

University of Szeged  
Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral School of Historical Sciences  
Department of Contemporary History

Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Balázs Valastyán

**Hungarian estate and - settlement policy in reannexed Bácska (1941-1944)**

Consultant: Prof. Dr. A. Enikő Sajti DSc



Szeged  
2019

## ***I. The objectives of the study, sources and technical literature***

The issue of estates was incredibly significant in the life of some of the Middle-Eastern European states during the XIX-XX. century. With the Treaty of Trianon, the local Hungarians were - in most cases – sufferers of the agricultural reforms of the newly - established states in the areas annexed from Hungary. Thus, after the re-annexation of territories - which they perceived as liberation – the postulation, in some cases, re-postulation of estates, perceived as rightful, began which - with the change of imperium - brought along the deprivation of peoples driven into minority of their estates. Although after the agricultural reform in Yugoslavia the allocated lands were given into management of the Hungarian State after the re-annexation but the local Hungarian population who may have been owners of large or medium-sized lands or have-nots - did not repossess their property in the reannexed Bácska: lands were given into possession only in exceptional cases – for instance to Szeklers or gallants – mostly, Hungarians could only lease estates. The other attempt to appease the local Hungarian population was the allocation of sites. The final allocation of lands and sites into possession and the closure of the land reform did not take place neither in Bácska nor in the Hungary before the revisions in the period I portray as the Hungarian government was planning the allocation of estates for the period after the war having faith in Hungary being on the winning side when the war was over. Had the land reform begun on any reannexed territory, it would have triggered the dissatisfaction of population living in the Hungary of pre-1938. The events are well-known, thus the post-war concepts of the Hungarian estate policy did not materialize.

The choice of topic for my thesis was also influenced by the fact that the land policy measures taken in Bácska had so far been discussed in altogether one volume - whose title immediately indicates its outdatedness<sup>1</sup>- in Hungarian historical technical literature. The primary sources of my study were the documents of the Branch Office for Estate Policy of Lower-Hungary which were produced between 1941 and 1944. My study also introduces the foundation and the management of the branch office. The documents are guarded in Novi Sad, in the County Archive of Vojvodina (Arhiv Vojvodine) where approximately 205 boxes of documents can be found and researched. The documents of the branch office were categorised into 11 groups. For this thesis of mine, the documents of the first six groups were selected assessing the material of 23 boxes altogether. These boxes contain the documents with regard

---

<sup>1</sup> Lőrinc Péter: *Harcban a földért. A magyar fasizmus jugoszláviai földbirtokpolitikája (1941-1944)*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1981.

to the topic in question, the materials of the other boxes (for instance, birth certificates) are beyond the framework of the topic thus they were not used. The documents of the individual groups utilized include among others the census related to estate possessions in the settlements of Bácska, applications for lease, leases for rent and applications for the reduction of farm rent in connection with these, applications for the repossession of estates by ex-landowners or their descendants in Bácska and those for allocations of sites. Also, these contain the so-called site-supervisor's reports whose help enabled me to get insight into the everyday life of Szeklers who were re-settled in the reannexed Bácska. In order to be able to research these documents, the Apáczai Csere János scholarship whose half -a- year period I utilized to do research in the Vojvodina County Archive - proved to be indispensable.

Another important unit of documents can be found in Budapest, in the National Archive of the Hungarian National Archive. The general documents of the Ministry for Agriculture produced between 1941 and 1944 have preserved several documents relevant to the topic. These documents enable us to get a better insight into, understand and nuance the documents of the Vojvodina County Archive mentioned above by containing the applications and postulations of former owners. Here, I would only refer to one more important unit of documents which contains the ones of Foreign Hungarians Repatriation Committee. The notes by Miklós Bonczos related to the repatriation of Szeklers provided me with important information that helped me to get acquainted with the process of resettlement of Szeklers and to get insight into its difficulties. In the National Archive of the Hungarian National Archive there were only few documents of the Branch Office for Estate Policy of Lower-Hungary to be found but these were not to be ignored by me either. These are predominantly census of owners of large lands in relation to the reannexed Lower-Hungary which include the census of expropriated estates in the Yugoslav era as well as the propositions for land repossessions after the imperium change. The documents of the document unit are far from being complete and the ones that are available are not categorized. To my best knowledge, a significant part of the documents was destroyed in 1956. From the records of the Council of Ministers, I utilized the one written on 15 July 1941 in which the Decree 5280/1941 M. E. with regard to the reannexed Lower-Hungary was recorded. This decree contained the vision for the Yugoslav agricultural reform and determined the major paths of execution for the Hungarian land reform. The atmosphere of the foreign reception of single, daily events and the officially expected atmosphere of the re-annexation, respectively may be grasped from the lithographic print reports of the Hungarian National News Agency (MTI) which I attempted to nuance the period before the re-annexation of Lower Hungary with.

When taking the secondary literature into account, I would highlight the technical literature - utilized for my thesis - in connection with the Yugoslav agricultural reform that took place between the two world wars. I predominantly used *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Bačkoj 1918-1941* by Nikola Gaćeša from the South Slavic technical literature. Gaćeša introduces the Yugoslavian agricultural reform, its events, decrees and results illustrated with charts in detail, based on Yugoslavian archive sources. His work has been regarded as fundamental. The introduction of the settlement of Serbian settlers(dobrovoljac) and the colonization is also the virtue of his work.In his second volume – *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Jugoslaviji 1945-1948*<sup>2</sup> – he is mainly concerned with the description of the estate and settlement policies after the war. From this work, I could predominantly utilize the charts only. To be precise, I have to mention that Gaćeša discusses the Yugoslavian estate and settlement policies conducted in the area of Banat and Szeremseg in a similar context as well.<sup>3</sup> The monography by Attila Kovacs, published in 2004 – despite introducing the estate and settlement policies conducted in the Lendva-area – was an important reading with regard to my dissertation. The work which discusses the legal background of the Yugoslavian measures and the impact of the estate reform and settlements in a quite detailed manner was a great help for me from a methodological point of view.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the above, I introduced the economic performance of the territories belonging to Hungary before the Trianon Treaty as well as the Czechoslovakian and Romanian agricultural reform in Upper-Hungary and North- Transylvania after the peace based on the technical literature.The other significant topic of my study, the settlement of Szeklers in Bácska is regarded as a popular, well researched subject with ample literature within the framework of the Hungarian historical sciences. First and foremost, I must emphasize the importance of the book by A. Eniko Sajti in this subject. Her monography discusses the resettlement of Szeklers to Bácska in great detail.<sup>5</sup>I would also point out that chronologically this is the first comprehensive workwith regard to Szeklers in the Hungarian technical literature after 1945. Among the more recent works, I would highlight the ones by Árpád Papp. The volume titled *Igaztörténetek Mindenkeföldjéről*<sup>6</sup> published in 2015 collected the memories of the population of Vojvodina related to the period after the imperium change.

---

<sup>2</sup> Nikola Gaćeša: *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Jugoslaviji*. Matica Srpska, NoviSad, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Nikola Gaćeša: *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Banatu*. K. n., NoviSad, 1972.; Nikola Gaćeša: *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija a Sremu 1918-1941*. K. n., NoviSad, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Kovács Attila: *Földreform és kolonizáció a Lendva-vidéken a két világháború között*. K. n. Lendva, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> A. Sajti Enikő: *Székely telepítés és nemzetiségpolitika a Bácskában: 1941*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1984.

<sup>6</sup>*Igaz történetek Mindenkeföldjéről. Vajdaság/Délvidék (1941-1944)*. Szerkesztette: Papp Árpád. Vajdasági Magyar Közművelődési Intézet, Zenta, 2015.

These recollections enrich the already established picture - besides the period of marching into Lower - Hungary – with new data regarding the everyday life of Szeklers settled in Bácska and that of the local Hungarians.

The other volume by Árpád Papp titled '*A zenélő kút. A bukovinai székelyek a Bácskában*'.<sup>7</sup> was published in 2017.<sup>8</sup> In this volume, Papp thoroughly discusses the plans of the era for the resettlement of Szeklers, their relocation and their settlement there. The volume which is illustrated with valuable stock of images was a control material for me as well. The work was predominantly compiled based on archive sources and I would remark that parts of the sources I utilized are identical with the ones listed in this book. The research for both works was taking place nearly at the same time but completely independently from each other.

## ***II. The structure of the study***

The study is divided into five major structural units which are further divided into sub-chapters. The first chapter is a historiographical overview in connection with the subject of the study. In the further four chapters I provided an overview of the estate and settlement policy conducted by the Hungarian government in the re-annexed Bácska in 1941 chronologically and thematically.

Despite being focused on the Hungarian policy between 1941 and 1944 in my study, in order to provide the whole picture, it was necessary to be also concerned with the Yugoslavian agricultural reform and settlement policy in the area, which is discussed in the second chapter. Similar tendencies took place in the new states formed around Hungary after the Trianon Treaty. The allocation of lands was started as a part of policy aimed at reducing social tensions and strengthening individual nations in Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Serbian- Croatian- Slovenian Kingdom. Besides the plans, the practical execution of land reforms was delayed even for over a decade. In spite of the above, the pre - dominance of large estates was successfully broken and the ratio of small and dwarf estates soared in all three states. The largest equalization on the social scale took place in Yugoslavia and besides this, the strengthening of Slavic population was also carried out: about 640 thousand families

---

<sup>7</sup>Papp Árpád: *A zenélő kút. A bukovinai székelyek Bácskában (1941-1944)*. Vajdasági Magyar Közművelődési Intézet, Zenta, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>Papp Árpád: *A zenélő kút. A bukovinai székelyek Bácskában (1941-1944)*. Vajdasági Magyar Közművelődési Intézet, Zenta, 2017.

out of two million peasant ones received an estate of some territory in the period between the two world wars. Families of German and Hungarian origins were not included in the above.

In the third chapter I introduce the circumstances of the revision of the area in 1941. As well-known, the return of Bácska and Prekmurje did not take place without obstacles as the revision of the southern part of Upper-Hungary and Subcarpathia and that of Northern Transylvania. The incoming Hungarian privates were greeted with exuberant joy by the local Hungarian population. However, in some cases they had to face the resistance of Chetniks. The Serbian settlers deemed unreliable were expelled by the Hungarian authorities and then they were transported to detention camps. The reattachment of the area in the life of Hungary and the annulation of the measures of the Yugoslavian period in the reannexed Bácska began at the same time.

The fourth chapter is the main body of my study which includes the introduction of the estate policy in the reannexed Bácska in five further sub-chapters. Estate policies were conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture via the Branch Office for Estate Policy of Lower-Hungary. After the re-annexation of the Lower – Hungary areas the Hungarian state being established placed the estates under a military administration then a civilian one. The decree 5280/1941 M.E. indicated the framework for the estate policy to be conducted in the area and the invasion in the period after. Thorough surveys were carried out in connection with the estate possessions of each settlement for the purpose of the formation and execution of estate policy. Alongside the surveys with regard to the estate possessions in the districts, the Branch Office also made recommendations on how the lands should be utilized. The planning procedure during which the experts of the Branch Office for Estate Policy of Lower-Hungary made proposals on how to utilize (letting, perhaps settlement) the lands in the administration of the Hungarian state was started in 1941. The national and social relations - and in some cases the amount of lands which was let to the local Hungarian population for lease are to be found in the reports about each settlement. The reports also mention a few former landowners who had hoped for a complete or partial repossession of their estates or in a compensation with the return of the area to Hungary. These were, however, already categorically rejected in the reports themselves. The Branch Office for Estate Policy of Lower-Hungary – based on the Decree 5280/1941. M.E. – provided repossessions to former landowners of Lower Hungary from their former estates only in the most extreme cases. Compensation in money was more widely practised by the Branch Office but these were only done after a thorough investigation. The former landowners of Lower Hungary had not expected such revision: only a part of their

former estates was returned to them in the most optimal cases or they received a partial compensation in money which were provided by the legal framework.

The Decree 5280/1941. M.E. Paragraph 9 states that *'appropriate compensation in proportion to security is to be given to the ones who suffered from repossession'*<sup>9</sup>. It was more common to provide former owners with leases, in cases from the parts of their former estates, in other cases in other areas of the reannexed territories. Leasing and thus providing a continuity of production was first and foremost a national policy interest therefore the constructors of the administration in Lower - Hungary did not defer to start this process. In fact, they already started allocating estates during the time of the regular military administration. The circle of people with the right for restitution was not expanded this would have namely endangered the realization of estate policy aims, that is, the improvement on the minority image of the area. Thus, the Hungarian government did not have the aim to restore large estates, they preferred lease agreements much more in the reannexed areas in Lower – Hungary. The reasons for the above may be found in two areas: from the perspective of national policy they tried to strengthen the local Hungarians and settlers in the area and also, at wartime, the aim was to provide the continuity of production. The officials of each settlement were obliged to keep an accurate record of the leases. However, these started to be submitted to the Branch Office for Estate Policy from September 1941. The process of leases may be reconstructed from these documents as well as the approximate number of leased lands in each settlement. Besides the lease documents of the settlements, other documents also prevailed through which the mood of the applicants for lease and that of the population who received them can be captured. It can be reconstructed from these documents that the people who received a lease could not take advantage of the given opportunity - which mostly occurred - through no fault of their own - due to the adversity of the weather resulting in the cessation of production. There is also a precedent for the leased land not being correctly looked after by the landholder and that is why they could lose their right to lease the land. The local Hungarian residents criticized the measures in several instances and there could be disputes related to the estates between individual landholders thus many of the local Hungarians concerned perceived the re-annexation of the territory to Hungary as a disappointment.

---

<sup>9</sup>A magyar királyi minisztérium 1941. évi 5280. M.E. rendelete. 9. §. MNL OL, K27, Minisztertanácsi Jegyzőkönyvek, 1941. július 15. Forrás: <http://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/minisztertanacsi-jegyzokonyvek-1867-1944> Hozzáférés ideje: 2017. 04. 26.

Besides leases, the Hungarian government was keen on satisfy the Hungarian population with sites. With regard to the allocation of sites we may conclude that - similarly to that of lands - the Hungarian administration being established could not achieve its designated goals according to which it was supposed to provide local Hungarians with appropriate houses or sites in the territories reannexed by Hungary after 11 April 1941. In its background we may discover several factors: besides the wartime conditions, the disorganisation of land ownership in Lower-Hungary play also a crucial role or we could also mention the disappointment of the local population which they felt over the loss of their houses and the failure of the allocation of sites. Besides the 'hunger for land' a 'hunger for site' could also be detected in part of the society.

The settlement plans of the Hungarian government for gallants in Lower- Hungary was predominantly induced to strengthen the local Hungarian population nationally. For the members of the Gallant Order, a significant amount of estates was supposed to be provided by the government but in the beginning, they were not even provided with housing: besides the difficulties of acquiring the building materials for the houses to be built, the weather also caused severe problems in the area during the constructions. Despite having plans for the establishment of a completely new settlement - Bácsvitézfalu - these calculations were overridden by wartime conditions and events. Their relationship with the local population and the other settlers was in many cases tense whose causes may be found in the possession of estates and personal effects. A significant part of the archive sources related to the history of the Gallant Order was destroyed in World War II and in the events of 1956.

In the fifth chapter of my study, I introduce the resettlement, settling down and difficulties of Szeklers of Bukovina to Bácska. The resettlement and move of Szeklers of Bukovina to Bácska was not smooth. The connection of the area in the Hungarian economy was prioritised by the Hungarian government and in the interest of this, resettlement was completed in a matter of few weeks which activity was carried out by the Foreign Hungarians Repatriation Committee. The feeding, the provision of economic equipment and health services for the re-settled population was also provided by this organization. In the beginning, the citizens of Bukovina were received with understanding by the local Hungarians. After a short time, however, - not without reasons - they worriedly observed their economic headway which generated a tense atmosphere between the two groups.

Although the resettlement of Szeklers from a completely different area into Bácska took place quickly, in a few weeks, they needed a much longer time for their integration. The designated, qualified site supervisors - who urged the Szeklers to acquire new farming



methods - assisted them with this. Their integration into their new environment was also more difficult because of their privileges. The local Hungarian population - who was afraid of their own future and welfare – gave the settlers of Bukovina the nickname 'Hungarian dobrovoljac'. Their struggles did not end with this, however. They had to relocate in October 1944: the order for evacuation was given on the radio and they had six hours to leave their newly-found homes with only the most basic personal belongings.

### ***III. The new scientific results of the dissertation***

The Hungarian technical literature has several comprehensive works with regard to the measures of the Hungarian government in Bácska after 1941 and several monographies include particular minor issues. Besides these, estate policies conducted in Upper- Hungary and North- Transylvania have also been the focus of researchers which cannot be said about a similar investigation concerning Bácska. In my study, I attempted to introduce Hungarian estate policy – controlled centrally – from the period of re-annexation which was to be found in the fact that the Hungarian governments attempted to make thorough professional preparations to implement estate policy in Bácska with the help of Branch Office for Estate Policy and public administration and they were fully aware of the public demands related to the issue. However, the characteristics of the system and wartime conditions quite limited the framework of solving the estate issue whose dominant elements were settlements vindicating the points of view of renationalisation. The related decree of the Council of Ministers limited the possibilities of land reform of Lower-Hungary in the first place as only the lands that were expropriated by the Yugoslavian land reform could be utilized for the aims of estate policy so the demands of the local Hungarians could not even be satisfied partially, and the earlier expropriated Hungarian estates were not returned either.

Despite all the problems arising in the practice, the Hungarian governments managed to adhere to estate policy principles and directions in connection with Bácska which were accepted in 1941. In spite of the social pressure from several directions they did not deviate from those – they did not intend to override the frameworks defined by themselves. The intentions of owners of large estates who suffered losses in the Yugoslavian era towards overriding these frameworks or even those of the local Hungarian peasant society were not even considered, but categorically rejected. Although, the possibilities of the Hungarian era were cut short by history in Lower-Hungary and the reoccupation of the territory by

Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1944 ended the reintegration of Bácska to Hungary - in the new state the (re) settlement of the estate issue was conducted in completely different dimensions.

The resettlement of Szeklers of Bukovina to Bácska has also got ample technical literature. In my work, I predominantly introduced how they settled down, their adaptation to the new environment, the challenges of everyday life based mostly on the reports by site supervisors appointed to the Szekler settlements. History, however, limited the stay of Szeklers in Bácska as well. In autumn 1944 they had to flee from Bácska to Hungary, to their final residence.

#### ***IV. Further opportunities of researching the topic***

The topic dealt with in my dissertation may be extended in several other directions. To begin with, the amount of documents in the Vojvodina Archive and their study requires further research which would further nuance the already existing image and deepen the topic. My research focused on Bácska but a study of Muravidek, Muraköz and the Baranya Triangle would be possible in the future. Besides the above, the subtopics in my study could further be extended by including further sources.

The relationship with regard to the issue of land between the local Hungarian population and other minorities could also be investigated. In the beginning, the local Hungarians believed that they would be the beneficiaries of the land reform with the imperium change but they had to be disappointed thus the social atmosphere against the estate policy of the Hungarian public administration being formed could be grasped this way. In connection with the above, it may be interesting to further study and deepen the issue of the settlements of gallants as alongside the Szeklers of Bukovina, this settler group received estates as possessions in the re-annexed territory. Furthermore, reports by more site supervisors could be looked into and compare their individual areas this way.

#### ***V. The publications of the author in the topic***

Valastyán Balázs: *"Vártunk, jöttetek! Éljenek a magyar honvédek!"-"Elmentek a barbárok és bejöttek a tatárok..." Társadalmi hangulat és a Délvidék visszacsatolása.* In: Limes XXIII. évf. 2010. 3. sz. 15-24.

Valastyán Balázs: *A magyar kormány délvidéki földbirtok- és telepítéspolitikájának hivatala – iratok a Délvidéki Földbirtokpolitikai Kirendeltség működéséhez.* In: Tanulmányok a magyar történelemből a kora újkortól a legújabb korig. Szerkesztette: DöbörAndrás – Zeman Ferenc. Közép-Európai Monográfiák 13., Szeged, 2014. 139-148.

Valastyán Balázs: *A magyar kormány földbirtok- és telepítéspolitikájának kezdetei a visszacsatolt Bácskában (1941).* In: DélvidékiSzemle. I. évf. 2014 2. szám. 53-65.

Valastyán Balázs: *Bepillantás egy telepfelügyelő munkájába. Horthyvára, Hadikhalom és Hadiktelke telepfelügyelőjének 1942-es jelentései.* In: Bácsország. Vajdasági Honismereti Szemle, 2014 3. szám (70. sz.) 70-77.

Valastyán Balázs: *Földbirtok-politikai ügyek Szabadkán 1941 és 1944 között.* In: Bácsország, 2015 4. szám (75. szám) 34-38.

Valastyán Balázs: *Haszonbérletek, haszonbérbeadások a visszacsatolt Délvidéken (1941-1944).* In: Bácsország, 2015 1. szám (72. sz.) 20-27.

Valastyán Balázs: *Vitézi telepítések a Bácskában.* In: Bácsország, 2016 3-4. szám (78. szám) 48-51.