

A powerful written testimony of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, this volume contains their stories, in their words, and it is an amazing source of inspiration, a book dedicated to their valuable legacy.



MIHAELA GLIGOR

STEFANO BOTTONI

**Moștenirea lui Stalin în România:
Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară
1952–1960**

(Stalin's legacy in Romania: The Hungarian Autonomous Region 1952–1960)

Translated from English by MUGUR BUTUZA
Bucharest: Humanitas, 2021

THE SUBJECT of the Hungarian autonomous region in Romania, which lasted from 1952 until 1968, has been insufficiently addressed within the national and transnational historiography of the past three decades, perhaps because it is a sensitive topic in the history of the Romanians, of the relations between the Romanian and Hungarian communities in Transylvania, or of the relations between Bucharest and Budapest.

Although several studies have been published about the Soviet experiment which granted territorial autonomy to the Hungarians in southeastern Transylvania, comprehensive approaches to this particularly complex issue have not been undertaken until quite recently, when two historians chose to examine the history of the Hungarian Autonomous Region in their book-length studies. They are Claudia Tișe, who has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Oradea, and Stefano Bottoni, an Italian historian and university professor.

In her work entitled *Administrație și politică în Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară (1952–1968)* (Administration and politics in the Hungarian Autonomous Region, 1952–1968), published in 2014, Claudia Tișe engages with this topic mainly from the perspective of interethnic relations in the Hungarian Autonomous Region. The author explores how Romanian-Hungarian diplomatic relations evolved in the context of this autonomous region, which is described by Tișe as a “Soviet-style political experiment.” By contrast, the volume authored by Stefano Bottoni analyzes in greater depth the internal life of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. However, it focuses solely on the timespan from its founding until 1960, without covering the period 1960–1968, coeval with the existence of the Hungarian Autonomous Mureș Region.

The two historians also analyze the concepts of territorial and cultural autonomy, as they were understood and applied by the Romanian communist regime to the Hungarians in Szeklerland. Stefano Bottoni believes that in the 1950s the autonomy of this region was limited, having been designed according to the Bolshevik pattern, with a view to ensuring the political integration of the Hungarians from the Hungarian Autonomous Region. Claudia Tișe concludes that the Hungarians in the Szekler region benefited only from extended cultural autonomy, but remained under the control of the central authorities. Tișe states that their territorial autonomy was not a real one, since it was regarded by the authorities in Bucharest as a solution to the national problem in Romania.

While Claudia Tișe's contribution to the advancement of knowledge on this topic is important and indisputable, Stefano

Bottoni has the merit of having conducted an extensive and multifaceted monographic research on the Hungarian Autonomous Region (1952–1960). Bottoni's volume saw the light of print in 2018, with Lexington Books, and was subsequently published in Romanian in 2021.

Using primary sources of documentation (found in the National Archives of Romania, Hungary and Great Britain), publications from the era, but also oral history collections, the author reconstructs, in detail, the existence of the only autonomous ethnic region in the history of Romania. Exploring through an objective critical lens the reasons for the establishment of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, Bottoni concludes that this territorial entity was a product of the Stalinist idea of autonomy.

Bottoni's work is structured into six chapters, which comprise the essential moments in the history of this administrative entity and capture different aspects of the political, economic, social and cultural life of the autonomous Hungarian community in Romania. The author offers a complex overview of the eight years during which the Hungarian Autonomous Region existed, focusing largely on the Hungarian ethnicity and less on the minority Romanian community, which amounted to only 20% of the region's total population.

Before embarking on a detailed presentation of the establishment of the autonomous region of the Hungarians in Szeklerland, the author discusses, in the first chapter of his work, the rather complicated realities of Romania's history in the first half of the twentieth century. The Szekler issue, described by Bottoni as "complicated and very tumultuous," had been a perpetual source of tension between Ro-

mania and Hungary. The author identifies two strategies employed by the Romanian communist regime to solve the national problem in Transylvania: the first relied on a selective integration of the Hungarian ethnics, while the second envisaged granting them territorial autonomy.

The second chapter of the book is justly entitled "Stalin's Gift," since the creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region was decided by the Soviet leader and imposed on the communist leadership of Romania under the Constitution of September 1952. In those years, a communist regime totally obedient to Moscow operated in Romania. Orders from the Soviet leadership were enforced subserviently in Bucharest. The same happened with the implementation of the administrative-territorial districts (*rayons*) in 1950 and with the adoption of a new fundamental law in 1952.

The administrative reform implemented in 1950 led to the traditional administrative-territorial units (counties and *plăși*) being replaced with those of Soviet inspiration (regions and districts or *rayons*). This led to the Hungarians in south-eastern Transylvania being included in the Stalin and Mureș regions. Two years later, in 1952, on the orders of the Soviet advisers in Bucharest, the territorial organization of Romania was restructured, the number of regions being reduced from 28 to 18. The text of the new Constitution was also drafted at that time. Upon its approval by Stalin, it authorized the creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region.

After presenting the context and stages of the establishment of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, Stefano Bottoni presents the Hungarian and Romanian inhabitants' reactions to the imposition

of Stalinist autonomy. Depending on who expressed them, these reactions encapsulated either enthusiasm or concern.

In the third chapter of his book, the author carefully analyzes the functioning of the autonomous region from an institutional point of view and delves into the personality of the Hungarian leaders of the region, providing substantial biographical data about them. Based on his research of historical documents, Bottoni concludes that the existence of the Hungarian Autonomous Region did not jeopardize Romania's territorial unity, but was rather an instrument for the political and social integration of the Hungarian community into the Romanian communist state. The author uses an inspired phrase, "Romanian drivers in the Hungarian car," to capture the power relations between Bucharest and the autonomous region, highlighting thus the formal autonomy of the Transylvanian Hungarians and the strict control that was exercised over them from the center. With genuine analytical spirit and special attention to detail, the historian detects the nuances of the internal political life of the autonomous region, as well as the influence of external forces, especially the Soviet Union, on the changes affecting the Hungarian Autonomous Region. The author also tackles issues such as the internal purges or the Catholic resistance of the Transylvanian Hungarians, whose advocate was Bishop Áron Márton.

In Chapter Four ("The Stalinist Greenhouse"), Stefano Bottoni presents details of everyday life in "Little Hungary," as the Hungarian Autonomous Region was sometimes called. From the party elite and ordinary activists to cultural, artistic and journalistic aspects, the author manages to present, almost exhaustively, the life of the

"small Hungarian world." The particular intertwines with the general and the details provided by the author are harmoniously interlaced in the book, demonstrating the validity of its working hypotheses and shaping its well-rounded conclusions.

Bottoni notes that the Hungarian cultural elite in the Transylvanian autonomous region achieved integration without assimilation, by participating in political life and supporting the Romanian socialist society. This form of autonomy introduced for the Hungarians in Szeklerland led to no radical economic or cultural transformations in their lives. After all, the Romanian communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej saw this autonomous region as a means of settling the conflict between nationalities, rather than as a way of institutionalizing Hungarian national and regional identity. In fact, the Hungarian Autonomous Region never had an official status approved by the party and state leadership in Bucharest: the autonomy of this region was regarded as a mere formality and there was little interest, if any, in granting broad prerogatives to the local leadership.

The author pays special attention to the impact of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Romania, in general, and on the Transylvanian Hungarians, in particular. The vast majority of the Hungarian ethnics in the Hungarian Autonomous Region voiced their enthusiasm about the revolutionary events in Budapest, and there were also some manifestations of solidarity with the revolutionaries. Things were kept under control thanks to the prompt intervention of the Securitate forces and of the national and regional party bodies, and a wave of retaliations against the presumed suspects was launched in 1957.

The revolution in Hungary was, according to the author, the turning point that led to the change in the national policy of the Romanian Workers' Party, meaning that the issue of the Hungarian minority was henceforth viewed as a matter of state security. Bottoni makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of this issue, capitalizing on unpublished archival sources and formulating well-articulated value judgments. He frequently invokes quotes from historical documents to support his views and to immerse the reader in the atmosphere of those years.

The author presents the last years of the Hungarian Autonomous Region in chapter six of his book, where he highlights the shift in the Romanian communist regime's attitude towards the Hungarian ethnicity. While until 1958–1959 the model of a gentle integration—especially in cultural terms—of the Hungarian ethnics was applied, a process of homogenization and centralization became prevalent from that moment on. In December 1960, following a new administrative reorganization (which involved the redistribution of territories and the renaming of regions), the borders of the Hungarian Autonomous Region were changed: on the one hand, two of its southern districts, overwhelmingly inhabited by Hungarians, were removed from it and, on the other hand, the districts of Luduș, Sărmaș, and part of the Târnăveni district from the Cluj Region, with a majority Romanian population, were added to it. As a result, the percentage of Hungarians in the region decreased to 60%, while that of Romanians increased to 35%. The name of the region was changed to the Hungarian Autonomous Mureș Region. Even though this administrative-territorial unit was

maintained until 1968, Hungarians in the region understood the territorial and institutional changes made by Bucharest in 1960 as the end of the autonomy that had been granted to them in 1952.

Through the information it provides, the conclusions it lucidly formulates and its very solid documentation, the book fills a gap in the contemporary historiography. Stefano Bottoni's research also impresses with the balanced, unbiased manner in which the author analyzes the sources of information, especially archival documents, in a scholarly text that is also fairly accessible to the general public.

Stefano Bottoni greatly enhances the book's textual density with various cartographic materials, tables and illustrations, which reinforce the views of the author, while also giving readers the opportunity to personally assess the realities they encounter in its pages. Descriptive analyses complement interpretive ones in a well-knit and richly textured academic work.

This volume is the first in the Romanian-themed historiography to present in depth the realities of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. The author has the undeniable merit of having examined both published and unpublished information about a subject that has been little investigated in the specialist historical literature, which he carefully analyzes and meticulously comments on. A connoisseur of the Hungarian and Romanian languages who is very familiar with the contemporary history of the two peoples, Bottoni conducts a unique, objective research on a subject that is likely to generate numerous tensions and conflicting opinions.

Written in a modern, balanced and clear style, placed in the service of historical truth, Stefano Bottoni's work comes to

expand the knowledge of a less researched topic in the history of Romania, and also to shed light on thorny issues that have divided the Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, thus pushing for a harmonization of relations between the two communities.



LUCIAN ROPA

† MACARIE DRĂGOI

10 ani cu mitropolitul meu

Bartolomeu Anania 1998–2008:

Amintiri de la capătul dorului

(Ten years with my Metropolitan

Bartolomeu Anania 1998–2008:

Memories from the edge of longing)

Foreword by RADU PREDĂ

Iași: Polirom, 2021

A REPUTED VOICE not only in the Romanian Orthodox Church or in the theological field, His Grace Macarie Drăgoi, bishop of the Romanians from Northern Europe, is also a historian, ethnologist and a philologist. With the book dedicated to the Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania he proves to be also a memorialist who writes with passion and talent and brings into attention the heritage of an important man of the recent history and spirituality. Dedicated to the centenary of his birth, the book brings into attention the decade of discipleship that the author spent under the guidance of the writer and bishop. Segmented into 49 chapters and accompanied by a rich appendix containing images that come to illustrate the presented episodes, the book tells a beautiful story and is structured as a bildungsroman. Written in the first person and speaking,

often tearfully, about the things learned from the aforementioned personality, the work starts with an invitation. His Grace Macarie asks his readers not only to accompany him in this voyage, but to live together the important moments that marked his becoming:

Dear reader, I invite you now to step into this story of apprenticeship to the Metropolitan Bartholomew. Let us live together the unexpected joy of the beginnings, the emotion of the first tests and trials, the fulfilment of expectations and aspirations, the grueling failures, the redemptions glimpsed through hope. It is a testimony of the soul that I put with emotion in your heart, a testimony of the memory and of the experiences lived as a secretary to the office of Metropolitan Bartholomew, and later, as ecclesiarch of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj. These are my best years, years of preparation for the cross of the later hierarchical service.

Lately, I have felt increasingly compelled, as a duty of conscience, to give this testimony about Metropolitan Bartholomew. The longing for Father Anania makes me want to no longer hide in the crevices of my heart the warm memories of the moments spent with him, but to bring them to light for the public benefit.
(p. 16)

While some of the aspects presented there can be surely considered pages of a contemporary *Paterikon*, due to the rich moral content that can be found there, others are testimonies of historical facts that changed the recent history of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania. Aspects which until the publication of this book were considered legends, like the meet-