

Journalist, Spy, Propagandist: About Vándory Lajos and His Activity in Romania (1876–1885)*

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Abstract: Towards the end of the 19th century, the relations between Austria-Hungary and Romania experienced several delicate episodes, caused by the diametrically opposed interests of the two sides regarding the specific realities of South-Eastern Europe. The rulers in Vienna and especially those in Budapest could only see the Romanian state as an obstacle to their plans, and therefore tried to quickly learn and decipher the diplomatic and political intentions and initiatives of the Romanian decision-makers. On different occasions, in order to obtain the necessary information, they resorted to setting up and supporting networks of influencers, propagandists and spies, both in Transylvania and across the Carpathians. The present article aims to add details to the depiction of an interesting figure, Vándory Lajos, who, according to the press of the time and several archival documents, was one of those who operated within the territory of the Romanian state as a spy, under the cover of working as a journalist. At various times, by his actions, he contributed to the further straining of the already problematic Romanian-Hungarian relations.

Keywords: Vándory Lajos, Romanian-Hungarian relations, press, propaganda, espionage

Rezumat: Spre sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, relațiile dintre Austro-Ungaria și România au cunoscut mai multe episoade delicate, provocate de interesele diametral opuse ale celor două părți cu privire la realitățile specifice sud-estului Europei. Conducătorii de la

* Gazetar, spion, propagandist: despre Vándory Lajos și activitatea sa în România (1876-1885).

Viena și mai ales de la Budapesta nu puteau vedea în statul român decât un obstacol în calea planurilor lor, încercând, în consecință, să cunoască și să descifreze cât mai repede intențiile și inițiativele diplomatice și politice ale factorilor decidenți din România. Pentru obținerea informațiilor necesare, au făcut apel în diverse rânduri la constituirea și sprijinirea unor rețele de agenți de influență, propagandiști și spioni, atât în Transilvania, cât și peste Carpați. Prin intermediul textului nostru, încercăm să contribuim la completarea imaginii unui interesant personaj, Vándory Lajos, care, așa cum arată presa vremii și documentele de arhivă, a fost unul din cei care au activat pe teritoriul statului român în calitate de spion, sub acoperirea îndeletnicirii de gazetar. În diferite momente, prin acțiunile sale, a contribuit la tensionarea suplimentară a relațiilor româno-maghiare, oricum problematice.

Cuvinte-cheie: Vándory Lajos, relații româno-maghiare, presă, propagandă, spionaj.

At the end of the 1870s, in the context of the reactivation of the Eastern Question and the foreshadowing of important political changes in the south-eastern part of the European continent, the attention of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in this area was mainly focused on the Romanian state, whose actions had often been seen, since the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866), as dangerous for the European order of that time. The correlation of these actions with the increasingly determined affirmation of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania, as well as several contacts with various subversive and revolutionary structures in this part of the continent¹ were considered to be the warning signals that predicted the possible organization of larger-scale enterprises that would ultimately destabilize the Dual Monarchy. As a somewhat natural consequence, the period in question was marked by an effervescent espionage activity carried out in Transylvania and across the territory of the Romanian state. These endeavours were coordinated by Vienna and Budapest, especially after Romania gained its independence following its participation in the conflict between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in 1877-1878.

¹ There were close connections with certain Bulgarian revolutionary structures and even diplomatic and political contacts with Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia. Vasile V. Russu, *Viața politică în România (1866-1871)*, vol. I - *De la domnia pământeană la prințul străin* (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2001), 203-205; Iulian Oncescu, *România în politica orientală a Franței (1866-1878)*. Second edition revised and added (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2010), 169-170; N. Iorga, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. X₁ - *Întregitorii*. Volume cared by Georgeta Filitti, Gheorghe Buzatu (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2011), 37-38.

The pressing need for detailed and relevant information felt by the decision-makers in the two Danubian capitals reflected the wider understanding that the young Romanian state was perceived as an immediate danger to the interests of Austria-Hungary. This danger was sensed and understood both in Vienna, which wanted to exert its influence in South-Eastern Europe and to control the European Danube Commission,² and in Budapest, which was increasingly concerned about the extent and the consolidation of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania. After all, the very attitude of many of the Transylvanian Romanians during the War of Independence was a major cause of anxiety for the Hungarian authorities, which tried, after 1878, to react on multiple levels in order to obtain the needed information.

Under various covers, agents of Vienna and Budapest were present both in Transylvania and south of the Carpathians. Their missions included: to follow the leaders of the Romanian national movement in the region, as well as the Romanians who had taken refuge in Romania, to collect data on the Romanian irredentist movement, to establish useful contacts and connections in different social groups, to influence the Romanian public opinion on certain political, economic, diplomatic issues, etc. The literature currently available, along with a number of archival documents retrieved in recent decades, highlight the effectiveness and adaptability of some of these agents.³ Among those who distinguished themselves on the so-called “invisible front”, there is a character that, more or less by chance, also plays a part in the history of the Romanian and Hungarian press.⁴

² See, for this aspect, the considerations expressed by Ion Bulei, “De la Chestiunea Dunării la Tratatul cu Puterile Centrale”, *Istorie și Civilizație*, 4/32 (May 2012): 5–9; 4/33 (June 2012): 10–13. For the Austro-Hungarian tendencies in this regard in the early 1880s, see also Mihaela Damean, *Personalitatea omului politic Dimitrie A. Sturdza* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 93–98.

³ Probably the best known such agent, in terms of the historiographical coverage and documentation provided by the archives in recent decades, is Friedrich Lachmann, whose name is often linked to various information regarding the situation of Mihai Eminescu. See: Luana Popa, “Gazeta Transilvaniei, oglindă a războiului pentru independența de stat a României”, *Cumidava*, 10 (1977): 53–71; Mircea Gherman, “Consecințe politice ale războiului de independență asupra luptei de eliberare națională a românilor transilvăneni”, *Cumidava*, 10 (1977): 97–120.

⁴ Despite the existence of increasingly consistent approaches, including the publication, in the last two decades, of studies and books that can be considered of reference for the knowledge of the Hungarian-language press, it must be said that, at the level of our historiography, we still know quite little about the Hungarian community’s gazettes, the personalities involved and their overall significance within the Romanian modernity. See, in this regard, the important and useful contributions of Hilda Hencz, *Magyarok román világbán. A Kárpátokon kívüli román térségben élő magyarok és a bukaresti magyar sajtó (1860-*

The name of this character is Vándory Lajos and, from 1876 until 1885, he was the editor-in-chief and owner of the periodical *Bukaresti Híradó*, a rather important member of the Hungarian Association in Bucharest, a press correspondent for several Hungarian newspapers and also, as a result of these attributes, an acquaintance of some of the leading Romanian politicians of the time.

The association between the editor of the second Hungarian-language newspaper in Romania and the espionage activity that he carried out under the coordination of the Budapest authorities was not accidental. It was one of the best covers for his infiltration in the Romanian capital, within the Bucharest society of the time.

Also, various testimonies of that time, together with other writings, contributed to the shaping of a certain image both for the gazette in question and for its enterprising editor. In this context, we must mention several observations made at that time, also drawn from newspapers.⁵ Thus, the German-language periodical *Politik* in Prague, quoted by George Barițiu's gazette *Observatoriul* from Sibiu, reported, in August 1878, that Budapest's plans at the time sought to "win Romania for the Hungarian politics and to thus mercilessly sacrifice the interests of three million Romanians living in Transylvania, the Banat, and Bucovina."⁶ As part of the moves carried out, there were mentions of the potential involvement of Romania's diplomatic agent in Vienna, Iancu Bălăceanu, described as "a very suspect person because of his completely troubled financial situation and known as a devoted partisan of Count Andrásy." According to the same Prague periodical, the Hungarians had, for some time, been striving to put "the Romanian nation in a political condition that made it dependent on Hungarianism."⁷

1941). Kétnyelvű kiadás (Bukarest: Carocom '94 kft, 2009) / *Maghiarii în universul românesc. Maghiarii din spațiul extracarpatic românesc și presa maghiară bucureșteană (1860-1941)*. Bilingual edition (Bucharest: Carocom '94 srl, 2009); *Publicațiile periodice maghiare din București / Bukaresti magyar időszaki kiadványok. Ziare, gazete, reviste, anuare, calendare, almanahuri, buletine, dări de seamă, îndrumătoare 1860-2010*. Bibliographical description by Hilda Hencz (Bucharest: Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011); Hencz, *Bucureștiul maghiar. Scurtă istorie a maghiarilor din București de la începuturi până în prezent* (Bucharest: Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011).

⁵ These can always constitute a pretext for resuming some of the older research on the Hungarian imperial idea in central and south-eastern Europe, an issue mentioned, in the Romanian historiography, for example, by Vasile Russu; see Vasile Russu, *Transilvania în istoria modernă*, vol. I – *Revoluția românilor din Transilvania. 1848-1849* (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, 1999); Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea, "Transilvania și Imperiul maghiar din centrul și sud-estul Europei. Motivații și justificări pentru o himeră istorică (1825-1867)", *Opțiuni istoriografice*, 8 (2006): 164-178.

⁶ "O misiune unguerească la București", *Observatoriul*, 1, no. 66 (16/28 August 1878): 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Moreover, these issues in addition to the more or less secret actions and espionage missions conducted from Budapest, “were in the service of the Hungarian dream of ruling over Eastern Europe:”⁸ “The Hungarians want to involve the Romanians in a conflict that would draw them away from their aspirations of emancipation of the Slavs, claiming that the Romanians are equally threatened by the Slavs, to the same extent as the Hungarians. However, in reality, it is only the Hungarians’ desire for supremacy that is truly threatened. [...]

The Germans and Hungarians seek political supremacy and the economic exploitation of Eastern Europe. The threatened Slavs and Romanians must work together to be able to face this danger.”⁹

In such an increasingly troubled context, in which the Romanian-Hungarian animosities could also be seen as part of a much larger picture (the Eastern Question), the role of the journalist, assumed by Vándory Lajos, was both appropriate and possible, rather fitting for his plans in Romania. The importance of the press in the 19th century had grown exponentially, with newspapers being the main source of information for the public at large. At the same time, a journalist’s status differed greatly from that of a private individual. A journalist enjoyed a greater mobility in terms of social relations, with access to various information, public and political figures, decision-makers, etc. In other words, a very good cover for any propaganda or data-gathering operations. This was quite probably the reason why Vándory Lajos contributed to the founding of the second Hungarian-language periodical in the extra-Carpathian region, *Bukaresti Híradó*.¹⁰

Various contemporary testimonies extracted from the press of the time, archival documents, as well as several studies allow us to attempt the reconstruction, as historically accurate as possible, of both his activity in Romania, and the ideas he expressed through the periodical he coordinated.¹¹

⁸ Gelu Neamțu, “Profilul spiritual, moral și fizic al unui spion maghiar la București – Vándory Lajos (1877-1885)”, *Aletheia*, 14 (2003): 413. Romanian original: “serveau visul maghiarimii în sensul că ea este chemată să domnească peste orientul Europei.”

⁹ *O misiune ungurească*, 2. Romanian original: “Ungurii vor să angajeze pe români într-o luptă contra aspirațiunilor de emancipare ale slavilor pretextând, că românii sunt amenințați din partea slavilor în aceeași măsură ca și ungurii. În realitate însă nu este amenințat decât numai dorul de supremație al ungurilor [...]. Nemții și ungurii aspiră la supremația politică și la cescploatarea economică a orientului Europei. Slavii și românii amenințați trebuie să lucre împreună pentru ca să fie în stare să facă față acestui pericol.”

¹⁰ For a general perspective on this gazette in the Hungarian historiography see, for instance, the research of Makkai Béla, “Egy kisebbségi hetilap – a București Híradó (1876-1882)”, *Magyar kisebbség. Nemzetpolitikai szemle*, 9/3(33) (2004): 257-282.

¹¹ One should mention here that, according to the information provided by the scholarly literature on the periodical *Bukaresti Híradó*, only 17 issues of the publication (dating from

With regard to most of the works consulted during our research, either in Hungarian or in Romanian, the picture that one can draw about Vándory Lajos and his activity as editor of the *Bukaresti Híradó* gazette is as serene and innocent as possible. Thus, in an article entitled “Războiul pentru independență în opinia publică progresistă maghiară a epocii” [“The War for independence in the Hungarian progressist public opinion of the time”] published in 1977 on the occasion of the centenary of the State Independence, Ștefan Csucsujă presented him in terms appropriate to the period and the specific ideology. Pointing out that he sent correspondences across the Carpathians, which were published in *Erdélyi Híradó* from Târgu Mureș, the author mentioned that the person in question was the one “who founded a Hungarian-language newspaper in Bucharest and considered himself a competent and committed spokesman – of the common people.”¹² Moreover, in the abstract of the article, the role of the Hungarian editor in Bucharest in presenting the events fairly and accurately is highlighted: “Des journalistes, comme K. Papp Miklós, Békési Károly ou des correspondants tels que Vándori Lajos ou Veress Sándor ont publié des articles où ils ont présenté avec sympathie et de manière juste la cause de la Roumanie et apprécié positivement l’effort fourni par le peuple et surtout par l’armée roumaine pour la conquête de l’indépendance.”¹³

An equally fine picture can be drawn from the works of Hilda Hencz on the Hungarian press in Romania and on the Hungarian community in Bucharest. We must, however, note that the author, despite not being a historian and not delving into the latest historical writings and archival documents, has nevertheless provided undeniable contributions to our understanding of the Hungarian-language press in the extra-Carpathian area and of the situation of the Hungarians in the Romanian capital in the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁴

1880–1885) are still preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, a matter that I have personally verified. However, it was shown that a large part of the collection is preserved by the National Library of Hungary “Széchényi István” in Budapest. See, in this respect, Hencz, *Bucureștiul maghiar*, 70. The Hungarian version: Hencz, *Magyar Bukarest* (Magyar Napló Kiadó, 2016), 103.

¹² Ștefan Csucsujă, “Războiul pentru independență în opinia publică progresistă maghiară a epocii”, *Studii. Revistă de istorie*, 30/4 (1977): 652.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 672.

¹⁴ See Hencz, *Bucureștiul maghiar*, 70: “After a long break, a new Hungarian gazette appeared between 1876–1885, namely the weekly *Gazeta de București* (*Bukaresti Híradó*), edited by the professional journalist Vándory Lajos (Lajos Beer). Only 17 issues of the collection remained [in Bucharest – our note], but the almost complete collection can be found in the Széchényi Library in Budapest. Through references to the articles published in the newspaper *Românul*, whose editor and owner was the politician C.A. Rosetti, the

As far as the Hungarian historiography itself is concerned, one should mention the works of the historian Makkai Béla;¹⁵ although some of his shortcomings are common knowledge, namely his somewhat arrogant and authoritarian manner of imposing himself in the affairs of the Hungarian Association in Bucharest, Vándory Lajos is portrayed in an essentially positive light, with indisputable merits in promoting Hungarian interests south of the Carpathians.¹⁶

The overwhelming majority of Romanian perceptions and mentions of the period, along with the few analyses identified so far in our historiography are the complete opposite of the aforementioned description. Some of these approaches occasionally use labels such as “a stirrer of ethnic intolerance towards Romanians and an ordinary crook.”¹⁷

The publication of the periodical *Bukaresti Híradó* in the capital of the United Principalities had quite a wide echo within the Hungarian press of the time, with various publications, both in Hungary and Transylvania, reporting the event: *Ellenőr*¹⁸, *Fővárosi Lapok*¹⁹, *Magyarország és a nagyvilág*²⁰, *Magyar Polgár*²¹, *Nemere*²², *Szegedi Híradó*,²³ and others. In

tendencies of the Romanian journalists to create a monstrous image of Hungary and the Hungarians became increasingly evident. The wording used was similar to that of the *Gazeta de Transilvania*, which had been constantly hostile towards Hungarians for decades and never missed an opportunity to label them as boors.

However, the diplomatic appearances were maintained, so Vándory Lajos was among the Hungarians decorated on the occasion of the coronation of King Carol I. The decoration was handed to him by C.A. Rosetti himself, acting foreign minister at the time. Questioned by Rosetti on why he thought he had been awarded the distinction, he replied: «I think because I have honourably fulfilled my duties as a Hungarian patriot here abroad». Rosetti confirmed: «You are right! Continue your work, make your homeland known, serve its interests, because this is the duty of an honest patriot: to serve his homeland above all». A few years later, in 1885, in no. 18 of his gazette, recalling the labelling of the Hungarian people («vandal, savage, heartless, incapable of culture») and Hungary («a barbarous country») made by *Românul*, Vándory affirmed his loyalty towards Romania: «We Hungarians who live here in Romania respect Romanian laws and institutions, learn the Romanian language, enjoy Romania's joys and share its failures in the most sincere way». Moreover, the journalist continued, «I dare to say that we Hungarians love and respect Romania more than many Romanian chatterers who live at the expense of the Romanian people». For the Hungarian version, see Hencz, *Magyar Bukarest*, 103–104.

¹⁵ Makkai “Egy kisebbségi hetilap”, 257–282; Makkai, *Határon túli magyar sajtó – Trianon előtt. Bukaresti és eszéki magyar lapok az identitásörzés és kisebbségi érdekvédelem szolgálatában (1860–1918)* (Budapest: Médiatudományi Intézet, 2016), esp. chapter 2. *A román változattól a magyaros címformáig. A Bukaresti Híradó [Gazetta de Bucuresci] (1876–1885)*, 27–50.

¹⁶ Makkai, *Határon túli magyar sajtó*, 48–50.

¹⁷ Neamțu, “Profilul spiritual, moral și fizic”, 414.

¹⁸ *Ellenőr* [Budapest], 8, no. 276 (6 October 1876): 3.

¹⁹ *Fővárosi Lapok* [Budapest], 13, no. 229 (6 October 1876): 4.

²⁰ *Magyarország és a nagyvilág* [Budapest], 13, no. 41 (8 October 1876): 650.

the very first article of the gazette, signed by Vándory Lajos, a very beautiful appeal was stated, which also seemed to represent the principle according to which this new Hungarian-language journalistic enterprise in the United Principalities was to be run:

“We have only a few words left as sons of the two countries: Let the debauchers, the wolves in sheep’s clothing, be rejected with disgust, let us not believe their words that mislead patriotic feelings, – let us love and respect each other, – let us be honest towards each other, for only mutual honesty, mutual love and respect will be a blessing for both countries.”²⁴

Such words were pleasant to the eye and the ear, but, as later realities would show, they are utterly unsubstantiated. Not even three months after its appearance, the Hungarian gazette was already mentioned in a depreciatory manner by the editorial staff of the periodical *Telegraful* in Bucharest:

“Who reads a newspaper of a foreign trinity and does not often see phrases appealing to foreign governments to get rid of the liberal party now in power?

Who has not seen for some time a Hungarian newspaper printed in the capital of Romania under the title of *Bukaresti Hirado*, in which it is reviled to us in all tones and in the most shameless manner, inventing various infamies in order to bring upon us the hatred of the peoples of Europe and to compel them to an invasion, if not collective at least a personal Hungarian one?

Thus there are such individuals in our press; fortunately we do not believe that one can find governments that can rely on their words.”²⁵

²¹ *Magyar Polgár* [Kolozsvár], 10, no. 230 (7 October 1876): 3.

²² *Nemere* [Sepsi-Szentgyörgy], 6, no. 84 (4 October 1876): 3.

²³ *Szegedi Hiradó* [Szeged], 18, no. 124 (11 October 1876): 3.

²⁴ Vándori Lajos, “Bukarest September 30/18 1876”, *Bucuresti-Hiradó*, 1, no. 1 (1 October 1876): 1. Hungarian original: “Még csak néhány szavunk van mint két ország fiaihoz: A bujtogatókat, a bárány bőrben öltözött farkasokat undorral utasítosák el maguktól, ne higgyenek a hazafiúi érzületet mételyező szavaiknak, – szeressük és tiszteljük egymást, – őszinték legyünk egy más irányában, mert csak is kölcsönös őszinteség, kölcsönös szeretet és tisztelet lesz áldásthözó mint két országágra”.

²⁵ *Telegraful* [Bucharest], 6, no. 1416 (30 December 1876): 1. Romanian original: “Cine citește un ziar al unei trinități streine și nu vede adesea strecurându-se frase prin care se face apel la guvernele streine ca să-i scape de partidul liberal azi la putere?”

Vándory Lajos's response came promptly, as he quickly picked up the gauntlet, stating that there could be absolutely no question about what was insinuated by "a paper which in a truly shameless fashion accuses another paper of invented infamy."²⁶ At the end of his reply, Vándory pointed out that, in the future, as far as his means allowed, he would try to publish his gazette in both languages, in Hungarian and Romanian.

The attack of December 1876 was to be repeated by the editorial staff of *Telegraful* in the first days of January 1877; in an extensive article printed on the front page of the 8 January issue, an overview of the first issues of *Bukaresti Híradó* is provided, with the insertion of several translated excerpts related to the distorted presentation of the Romanian realities and the country's image.²⁷ Furthermore, Vándory is portrayed as a "vagabond", a wanderer who does not settle in one place for long and about whom very little is known for sure. Nevertheless, *Telegraful* had obtained information that his real name was, in fact, not Vándory:

"According to the most reliable information we have, we are hereby able to denounce, on our own responsibility, that this individual usurps in the midst of our society a fictitious name, the name Vandory, which, in Romanian, merely means: *traveller*. The name under which he first appeared in Bucharest and under which he has lived here for several months is a Jewish name: **Behr**. Under this name, in the library of the Hungarian society here there are still several books donated by him, with this signature of his own hand."²⁸

Therefore, as the newspaper concluded, for his dubious activities, he had to become a concern for the authorities.

Cine nu a văzut de câțva timp o foaie ungurească, tipărită în capitala României, sub titlu<l> *Bukuresti Hirado*, în care suntem înjurați pe toate tonurile și în modul cel mai nerușinat, inventând diferite infamii spre a ne atrage ura popoarelor din Europa și a le sili la o invasiune dacă nu colectivă cel puțin personal ungurească?

Sunt dar asemenea indivizi la noi în presă; din norocire însă nu credem să se găsească guverne cari să pue temei pe zisele lor."

²⁶ *Telegraful*, 7, no. 1422 (8 January 1877): 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* Romanian original: "După informațiunile cele mai positive ce avem, suntem în stare a denunța, pe răspunderea noastră chiar, că acest individ usurpă în mijlocul societății noastre un nume fictiv, numele *Vandory*, care pe românește nu va să zică nimic alta decât: *călător*. Numele supt care s-a presintat pentru prima oară în București, și supt care a trăit aici câteva luni de zile, este un nume jidovesc: **Behr**. Sub acest nume se găesc și astăzi în biblioteca societății maghiare de aici câteva cărți, donate de dânsul, cu această iscălitură a propriei sale mâini."

According to the Hungarian historian Béla Makkai, the negative attitude towards the periodical *Bukaresti Híradó* was linked, to a certain extent, to the broader picture of the Eastern Question in 1876–1878, when the sympathies of a large part of the Hungarian public opinion were mainly directed to the Ottoman Empire,²⁹ an aspect to which one must add the sudden revival of the problem of spies who were moving freely throughout the country.

The issue of espionage on the territory of the United Principalities in the period immediately prior to the proclamation of the State Independence had reached worrying proportions for some of the decision-makers in Bucharest, to the point that, on 9 May 1877, Nicolae Fleva made an interpellation on this matter in the Chamber of Deputies addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihail Kogălniceanu. Taking advantage of this fact and of the Minister's reply, who "solemnly promised that he would take appropriate measures against the spies who roam the country from one corner to the other,"³⁰ the journalists from *Telegraful* reiterated the accusations against Vándory Lajos and his gazette, *Bukaresti Híradó*, stating:

"Well, we do not know a spy who is more of a spy than this one! – We have just learned that for two days now he has been wandering around our camp in little Romania, no doubt with the aim of making us read again, in a few days, in *Hon, Kelet, Pester Lloyd* and other Hungarian newspapers his infamous and revolting slanders, profusely thrown at our army."³¹

Things would become even more complicated for Vándory Lajos in June 1877. Initially, because of the correspondences he had sent to various newspapers in Hungary and Austria, such as *A Hon, Pesti Napló*, and *Neue Freie Presse*, in which he gave voice to an obvious anti-Russian attitude, he was targeted by the Russian police; they warned him that he was to either cease these activities or he would be rendered inoffensive.³² As the Russians issued a warrant for his arrest on 6 June, he fled

²⁹ Makkai, *Határon túli magyar sajtó*, 29–30.

³⁰ "București, 24 Mai", *Telegraful*, 7, no. 1535 (25 May 1877): 2.

³¹ Ibid. Romanian original: "Ei bine, mai spion decât acesta noi nu cunoaștem! – Chiar acum aflăm că ar fi cutreerând de două zile deja tabăra noastră din România mică, negreșit cu scopul de a face să citim iarăși, preste câteva zile, în *Hon, Kelet, Pester Lloyd* și alte ziare ungueresci calomniile sale infame și revoltătoare, aruncate cu profuziune asupra armatei noastre."

³² Makkai, *Határon túli magyar sajtó*, 30–31.

Bucharest with the help of a Romanian officer and took refuge in Ruschuk in the Ottoman Empire. Later, in the same month of June 1877, the periodical *Gazeta Transilvaniei* in Braşov published the information that *Bukaresti Híradó* was receiving funds from the government in Budapest and that the editor,

“a Jew named Behr or Vándory had promised to work in the interest of the good understanding between Romanians and Hungarians; but he thought he could achieve this purpose by insulting and swearing at the Romanian government and Romanians in general, and claiming that the Hungarians in Romania – if one could talk about Hungarians in Romania – are treated worse than the Jews, whose life and fortune are precarious and subject to change from one day to another. After the outbreak of the war, the editor of this journal fled to Ruschuk, from where he then began to write the most infamous correspondences about Romania in the Hungarian newspapers in Cluj.”³³

This situation also directly affected the Hungarian community in the Romanian capital which, through its representatives, in order to distance itself from the allegations expressed on different occasions by Vándory Lajos, did not hesitate to issue a letter in which it refuted “the calumnies of the Hungarian newspapers” and dissociated itself from the untruths “written by that individual *Behr* or *Vandori*,” who had described the establishment of the *Bukaresti Híradó* gazette in a certain manner.³⁴

Given the increasingly tense circumstances, it is not surprising that for several months in 1877 and 1878 the periodical coordinated by Vándory Lajos ceased its publication. Apparently, it was not until January 1879 that it resumed publication, and in April of the same year,³⁵ in the context of some severe floods in Hungary, *Bukaresti Híradó*

³³ *Gazeta Transilvaniei* [Braşov], 40, no. 45 (12/24 June 1877): 3. Romanian original: “un jidan Behr sau Vándory promisese a lucra în interesul buneii înţelegeri între români şi maghiari; însă dânsul crezu a ajunge la acest scop prin insulte şi înjurături contra guvernului român şi a românilor în genere, şi susţinând, că ungurii din România – dacă poate fi vorba de unguri în România – sunt mai rău trataţi decât jidanii, a căror viaţă şi avere nu este sigură de pe o zi pe alta. După erumperea resbelului redactorele acestui jurnal a fugit la Rusciuc, de unde apoi începu a scrie în jurnalele maghiare din Cluj cele mai infame corespondinţe despre România.”

³⁴ See for instance *Telegraful*, 7, no. 1540 (1 June 1877): 3.

³⁵ *Publicațiile periodice românești (ziare, reviste, gazete)*. Bibliographical description by Nerva Hodoş and Al. Sadi Ionescu. With an introduction by Ion Bianu. Tome I – *Catalog alfabetic 1820-1906* (Bucharest – Leipzig – Vienna, 1913), 86.

published an article which was reprinted in a number of newspapers in Romania. In that article, Vándory was urging that the recent frictions and Hungarian interdictions during the War of Independence (1877-1878),³⁶ which, according to his explanations, were to be understood only in the context of Hungary's antipathy towards Russia, should be forgotten.³⁷

As various contemporary testimonies show, in addition to the information present in the archival documents known so far about Vándory Lajos (such as those in the Fund of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs, kept at the Cluj County Service of the National Archives of Romania),³⁸ his activity on the territory of the Romanian state became more intense and productive in the first part of

³⁶ The conflict between Russia and Turkey in 1877-1878 is generally known in Romania as The War of Independence (sometimes presented as The Russo-Romanian-Turkish War - Războiul ruso-româno-turc), as the Romanian state gained its national independence following the participation at this conflict, a reality which was recognized in 1878 at San Stefano and Berlin.

³⁷ "O voce maghiară", *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, 42, no. 25 (29 March / 10 April 1879): 3: "Under this title, the Romanian newspapers in Romania published an article of the Hungarian paper «Bukaresti Hiradó» which we also reproduce, since we are convinced that our readers will know how to appreciate it, like many of our brothers from over there:

«The Prince of Romania sent two thousand francs to Count Hoyos, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, for the floods in Seghedin. This is the manifestation of a sentiment so noble that any comments become superfluous. The Romanian nation does not wait to be asked, urged only by the impulse of its own soul it comes and participates with generosity to the subscriptions. Nevertheless, the Romanian press all over the country and regardless of political orientation makes the warmest appeals to public generosity. It invites the Romanian nation to throw off the veil of oblivion over the interdiction of the Hungarian government in Sibiu (regarding the subscriptions for the Romanian wounded). Hungary has endured a terrible misfortune, and so it must be helped; this is the motto of the Romanian papers. However, we shall also say, let us throw away the veil of forgetfulness over the past and leave the criticism of that fact to history. Where the soul must work, let the political struggles cease. [...]

May Romania never need the generosity of others; may disaster never befall this beautiful country; - but should peril or misfortune ever strike it, may Romania be sure to find generous brothers in the sons of Hungary, in the Hungarian nation. For this nation is not ungrateful, it never forgets a good deed it has received. It proved this during the Russo-Turkish war when, in the face of the entire Europe, the Hungarian nation so warmly, one might say fanatically, protected the wretched sick man.

Only in this and in the Hungarian antipathy for the northern colossus should the Romanian nation seek to explain the exceptional attitude of the Hungarian nation towards the Romanian wounded two years ago, and not to attribute it to an antipathy for itself. Hungary will never forget the generosity of the Romanian Prince; Hungary will never forget the generosity of the Romanian nation; Hungary will pay respect to the Romanian press for its noble zeal.»

³⁸ See *Documente privind mișcarea națională a românilor din Transilvania*. Vol. I - 1881-1891. Introductory study by Șerban Polverejan (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1997), *passim*.

the 1880s.³⁹ A clear proof in this regard is brought by the more detailed data contained in these documents, many of which are, in fact, reports addressed by the editor of the Hungarian gazette in Bucharest to his superiors in Hungary. According to their contents, one may conclude that one of his main tasks was to gather information and monitor the so-called “Daco-Romanianists” – the persons from the Romanian Kingdom⁴⁰ or from Transylvania who supported the annexation of Transylvania and the Banat to Romania.⁴¹

In our opinion, this aspect should be connected not only to the more intensive activity of the Romanian society in the Old Kingdom and the establishment of structures explicitly targeting the matter of the Romanians in Transylvania (such as, for instance, the irredentist society “Carpații” / “The Carpathians”, founded in 1882), but also with the general situation in the Hungarian state, where systematic Magyarization measures were implemented. In this context, we must also mention the famous Central Society for the Magyarization of Names (Központi Névmagyarosító Társaság), created in 1881 in Budapest, headed by a figure too well-known to some of the Romanians in Transylvania, Telkes Simon, who, towards the end of the 19th century (more precisely, in 1897), one year after the celebration of the “Hungarian Millennium”, would write and publish an eloquent brochure for the Magyarization efforts, entitled *How do we Magyarize the surnames? (Hogy magyarosítsuk a vezetéknéveket?)*. Moreover, in 1885, the Hungarian Cultural Association in Transylvania (Erdélyi Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület – EMKE) was founded with the direct support of the Hungarian authorities, with the clear aim of assisting the Magyarization process and counteracting the actions of The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (Asociațiunea Transilvană pentru Literatura Română și Cultura Poporului Român – ASTRA).

Given all of these aspects, in addition to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania in 1881, as well as the firm attitude of the rulers in Bucharest regarding the Question of the Danube, to the displeasure of the Dual Monarchy,⁴² one can better understand the density of the reports and information sent by the Austro-Hungarian agents during that period.

³⁹ Neamțu, “Profilul spiritual, moral și fizic,” 414.

⁴⁰ Romania became a kingdom on 14/26 March 1881.

⁴¹ Neamțu, “Profilul spiritual, moral și fizic,” 413.

⁴² Gheorghe Nicolae Căzan, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *România și Tripla Alianță 1878-1914* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979), *passim*. More recently, with extensive explanations, Gheorghe Cliveti, *România modernă și “apogeul Europei” 1815-1914* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018), especially 674–1059.

Not without reason, in the summer of 1880, the journals *Gazeta Transilvaniei* and *România liberă* drew attention to the more than suspicious activities of Vándory Lajos, portrayed by the editors of the latter periodical as

“a Hungarian missionary who, subsidized by the government in Budapest, has, for several years, sought to spread ideas on the territory of Romania, ideas that have nothing to do with the interests or dignity of our state. So far, these attempts of Hungarian propaganda have been overlooked; the government may have told itself that it wants to be tolerant. But this is not tolerance, it is negligence, and, depending on the circumstances, negligence can become purely criminal.”⁴³

In that year, Vándory Lajos, despite being a Calvinist,⁴⁴ was elected chairman of a permanent committee of the Catholic community in Bucharest, and his first action was to petition the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, Count von Hoyos-Sprinzenstein, and the Roman Catholic Bishop, asking for support for the Hungarian-language education and for the strengthening of the Hungarian Catholic and Reformed Church in Romania.⁴⁵

An interesting episode took place the next year, 1881, in the period following the proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania. Thus, on 15/27 August 1881, the readers of the *Monitorul Oficial al României* could learn that, in accordance with the High Royal Decree no. 1927 of 4 August of the same year, King Carol I conferred the Order of the “Crown of Romania” (“Coroana României”), in various grades, to the

⁴³ “Cultul iubirei către ‘patria maghiară’,” *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, 43, no. 53 (3/15 July 1880): 2–3; “Propaganda ungurească în România,” *România liberă* [Bucharest], 4, no. 928 (6 July 1880): 3 – it reproduces the article in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, preceded by a comment of the editorial staff. Romanian original: “un misionar maghiar, care subvenționat de guvernul de la Budapesta, caută să propage de mai mulți ani pe teritoriul României idei, cari de fel nu se unesc nici cu interesele nici cu demnitatea statului nostru. Până acum s-au trecut cu vederea aceste încercări de propagandă maghiară; guvernul își va fi zis poate, că vrea să fie tolerant. Dar aceasta nu este toleranță, este neglijență, și neglijența poate deveni după împrejurări curată crimă.”

⁴⁴ See what seems to be his funeral notice, a document accessible online at <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-6QG7-H7X?i=189&wc=M6WK-RP8%3A101520701%2C104654001&cc=1542666> (accessed on 28 October 2023). The document also shows that he died in Török-Becsé at the age of 63, on 19 November 1897 and contains other several details regarding his family. I am grateful to the reviewers who brought this funeral notice to my attention.

⁴⁵ “Cultul iubirei către ‘patria maghiară’,” 3.

representatives of different foreign communities in the country who, on the occasion of the coronation festivities, had been delegated to express the devotion and gratitude of those communities. Among these representatives was, together with Veress Sándor, “Mr. Ludovic Vandory, head of the Hungarian society’s cortege,” who was the recipient of the “Crown of Romania” order with the rank of officer.⁴⁶ Although seemingly innocent, this episode raises some questions with regard to the relations in the high circles of Romanian politics which he managed to establish. By searching the available sources, one can identify a few names and implicitly some connections which, most probably, Vándory Lajos knew how to cultivate during his years in Romania. First of all, in an article from June 1884, which appeared in *România liberă*, the interesting idea that the *Bukaresti Híradó* gazette would have benefited from subsidies provided by the Romanian state was formulated, and Vasile Boierescu was the one incriminated:

“[...] the Hungarian pamphlet in the capital was subsidized by the Romanian government when the late Boierescu was a member for the last time. We do not know if the subsidy is still given to it today, there is no reason to believe it is not. The sheet had ceased after Mr. Boierescu’s departure from the ministry; but for some time now it has been appearing again, endorsing the government as before and reviling what is Romanian.”⁴⁷

He was also one of the acquaintances of C.A. Rosetti who, incidentally, presented him with the Order of the “Crown of Romania” in

⁴⁶ *Monitorul Oficial al României*, no. 109 (15/27 August 1881): 3359–3360: “**Rectification**. – In the Royal Decree No. 1.927, published in *Monitorul Oficial* No. 100 of 4 August this year, due to a manuscript error, it was omitted:

Mr. Ludovic Vandory, head of the cortege of the Hungarian society, with the rank of *officer* of the Order of the *Crown of Romania*, and *Mr. Moritz Blank*, banker, with the class of *knight* of the same order.” Romanian original: “**Rectificare**. – În înaltul decret regal, No. 1.927, publicat în *Monitorul oficial* No. 100, din 4 August a.c., din eroare de manuscris, s-a omis a se trece:

D. Ludovic Vandory, șeful cortegiului societății maghiare, cu gradul de *ofițer* al ordinului *Coroana României*, și *D. Moritz Blank*, bancher, cu gradul de *cavaler*, al aceluiași ordin.”

⁴⁷ “Ceea ce se poate întâmpla la noi,” *România liberă*, 8, no. 2083 (16 June 1884): 3. Romanian original: “[...] pamfletul unguresc din capitală a fost subvenționat de guvernul român pe când se găsea într-însul, pentru ultima oară, reposatul Boierescu. Nu știm dacă subvențiunea nu i se dă și astăzi, nimic nu ne legitimează a crede că nu. Foaia încetase după eșirea din minister a d-lui Vasile Boierescu; de câțva timp apare însă din nou, cădelnițând guvernul, ca și mai înainte și hulind ceea ce este românesc.”

the name of King Carol I.⁴⁸ Other names which had been in contact with Vándory Lajos in various contexts are V.A. Urechia and Gheorghe Chițu, in their capacity as Minister of Public Instruction, respectively Minister of Justice.⁴⁹ Last but not least, most probably as a result of these connections, but also of the status he was able to gain within the Hungarian society in Bucharest, in the same month of August 1881, he went to Sinaia, where Count Andrassy, former imperial foreign minister of the Dual Monarchy paid a private visit to King Carol I. According to contemporary accounts, following an hour-long discussion with C.A. Rosetti, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Andrassy received the Hungarian gazetteers Vándory and Berengi:

“He told them that he had come to Sinaia as a private individual, particularly in response to the King's invitation. The Count dismissed the reports of Romanian agitation in Hungary as falsehoods. The interest of the Romanians and Hungarians is to fight together against the Slavic influence; from this viewpoint both countries are natural allies.”⁵⁰

Having had access to an article from 2003 written by the late researcher Gelu Neamțu from Cluj (practically one of the two most thorough studies we have identified so far in the Romanian historiography on the subject under scrutiny in the present paper), we can even outline a physical and moral profile of this interesting figure. Analysing a number of documents from the archives in Cluj, Gelu Neamțu identified the passport that Vándory Lajos used at a certain time on the Romanian territory. His features are those of a person with an ordinary physiognomy, who did not stand out in any particular way: “Height: medium. Face: round. Hair: brown. Eyes: brown. Mouth: ordinary. Nose: normal. Distinguishing marks: -.”⁵¹

As for the moral profile of Vándory Lajos, the researcher from Cluj showed that this is especially evident from his personal business,

⁴⁸ Hencz, *Magyarok román világban / Maghiarii în universul românesc*, 25; Hencz, *Bucureștiul maghiar*, 70.

⁴⁹ “Sibiu 28 Iunie,” *Telegraful Român* [Sibiu], 30, no. 74 (29 June / 11 July 1882): 1.

⁵⁰ *România liberă*, 5, no. 1257 (22 August 1881): 1. Romanian original: “Aceștia le-a comunicat, că el a venit la Sinaia ca persoană privată și special numai la invitarea regelui. Conte a calificat ca mincinoase știrile despre o agitațiune a României în Ungaria. Interesul Românilor și al Ungurilor este a lupta în comun contra curențului slav; din punctul de vedere al acestei tendințe ambele țări sunt nește aliate naturale.”

⁵¹ Neamțu, “Profilul spiritual, moral și fizic,” 418 – Annex I.

“which was nothing but a pitiful, yet very profitable swindle (the spy was «clever»): he identified Romanian emigrants from Transylvania who had kept their citizenship and therefore were required, according to the laws in force in Austria-Hungary, to return home, in order to complete their military duty. After identifying the boys in question, he assured them that he could exempt them from the army, taking from them, in exchange, large and hard-earned amounts of money, but without doing anything about the exemption from the army. This extortion was practiced on a scale large enough to reach the ears of the embassy, which opened an investigation, eventually finding him guilty.”⁵²

Moreover, in 1885, the Hungarian Society in Bucharest (Bukarest Magyar Társulat) and the curator of the Evangelical-Reformed parish in the capital submitted a complaint to the Austro-Hungarian authorities, in which he was called a swindler and accused of “stirring up misunderstandings and agitating nationalities by various means against each other.”⁵³

From our point of view, in addition to the picture that the researcher in Cluj outlined for him, we cannot ignore the fact that Vándory Lajos was as suited as possible for his mission, proving self-control and the ability to react quickly even in conflict situations. The best example in this sense can be found in the pages of the newspaper *România liberă* which, in its issue of 4 May 1885 published the following news report:

“Last night, between 10 and 11 o’clock, Mr. Vandory Lajos, the director of «Bukaresti Hirado», was attacked by a thug in the pass under the Metropolitan’s hill. Asked in a threatening manner by the thug to give him 20 lei, Mr. Vandory quickly responded with two slaps which confused the assailant and gave him time to call the police. The thug is arrested.”⁵⁴

At the end of 1885, Vándory Lajos left Romania for Serbia, another area from which Budapest’s interests needed the most reliable and relevant information. With his departure, the existence of the second

⁵² Ibid., 416.

⁵³ Ibid., 416 and 423 – Annex VI.

⁵⁴ *România liberă*, 9, no. 2337 (4 May 1885): 4.

Hungarian-language gazette in the Romanian extra-Carpathian space was officially ended, the last issue of *Bukaresti Híradó* appearing on 3 October 1885. Although known fairly little within the Romanian historiography, both the person and the activity of the editor-in-chief Vándory Lajos and the gazette he edited in Bucharest certainly deserve a broader and more in-depth analysis, without neglecting the fact that the existing sources in Hungarian are richer in information and at least some of them are somewhat easier to access now, thanks to the progresses made by the digitization technology in recent years.