. Petru Biberea died in 1922, and Siegescu considered it appropriate to appoint Bogoevici as a substitute priest for Gyula I, although Bogoevici was a parish priest in Budapest and therefore, he was not eligible due to the distance between the two parishes.⁶⁷

THE EPISTOLARY exchanges between the commissioner for Romanian affairs in Hungary and the parishes in interwar Hungary was naturally peppered with patriotic overtones. The anniversaries and commemorations of various Hungarian or imperial personalities were properly arranged and planned by Iosif Siegescu in the Romanian parishes in Hungary, in 1926. The attendance to such events was mandatory. One of the glorious figures to be celebrated was the future president of the Hungarian Revisionist League (a League founded on 11 August 1927), the writer Ferenc Herczeg. This is what Siegescu conveyed to the Romanian schools in Hungary:

*Ferenc Herczeg, the pride and the jewel of our literature, celebrates 40 years of literary activity this year. On this occasion a National Committee was set up aiming to express, in accordance with the devout personality of the poet, our infinite gratitude and the appreciation of the nation towards him. One of the ways in which we may and can express our gratitude and appreciation is to celebrate this anniversary in schools. As this celebration is very suitable for strengthening our patriotic thinking and feelings, to educate the youth to respect the intellectuals of the nation and to love reading, I therefore request that this event be duly planned and organized. The anniversary will take place during the school year, and the program will be set according to the local conditions and the intellectual level of the students. In any case, the program will include: the prayer "The Symbol of Faith" (the Creed), the national anthem and the poem Szózat, as their tone corresponds to our will to preserve the national identity, major features of Ferenc Herczeg's works. The program will also include: a brief characterization of the life and works of Ferenc Herczeg, presented by a teacher, and the reading or presentation of a poem authored by the poet (for the elementary schools, for example a story, and for the middle schools, the script entitled *A bujdosók*, or another screenplay of your choosing, or a novel, etc.)*

The Ode about Ferenc Herczeg, which will be available on the date of the event, and corresponding songs, songs of the lads, the Rákóczi March, Lavotta's Love, Hubay: Scenes from Csárda, Brahms: Hungarian Dances, etc.

The detailed description of the program falls within the attributions of the teaching staff. It is important that the anniversary be a solemn, educational and productive event. I request that you take the necessary measures to implement this Decree.⁶⁸

During the same year, 1926, the Romanian Orthodox Church, together with the confessional school, was involved in the commemoration of Francis Rákóczi II. The Hungarian leader celebrated a quarter of millennium since his birth, in 1926.⁶⁹

The anniversary program of the two Hungarian leaders, Ferenc Herczeg and Francis Rákóczi II, contained several identical elements, such as the *Szózat* poem by Mihály Vörösmarty. Together with the official national anthem of Hungary, *Himnusz* by Ferenc Kölcsey, *Szózat* is in fact the second national anthem.

The patriotic elements combined with memories of the past. Emperor Francis Joseph I, the father of the Austro-Hungarian dualism, had died on 21 November 1916, so ten years later it was imperative to commemorate the monarch's contribution to the consolidation of the Hungarian element in Eastern Europe.⁷⁰

From a statistical perspective, from the beginning of 1924 until the end of 1926 (approximately 3 calendar years), Toma Ungurean, the priest of Gyula, had to answer to and put into practice a number of 35 letters issued by the Commissioner's Office. Obviously, during the period in question there were more letters than those mentioned by us (we made reference only to those we have found in the archives), but this figure gives us the image of an institution interested in implementing the Hungarian policies.

Based on the dozens of documents quoted above and drawn up by the commissioner for Romanian Affairs in Hungary we must admit and acknowledge a historical truth. The title given to the institution (subordinated to the Government in Budapest)

is—undoubtedly—a terminological masquerade, a pure hoax. Why? Because this institution only sought to dismantle the Romanian Orthodox parishes and to assimilate the Romanian groups into the larger Hungarian communities.

Unfortunately, Iosif Siegescu, a Romanian national from Banat, in exchange for a few shiny coppers managed to earn a place in the clerical (and secular) historiography alongside other similar traitors. His short diplomatic activity served the foreign interests instead of serving his people.



Notes

1. Maria Berényi, *Cultură românească la Budapesta în secolul al XIX-lea* (Gyula: n.p., 2000), 285.
2. *Ibid.*, 86.
3. Maria Berényi, “Școala din Micherechi,” in *Micherechi: Pagini istorico-culturale*, edited by Maria Berényi (Gyula: n.p., 2000), 71.
4. Teodor Misaroș, *Din istoria comunităților bisericești ortodoxe române din Ungaria*, 2nd rev. edition (Gyula: n.p., 2002), 236.
5. Archives of the Ministry of Romanian Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, coll. Problema 15—Școli și biserici românești din străinătate (1877–1949), file Situația Bisericii Ortodoxe din Ungaria, 1921–1942, fol. 169.
6. <https://www.elevetar.hu/digitalis-tartalom?source=preservica&ref=preservica::805e0d99-fca0-45ca-8e63-a65951a46552>.
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Abstract

Iosif Siegescu, Commissioner for Romanian Affairs in Hungary: A Commission Reviewed Under the Magnifying Glass of Historiography and of Diplomatic and Ecclesiastical Documents

From 1921 to 1927, Iosif Siegescu (1873–1931) led the Commissioner’s Office for Romanian Affairs in Hungary. This institution was subordinated to the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education in Budapest. Although the historiography accurately depicts him as a renegade of Romanian culture and spirituality, the actions based on which Siegescu was given this ominous office are largely absent from the literature. This study brings into the scientific circuit dozens of addresses that complement the bibliography.

Keywords

Iosif Siegescu, the Commissioner’s Office, Romanian Orthodox Church, Hungary, Budapest