

Changes in the Recruitment of Transylvanian Local Government Representatives (Lord Lieutenants and Prefects) During and After the First World War

Judit PÁL

Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca

E-mail: pal.judit@ubbcluj.ro

Article: history; Received: 21.09.2023; Revised: 29.10.2023

Accepted: 03.11.2023; Available online: 30.01.2024

©2023 Studia UBB Historia. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Abstract: The study explores the changes in the Transylvanian Lord Lieutenants' corps during and after the First World War, using a prosopographical approach. The comparative analysis of the Lord Lieutenants' and prefects' corps in 1918-1919 aims to examine the impact of various political and regime changes on the recruitment of these high officials. In the autumn of 1918, one can already talk of a partial change of the elite, since part of the newly appointed Lord Lieutenants had a very different social and family background than their predecessors. When the political status of Transylvania changed, at the end of 1918 and in 1919, it brought further, more radical changes atop the administrative elite: the Hungarian Lord Lieutenants were replaced by Romanian prefects, who did have the necessary qualifications, but who had no prior experience in local government.

Keywords: Lord Lieutenant, prefect, elite change, Transylvania, 1918, First World War, recruitment

Rezumat: Studiul explorează schimbările din corpul comiţilor supremi transilvăneni în timpul Primului Război Mondial şi imediat după aceea, folosind o abordare prosopografică. Analiza comparativă a comiţilor supremi şi a prefectilor din 1918-1919 are ca scop examinarea impactului diferitelor schimbări politice şi de regim asupra recrutării acestor înalţi funcţionari. În toamna anului 1918, se poate vorbi deja de o schimbare parţială a elitei, deoarece o parte dintre comiţii supremi nou numiţi aveau un mediu social şi familial foarte diferit de cel al predecesorilor lor. Când statutul politic al Transilvaniei s-a schimbat, la sfârşitul anului 1918 şi în 1919, a adus alte schimbări, mai radicale, la vârful elitei

administrative: comiții supremi maghiari au fost înlocuiți cu prefecti români, care aveau într-adevăr calificările necesare, dar care nu aveau experiență anterioară în administrația locală.

Cuvinte cheie: comite suprem, prefect, elite și schimbare, Transilvania, 1918, Primul Război Mondial

The study will explore the changes in the Transylvanian Lord Lieutenants'/prefects' corps during and after the First World War – using a prosopographical approach –, to observe the impact of various political and regime changes on the recruitment of these high officials.¹ Although my research has examined several indicators, this paper will focus only on changes in the social background of the local government representatives.

Legal status of the Lord Lieutenants/prefects

Within the administrative system in Hungary, the key unit was the county (*vármegye*), which preserved a part of its autonomy and self-administration rights. However, this autonomy was increasingly diminished even before First World War. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the public administration underwent major changes (Law XLII of 1870). These changes introduced increased competences for Lord Lieutenants – a trend that was to grow over the coming years. The main competence of the Lord Lieutenants – who represented the government in the counties – was to control the county administration and to ensure that government policy was enforced. They also functioned as presidents of the main body of the public administration, the county general assembly – made up of half of the elected members and half of the largest tax-payers (the so-called *virilists*). After 1876, administrative committees were formed in the counties to coordinate the activities of various branches of public administration, also headed by the Lord Lieutenants, whose influence became even stronger especially because of the disciplinary cases referred to the authority of the committee. A decade later, Law XXI of 1886 further expanded the competences of the Lord Lieutenants, they also became chief executive officers of the state bodies functioning on the territory of their county and, in special cases and when the “pressing interest” of the state

¹ The study was supported by the project K 134378 Parliamentarism in the era of Dualism from a regional perspective, funded by Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Fund (NKFI).

A version of the study was published in Hungarian: Judit Pál, “Főispánok és prefektusok 1918–1919-ben: a közigazgatási átmenet kérdése Erdélyben (Lord Lieutenants and prefects in 1918-1919: the question of administrative transition in Transylvania),” *Századok* 152, no. 6 (2018): 1179–1214.

were at stake, they had the power to issue decrees without consulting the county administrative body.²

After the outbreak of the First World War, they were also appointed government commissioners based on Law no. LXIII of 1912 regarding special measures in case of warfare.³ This again increased their authority, because government commissioners had special powers, such as disposing of the legal and state institutions in their region of operation if needed. If the latter did not obey, their activity could be suspended by the commissioner.

After the war, Decree I of the Romanian Ruling Council, issued on 24 January 1919, temporarily and for the sake of continuity, left in force for the time being – with a few exceptions – the previous laws and decrees; it also made Romanian the official language. Therefore, during the transitional period, between 1919 and 1925, the old Hungarian laws remained in force, with several amendments. The powers of the prefects – as the Lord Lieutenants were now called – were determined by the provisions of Act XXI from 1886 and other laws and decrees concerning the public administration.⁴

Even though power started to be taken away from the local governments already in 1918, there was a marked difference between the public administration before and after 1918. The institution of the government commissioners somewhat anticipated the broad powers later bestowed on the prefects. Yet, all the powers the prefect had were dwarfed by those already provided by the Decree II of the Romanian Ruling Council (*Consiliul Dirigent*) by suspension of the municipal committees and the appointment of state officials who used to be elected. The Administrative Committee was maintained by decree, but its elected members were also appointed by the prefect. Latter decrees all provided the central power with a vigorous grasp over the institutions and officials of the local government – with more or less significant variations.⁵

² Judit Pál, “Research on High Hungarian Officials in the Dual Monarchy: The Case of Transylvanian Lord-Lieutenants,” in *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond: Bureaucracy and Civil Servants from the Vormärz to the Inter-War Years*, eds. Franz Adlgasser – Fredrik Lindström (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019), 149–166.

³ Árpád Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom jogi szabályozása Magyarországon az első világháború előestéjén (The legal regulation of exceptional power in Hungary on the eve of the First World War),” *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nominatae. Acta Juridica et Politica* 50, fasc. 13 (1996): 3–95.

⁴ Augustin Galea, *Formarea și activitatea Consiliului Dirigent al Transilvaniei, Banatului și Ținuturilor românești din Ungaria (2 decembrie 1918 –10 aprilie 1920)* (Târgu Mureș: Tipomur, 1996), 446–450.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The situation underwent another significant change following the administrative unification of Romania in 1925. Under the 1925 Act, the counties were headed by prefects, appointed by the government. On the one hand, the prefect represented state power and had a supervisory role, and on the other hand, he was the *de facto* head of the county administration, so that most of the pre-1918 deputy Lord Lieutenant's functions (*alispán*) were transferred to him.⁶

The "traditional group" of the Lord Lieutenants

During the 19th century, the tendency was usually to appoint a respectable landlord from the region as lord-lieutenant. Variations of the same elements can be observed in the reasoning behind appointments even until the end of the World War. To give an example from a nomination proposal for a lord-lieutenant's position of 1917: "practical knowledge of public administration, excellent personal abilities, distinguished family and social ties, independent financial status, complete trustworthiness in politics and good sense in leading and handling public life" were the reassurances that this individual would be successful as a Lord Lieutenant.⁷ Good social relations and an independent financial situation were stated in almost all recommendations, showing what the "archetype" of the Lord Lieutenant was in the eyes of the government over the entire period.

If we look at the last so called "traditional group" of the Transylvanian Lord Lieutenants appointed before the last year of the Great War and in office at the beginning of 1918, we will encounter a picture that reflects the dualist period.⁸ Lord Lieutenants were appointed for an unspecified period by the ruler on the proposal of the Hungarian government (minister of interior), but it became customary that if the government resigned, so did the Lord Lieutenants - or at least they submitted their resignations. As political divisions deepened, there was an increasing turnover within the Lord Lieutenants corps, and in 1917,

⁶ Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Hamangiu, 2006), 202–203; Florin Andrei Sora, "A difficult modernization: the institution of the prefect in Greater Romania, 1918–1940," *Analele Universității București* 42, no. 1 (2014): 45–63. For changes in public administration, see: Judit Pál – Vlad Popovici, "Între autonomie și centralism: administrația comitatelor/județelor din Transilvania între 1867–1925," in *Pasiune și rigoare: noi tentații istoriografice: Omagiu profesorului Ovidiu Ghitta*, eds. Ionuț Costea, Radu Mârza, Valentin Orga (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut – Mega, 2022), 537–560.

⁷ Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, MNL OL), K 148 Ministry of Interior, Presidential Acts, 1917-11-17404. Proposal regarding the appointment of Deputy Béla Barabás as Lord Lieutenant, 14 June 1917.

⁸ The study covers only the 15 counties of historical Transylvania.

following the appointment of Count Móric Esterházy's government, there were significant changes in personnel. This was illustrated by the appointment of new Lord Lieutenants to head 12 of the 15 Transylvanian counties.⁹ Only the two Saxon-dominated counties, Brassó (Braşov – Count Zsigmond Mikes) and Szeben (Sibiu – Friedrich Walbaum), and the Romanian county of Fogaras (Făgăraş – József Széll) retained their old Lord Lieutenants, but the latter also changed in the spring of 1918.

Many of the new Lord Lieutenants appointed in 1917 represented continuity, either personally or within their families, as members of the traditional elite that had been at the head of the Transylvanian counties for centuries. Baron Kázmér Bánffy was the son of Lord Lieutenant and later Prime Minister Dezső Bánffy; in the case of Count Sándor Bethlen, his uncle, his cousin and several of his other relatives had all been Lord Lieutenants; the uncle of the Lord Lieutenant of Hunyad (Hunedoara) county, Béla Pogány had occupied the same position in the same county before him. András Ugron, was the son of the famous (and notorious) opposition leader and MP, Gábor Ugron senior. His brother, Gábor Ugron junior, former Lord Lieutenant of Maros-Torda (Mureş-Turda) county was the Minister of interior in the Esterházy government, so it was he who ultimately recommended his then 32-year-old brother for the position.¹⁰

More than half of the Lord Lieutenants had been appointed after a long career in public administration. Friedrich Walbaum, the Lord Lieutenant of Szeben county – the only Lord Lieutenant of Saxon origin – had spent several decades in public administration before having been appointed. He started his career in Szeben county in 1886, then held various positions in Nagy-Küküllő (Târnava Mare) county; and from 1897 he was the mayor of Sighişoara (Segesvár/Schäßburg).¹¹ In 1910, during his mandate as a mayor, he was appointed Lord Lieutenant, a practice rather unusual in that period.

Changes are well-reflected in the fact that he was not the only mayor among the newly appointed Lord Lieutenants: György Lengyel, appointed as Lord Lieutenant of Udvarhely (Odorhei) county had been a secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, then chief county notary (*főjegyző*) in

⁹ Most of them were appointed by the monarch on 7 July. *Belügyi Közlöny* 22, no. 32 (1917) 999–1000.

¹⁰ MNL OL K 27 Minutes of the Council of Ministers (Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek), July 3, 1917, no. 13.

¹¹ The data come from my own data collection, and for career information I have used, in addition to archival sources, the Officer's Directory (*Magyarország tiszti cím- és névtára*) published annually after 1886.

another county, then finally the mayor of Aiud (Nagyenyed) for two years. Béla Pogány and Aladár Király were Deputy Lord Lieutenants in the respective counties they have been appointed to as Lord Lieutenants. The Deputy Lord Lieutenant (*alispán*) was the head of the county clerks and also the highest position a person could be elected for in a county. Formerly, Király had been a public prosecutor for a long time. András Ugron, the Lord Lieutenant of Beszterce-Naszód (Bistrița-Năsăud), also spent more than a decade in the service of Maros-Torda (Mureș-Turda) county as a sheriff (*szolgabíró*) and later as high sheriff (*főszolgabíró*).

In contrast to the first group, there were some who were appointed Lord Lieutenants without any prior experience: some of them were lawyers and/or land owners. A special case was Nándor Inczedy-Joksmán, Lord Lieutenant of Maros-Torda county who had studied law, opted to pursue a career in the military afterward. He joined the Hungarian Noble Guard as a hussar captain in 1911, and held the rank of major in 1916.¹² Formerly military officers had been very rarely appointed as Lord Lieutenants and even if it happened, only retired officers were chosen.

Although there were many Lord Lieutenants of aristocratic origin, not everyone's career advancement was accelerated by their rank. Among the 15 Transylvanian Lord Lieutenants, five were of aristocratic origin, which concurs with the traditional custom.¹³ However, a more in-depth scrutiny reveals that their case is not simply one of tradition living on. Baron Zsigmond Diószeghy found himself in quite a difficult position when the Károlyi government superannuated him in 1918; as he himself confessed: "besides the small, debt-ridden domain that I had inherited I had no other sources of income to secure a living for my family of six."¹⁴ His career was rather atypical, in the sense that he was first a public clerk of lower status, then the mayor of the Zalău (Zilah) for 18 years. Count Sándor Bethlen, whose grandfather had also been the Lord Lieutenant of Torda-Aranyos (Turda-Arieș) county, was born an illegitimate child and was only later legitimized.¹⁵ He had to start from the lowest position as

¹² *A magyar testőrségek évkönyve 1760–1918*, ed. Kálmán Hellebronth (Budapest: Stádium Sajtóvállalat, s. a.), 494.

¹³ This is roughly the average for the whole period in Hungary. Magdolna Balázs, "A középszintű közigazgatási apparátus személyi állományának vizsgálata a dualizmus időszakában," *Történelmi Szemle* 29, no. 1 (1986): (116–124) 124.

¹⁴ "[...] adóssággal túlterhelt kevés öröklött birtokomon kívül semmi más jövedelmi forrással nem rendelkezem, amiből hat tagból álló családomat eltarthatnám". Diószeghy to the Minister of Interior, November 21, 1918. MNL OL K 148 1918-11-690.

¹⁵ János József Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség XX. századi genealógiája*, vol. I (Budapest: Natura, 1990), 156.

well – probably his illegitimate birth also contributed to this –; still, when he was appointed Lord Lieutenant, he was only deputy chief county notary.¹⁶ Even Kázmér Bánffy, the son of the former Prime Minister, despite his aristocratic origin, had to go through every step of the public administration ladder: he started as a public administration intern (*közigazgatási gyakornok*), then he served as sheriff, as a chief county notary, then in 1907 he became Deputy Lord Lieutenant and he was appointed Lord Lieutenant only at 51.¹⁷

All Lord Lieutenants held a university degree in law and political science, and several of them (40%) had even a PhD. Some of them were working as lawyers at the time of their appointment – Lajos Tolnay Lord Lieutenant of Csík County, former lawyer in Deva, Elemér Gyárfás, Lord Lieutenant of Kis-Küküllő County and Emil Petrichevich-Horváth, Lord Lieutenant of Nagy-Küküllő County, but the latter two also had smaller land holdings – a sign of the opening of a new era.

The later career of the Lord Lieutenants is not the topic of the paper hereby. Some of them continued to pursue their careers in Hungary, others remained in Transylvania. Among those in the first group, the brightest career was made by state secretary Emil Petrichevich-Horváth, the manager of the National Office for Refugees, representative in the House of Commons, a university professor who attracted contradictory opinions among his contemporaries. Among those who stayed in Transylvania, the most important role was played by Elemér Gyárfás, a former senator, the lay president of the Self-Governing Body of the Roman-Catholic Church of Transylvania, a leading member of the National Hungarian Party, and the president of the Hungarian Ethnic Community in Romania during World War II.¹⁸

Lord Lieutenants of the Károlyi government

The losses in the World War and the news about the dissolution of the Monarchy led to the breakout of the so-called Aster Revolution in Budapest by the end of October 1918. The government led by Mihály Károlyi came to power by promising instant measures to restore peace and democratic reforms, but mostly had neither the time nor the

¹⁶ We have to take into consideration that he was 15 years younger than Bánffy.

¹⁷ The average age of appointment was between 40 and 50. Balázs, "A középszintű közigazgatási apparátus," 124.

¹⁸ See Gyárfás Elemér, a "civil püspök". *A Gyárfás Elemér halálának 70. évfordulója alkalmából tartott emlékkonferencia előadásai* (Elemér Gyárfás, the "civil bishop". Papers presented at the conference commemorating the 70th anniversary of the death of Elemér Gyárfás), ed. László Holló (Kolozsvár: Verbum Keresztény Kulturális Egyesület, 2016).

opportunity to put them into practice. To overcome the chaotic situation, it was important to consolidate the administration. New Lord Lieutenants were to be appointed to head the counties, but this was not easy, as each of the three parties in the coalition that formed the government wanted to gain as many positions as possible. The situation was further complicated by the emergence of multiple authorities. Everywhere in Hungary national councils were formed in the towns and villages and at county level, partly as a local initiative, but in most places mainly at the appeal of the National Council in Budapest. Later also the national militias were created. In Transylvania, national councils and militias were formed according to each nationality.¹⁹

Members of the coalition government engaged in intense debates regarding the appointments to Lord Lieutenant/government commissioner position, even on the eve of the catastrophe. “Even the preliminary appointments took a heavy toll on my nerves, since for every government commissioner position, I had to endure debates that lasted for several weeks” – wrote Kázmér Batthányi, the first Minister of the Interior of the Károlyi government.²⁰ For the moment he sent a telegraph to all Lord Lieutenants asking them “to continue to temporarily fulfil your duties in regard of the present extraordinary circumstances.”²¹ At first, his appeal was approved, but soon troubling news came regarding the failure of public security and public order. In this difficult situation, the Lord Lieutenants were also assigned the role of government commissioners.²² Nándor Inczédy-Joksman, the Lord Lieutenant of Maros-Torda County, in the same telegram, in which he indicated that he would be happy to fulfil his “patriotic duty”, also referred to the fact that “anomalies concerning the demobilization of soldiers are also on the agenda in Maros-Torda County.”²³

Batthyány was heavily criticized by members of the government and by the national committees and the press for the appointment of

¹⁹ See Pál Hatos, *Az elátkozott köztársaság. Az 1918-as összeomlás és forradalom története* (The cursed republic: The history of the collapse and revolution of 1918) (Budapest: Jaffa, 2018).

²⁰ “Már az előzetes kinevezések is ugyancsak kemény próbára tették idegeimet, mert hisz minden egyes kormánybiztosi állás körül hetekig tartó harcokat kellett megvívnom [...]”. Tivadar Batthány, *Beszámoló* (My testimonial) (Budapest: Szépművés, 2017), 402.

²¹ “[...] a jelenlegi rendkívüli viszonyokra való tekintettel főispáni teendőket ideiglenesen továbbra is ellátni szíveskedjék.” MNL OL K 148, 1918-11-8906.

²² See Judit Pál, “The System of Government Commissioners during the First World War and the Organization of the Government High Commissioners Office in Transylvania,” *Studia Universitatis „Babeş-Bolyai”*, *Historia*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2018): 62–98.

²³ “[...] katonák leszerelésével kapcsolatos rendellenességek Marostorda vármegyében is napirenden vannak”. Inczédy-Joksman to the Minister of Interior, November 11, 1918. MNL OL K 148, 1918-11-8906.

persons sympathizing with the former Labour Party (*Nemzeti Munkapárt*) government and for leaving formerly appointed people in their position. Batthyány himself opined that “the appointment of government commissioners was one of the major weaknesses,” by which they wanted to flunk his position.²⁴ In regard to this matter, he notes one case when in one of the counties with a population of mixed ethnicity he wanted to appoint a landlord of that county recommended also by István Apáthy, the president of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania and later high government commissioner for Transylvania and Eastern Hungary²⁵ and – what follows here is typical – “also by all the Transylvanian gentlemen sympathizing with us.” But Oszkár Jászi, the Minister of Nationalities “did an emphatic philippic” in the Council of the ministers against the appointee and he suggested instead “a local man whose name was unknown to everybody,” who turned out to be a county clerk and who established a “Jászi party” with three other fellows.²⁶

The above case concerns the county of Kis-Küküllő (Târnava Mică). There, the former Lord Lieutenant, Elemér Gyárfás, who had resigned in the spring of 1918, organised the county’s Hungarian National Council and became its president. On 4 November, he appealed to the Minister of the Interior for the appointment of a new Lord Lieutenant. His candidate was László Kispál, “who has been enthusiastically championing the ideals of the Károlyi party in our county for years.”²⁷ Kispál was a member of the local Hungarian elite, and in the years around the war his name is mentioned as a landowner, mill owner and manager of a local bank. Afterwards, numerous urgings were sent to the Minister of the Interior, offering that if Kispál was not found suitable, someone else would be nominated. Meanwhile, the name of a 26-year-old comptroller also emerged as a possible candidate, reportedly recommended by the Romanian National Committee, as recently as early November. Subsequently, this candidate also received the support of the Civic Radical Party (*Polgári Radikális Párt*). Kispál tried to lobby for

²⁴ Batthyány, *Beszámolóm*, 404.

²⁵ At the beginning of December, the Hungarian government appointed a high government commissioner and created a High Commissioner’s Office in Cluj, to which university professor István Apáthy was appointed. Yet, the Commissioner’s Office was in place only for a month and a half, since Romanian troops entered Cluj during the Christmas of 1918. See Pál, “The System of Government Commissioners.”

²⁶ Batthyány, *Beszámolóm*, 403–4.

²⁷ “[...] ki vármegyénkben évek óta lelkesen képviseli Károlyi-párt eszméit”. MNL OL K 803 PTI 606 f 3 Törvényhatóságok táviratai (Telegrams from municipalities), vol. 29. Kis-Küküllő vármegye.

himself, even by travelling to Budapest, arguing that “we are directly facing the Romanian occupation, and thus we are exposed to the Romanians themselves assuming control of the administration of a county where the majority is not Romanian.”²⁸ His appointment was also supported by Apáthy. On 23 November, however, on behalf of the local Radical and Social Democratic Party, a protest was lodged against the appointment of Kispál, who they presented as “a typical representative of the old chauvinist Junker system.”²⁹ The debate lasted until the end of the year and finally the position was filled by a prefect appointed by the Romanian Ruling Council. This case well exemplifies the struggles within the Council of Ministers. At the same time, this shows that although Apáthy tried to assert his authority, which in principle covered the whole of Transylvania, this was limited by the government at the top, but also by the various interest groups at the bottom.

Taking advantage of the revolutionary circumstances, new people appeared on the scene and established new parties, became part of the new governmental institutions, national councils and for a very short time they became part of the political games. This was likely a result of both insufficient information gathering power struggles. It is symptomatic that on the Council of Ministers of 12th November 1918, when a mass government commissioner appointment took place, from among the 15 Transylvanian counties, they managed to appoint a government commissioner in only three (Csík/Ciuc, Háromszék/Trei Scaune and Udvarhely/Odorhei – all three predominantly populated by ethnic Hungarians).³⁰

Taking advantage of the revolutionary circumstances, new people appeared on the scene who established new parties, became part of the new governmental institutions, national councils and, for a very short time, they became part of the political games. In November and December of 1918, appointments were made in a state of panic. The revolutionary winds were reaching Transylvania, as well, a fact that was

²⁸ “Közvetlen a román megszállás előtt állunk, és így annak vagyunk kitéve, hogy a románok maguk veszik át a gazdátlaná vált közigazgatást abban a vármegyében, amelynek majoritása nem román [...]”. Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The period of administrative transition in the three counties is well explored: Botond Nagy, “Háromszék közigazgatása 1918–1940 között (The administration of Háromszék between 1918 and 1940),” *Areopolisz. Történelmi és társadalomtudományi tanulmányok XIV* (Székelyudvarhely 2015): 159–194; Csaba Gidó, “Udvarhely megye közigazgatás-története impériumváltástól impériumváltásig (1918–1940)”, *ibid.* 225–277; Csongor Szabó, “Csík vármegye közigazgatása 1918–1940,” *Magyar Kisebbség* 19, no. 3-4 (2014): 220-231; 20, no. 1-2 (2015): 221–270.

evidently apparent in the appointment of the Lord Lieutenants endowed with government commissioners' powers: novices who earlier had no chance of occupying such a position appeared on the scene. Some were lawyers, bank managers, secretaries of the former Lord Lieutenant, deputy town clerks and gymnasium professors. But the government also tried to convince some of the formerly appointed Lord Lieutenants to continue in their position – those who were willing and those to whom the appointing committee did not object too vehemently. However, an obvious proof of the difficulties is that in half of the Transylvanian counties the position of the Lord Lieutenant was not properly filled, given that the Deputy Lord Lieutenants were partly endowed with Lord Lieutenant powers.

The situation in Beszterce-Naszód county illustrates the chaotic situation of the last months: in the spring of 1918, András Ugron, the Lord Lieutenant, resigned, but his place was not filled; on 28 September, Nándor Inczédy-Joksmán, the Government Commissioner of the Maros-Torda (Mureş-Turda) County, was appointed to replace him; on 30 November, the Deputy Lord Lieutenant was appointed to take over the duties of the Lord Lieutenant; on 21 December, the Council of Ministers again appointed Ugron as Government Commissioner, but by then the Hungarian government had definitively lost control of the Transylvanian counties.

It was as a result of the agreements of the coalition parties that József Halász, a Social Democrat and the manager of the local Agricultural Bank was appointed Lord Lieutenant in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely).³¹ Halász was born in Western Hungary and came to Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) as a bank clerk. There he was one of the initiators and organizers of the Free School for Workers and the Workers' Lodgings, he held presentations about Marxism and he also became the President of the Social Democratic party. Despite the fact that Minister Oszkár Jászi, when he resigned, argued, among other things, that "the spirit of the power apparatus remains the same,"³² at the appointments of December leftist leanings can be easily observed. Social Democrats and radicals gained momentum. This was another sign of changing times since the Károlyi government rose to power.

³¹ "Szocialista főispán" (Socialist Lord Lieutenant), *Tükör* 6, no. 52 (19.11.1918): 1.

³² Oszkár Jászi to Mihály Károlyi, December 10, 1918. In: *Károlyi Mihály levelezése* (Correspondence of Mihály Károlyi), vol. I. 1905–1920, ed. György Litván (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1978), 320–321.

The new Transylvanian prefects

After the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy lost the war, Transylvania and the Transylvanian public administration went through several radical changes. Even though the peace treaty was signed only in 1920, Transylvania became *de facto* part of Romania earlier. From the outset, it has been important for the Romanian Ruling Council to control the administration on all levels, if possible.³³ This process accelerated after the arrival of the Romanian army. The elite group of the Lord Lieutenants was also quickly and in a radical manner changed at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919. Lord Lieutenants appointed by the Hungarian government were forced out and replaced by prefects appointed by the Ruling Council, which functioned as the interim regional government.

The prefects had to effectively manage and supervise the public administration of the county, but their position was also a political office. Prefects had powers that were both greater and lesser in comparison to Lord Lieutenants. Their main task was to take over the public services, to control the old civil servants still in office, to fill key-positions with trustworthy persons (mainly Romanians), and to create the Romanian public administration. And they did have the proper means to do just that.

Looking at who the Ruling Council appointed as prefects at the beginning of 1919 in Transylvania, we must note that they were very thoughtful about putting the very delicate matter of the transfer of power into the hands of properly qualified people. Upon the initial appointments, it becomes immediately apparent that all the individuals selected, with the exception of one, held a PhD. The exception was military officer Valer Neamțu, who was first appointed as a prefect of Ciuc (Csík) county, then to the most resistant county, Odorhei (Udvarhely) – in which case it is important to note that both were counties inhabited by a majority of ethnic Hungarians. The others – except for two physicians – were lawyers with a PhD in law. There are numerous studies about the role of lawyers in modern political life; from as early as the second half of the 19th century, a high percentage of the representatives of the House of Commons were lawyers.³⁴ However, in this case, we must also note that the Transylvanian Romanian elite was a

³³ Gheorghe Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent la consolidarea statului național unitar român (1918–1920)* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1985).

³⁴ For their proportion among MPs, see: Maurizio Cotta, Heinrich Best, “Between Professionalization and Democratization: A Synoptic View on the Making of the European Representative,” in: *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848–2000. Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries*, eds. Heinrich Best, Maurizio Cotta (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 510–511.

rather narrow strata of the Romanian society and still a significant proportion of this elite were Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox priests.³⁵ Public servants who served under the Hungarian government – or some of them – were not deemed reliable enough, and were too few in number compared to the Romanian population, so it was obvious that qualified freelancer intellectuals should be appointed to such positions. Since in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, legal and political studies qualified a person to work as an official in public administration, lawyers were the most eligible for such a position. Even before 1918, the Lord Lieutenants were predominantly law graduates.

Most of the prefects graduated from the university of Cluj (Kolozsvár), but four of them pursued studies either partially or entirely in Budapest, while two of them studied in Vienna as well, the same as the two physicians.³⁶ Several of them attended university subsidized by the Gozsdu (Gojdu) Foundation,³⁷ since almost all of them came from families with modest means – as the data preserved in this regard shows: they came from families of peasants or teachers. It is known that two of them were sons of priests (Valentin Poruțiu and George Baiulescu)³⁸ and Silviu Moldovan's father was a sheriff for a period. In a paper co-authored with Vlad Popovici, we studied the county officials in office in 1925 and they had similar family origins.³⁹ The average age of the prefects was 51, but there was a wide range: the two oldest (George Baiulescu and Teodor Mihali) were 64, while the youngest was 36 (Marțian Căluțiu).⁴⁰

The most renowned of the prefects appointed in 1919 was Teodor Mihali who probably initially set out to become more than a mere prefect. Mihali was also a lawyer in Dej, the seat of Solnoc-Dăbâca (Szolnok-

³⁵ The role of the lay intelligentsia, however, increased significantly during the period of dualism, and they took over the leadership of the national movement early on. See Vlad Popovici, "Elita politică românească în Transilvania (1861-1881). O perspectivă alternativă," in: *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Seria Historica*, 14 (2010): 213–227.

³⁶ For brief biographies of several of them, see Vasile Lechințan, *Oficiali de stat români din Transilvania (1368–1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2003).

³⁷ Most of the scholarship holders studied law. Maria Berényi, *Istoria Fundației Gojdu (1870–1952) / A Gozsdu Alapítvány története (1870–1952)* (Budapest: Societatea culturală a românilor din Budapesta, 1995), 47–48.

³⁸ Rozalinda Posea, "George Baiulescu – aspecte din activitatea de pedagog și medic la Brașov," in: *Țara Bârsei*, 9 (2010): (108–112) 108.

³⁹ Judit Pál, Vlad Popovici, "Corpul prim-pretorilor din Transilvania între 1918 și 1925. O analiză prosopografică," in: *Servitorii Statului: funcționari, funcții și funcționarism în România modernă (1830–1948)*, eds. Judit Pál, Vlad Popovici, Andrei Florin Sora (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2022), 241–275.

⁴⁰ The dates of birth of three people could not be found.

Doboka) county. Additionally, he was one of the founders of the local Romanian bank and Romanian club (*Casina*), a supporter of and an organizer in the local branch of the Romanian Cultural and Literary Association (ASTRA) and in general of the social and cultural life of the Romanians. Since 1905, he was a Parliament representative of the National Party of the Romanians and he was one of the authors of the declaration that Alexandru Vaida-Voevod read in front of Parliament in which self-government was declared in 1918 in the name of the Romanians of Hungary. He was one of the vice-presidents of the Great Romanian National Assembly of Alba Iulia and of the Great Council. And, after George Pop de Băsești's death in 1919, he became leader of the National Romanian Party. Despite of all of the above involvements and accomplishments, he was not appointed to any nationally important office. It is probable that his disappointment was one of the factors that made him leave the party in 1920 and become a member in the People's Party (*Partidul Poporului*) lead by Alexandru Averescu alongside the group lead by Octavian Goga. Later, he was a representative in the Romanian House of Commons, a senator and also the mayor of Cluj (1926, 1927-1931).⁴¹

Prefects in general – as Lord Lieutenants were named after 1919 – were appointed from among members of the Romanian elite that were active and dedicated to the Romanian national interests. They used to take part in the events of the local branches of the ASTRA and the activities of the Romanian National Party, five of them were also members of the Central Electoral Committees.⁴² Many of them also took part in the founding and management of the local Romanian banks. Octavian Vasu, a former World War I prisoner, even became one of the organizers of the Romanian Volunteer Corps in Russia, who went to fight for the Romanian army.⁴³ Lawyer Zosim Chirtop of Câmpeni, who had been sentenced to prison by the Hungarian authorities, and physician Nicolae Comșa of Săliște, who had been forcefully relocated to Sopron during the war, came to be considered martyrs of the Romanian national cause. Most of them were delegates to the Romanian National Assembly in Blaj and were also on the list drawn up for the Romanian army comprising reliable Romanians in Transylvania.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Lazăr Marian, *Primarii Clujului, 1919–2012*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: s. n., 2013), 56–63.

⁴² See Vlad Popovici, *Studies on the Romanian political elite from Transylvania and Hungary (1861-1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2012), 73–78.

⁴³ https://dspace.bcucuj.ro/bitstream/123456789/82739/1/Vasu_Octavian.pdf (10.9.2023).

⁴⁴ Cornel Grad. "Contribuția armatei la preluarea și consolidarea Imperiumului în Transilvania (noiembrie 1918 – iunie 1919)," in: *95 de ani de la Marea Unire. Volum omagial*,

There is no reliable source for the exact background of the appointments, but according to several sources and the memoirs of several contemporaries, the opinion of the local Romanian elite was taken into consideration, as well, as illustrated by the example of Târnava Mică county. In the case of several prospects considered, it is probable that their popularity and personal connections also played a role. At that moment, the Bucharest government did not wish to have a say in the appointments. They lacked both the familiarity with the specific locations where appointments were necessary and knowledge of the most suitable local individuals to fill those positions.

As far as locals are concerned, the situation was similar to the one before 1918: the Ruling Council intended to make appointments from among the socially and politically active local Romanian elite. In fact, except in the Székelyland, locals were appointed everywhere. For example, in Târnava Mare county the Ruling Council appointed lawyer Dionisie Roman, a man who was well-liked by the Saxon community as well. He had been a pupil in the Saxon Gymnasium of Mediaș and, therefore, he not only spoke excellent German, but he was also fluent in the local Saxon dialect. However, for the counties of Székelyland with a Hungarian speaking population, prefects of Romanian origin were appointed – the practice was the same as before 1918, only this time the Romanians, not the Hungarians, were favoured. In Ciuc (Csík) county, lawyer Silviu Moldovan from Orăștie was appointed first, followed by lawyer Gheorghe Dubleșiu from Hunedoara; in county Trei Scaune (Háromszék) lawyer Nicolae Vecerdea from Brașov and to Odorhei (Udvarhely), as formerly mentioned, lieutenant-colonel Valer Neamțu.

The careers of these first prefects show that, usually, this appointment was a promising first step on the career ladder: more than a third of them later became representatives in the Romanian Parliament (in the House of Commons or the Senate) and several of them were appointed as prefects for the second time: after his term in Ciuc county, Silviu Moldovan was appointed prefect of Arad county (1920-1921), then he became the president of the Courthouse in Arad; Marțian Căluțiu, the prefect of Târnava Mică county then became the prefect of Cojocna (Kolozs) county between 1926-1927; Gheorghe Dubleșiu after his term in

ed. Marius Grec (Arad: „Vasile Goldiș” University Press, 2013) (215–261), 248–253. For biographical data see: *Contribuția avocaților din Transilvania și Banat la Marea Unire* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2018); *Dicționarul personalităților Unirii. Trimișii românilor transilvăneni la Marea Adunare Națională de la Alba Iulia*, eds. Ioan I. Șerban, Nicolae Josan (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2003).

Ciuc county became prefect of Hunedoara county (1922-1926); Ioan Vescan after his term was a member in the Senate and then again a prefect in Mureș-Turda county (1928-1931, 1932-1933). Nicolae Vecerdea, prefect of Trei Scaune county obtained high positions at the High Court of Cassation.⁴⁵ The highest position occupied by Ioan Pop, the first Romanian prefect of Alba de Jos (Alsó-Fehér) county, was deputy secretary of state in the Ministry of the Interior, while Teodor Mihali – as mentioned above – became mayor of Cluj. There were also some who returned to their original professions, such as Valentin Poruțiu, who worked as a lawyer in Cluj.⁴⁶

Conclusions

The centralization of administration, and the gradual extension of state control, mainly through the Lord Lieutenants, was a process that had already started in pre-war Hungary, and it was further intensified during World War I, by the appointment of some of the Lord Lieutenants as government commissioners with increased powers. However, we find no change in the social composition of the Lord Lieutenants corps. Major changes can only be observed during the Károlyi government, which came to power in the autumn of 1918, following the so-called Aster Revolution. In Transylvania, however, some of the Lord Lieutenants appointed by the Károlyi government were no longer able to take office, because of the chaos caused by the disintegration of the administration, and in December 1918 the takeover of power by the Romanian Ruling Council began.

The research conducted by Florin Andrei Sora shows that, during the inter-war period in Transylvania, the local Romanian elite managed to maintain its position in the local government, obtained in 1919 and 1920, and was rarely replaced by Romanians from the Old Kingdom. Naturally, the counties dominated by a non-Romanian population were an exception to that rule. The National Liberal Party, which had a great political tradition and which was the ruling party both before 1918 and during the majority of the period after, also realized that they had to win over the local elite in order to be successful during elections. Therefore, they usually named a local prefect loyal to the party in the Transylvanian counties. Whenever this failed to occur, the result was always

⁴⁵ According to Vasile Ciobanu, his appointment in 1924 was a reward for helping the Liberal Party gain power in Sibiu County. Vasile Ciobanu, "Reorganizarea Partidului Național Român în anii 1919-1922. Studiu de caz: județul Sibiu", in: *Acta Musei Porolissensis*, 36 (2014): (213–240) 234.

⁴⁶ https://dspace.bcucluj.ro/bitstream/123456789/82848/1/Porutiu_Valentin.pdf (15.09.2023).

discontent among the locals. In order to be appointed prefect, one had to be a loyal party member and have good connections, both locally, but – more importantly – to the party leadership. During the inter-war period, the social background of the prefects changed, as well: an increasing number came from less wealthy families, and it was the position itself that conferred significance upon the person, rather than the status of the individual enhancing the prestige of the role. An interesting new tendency subsequently emerged, namely that military officers (between 1926 and 1932 24% of the prefects had been military officers) and priests, even bishops were appointed prefects in quite a significant number: between 1931-1932 a Greek Catholic priest was the prefect of Făgăraș county, for example and bishops were the prefects of Satu Mare, Sibiu and Hunedoara counties.⁴⁷ The ethnic loyalty and commitment of both groups were probably a significant aspect in their appointment, in addition to the fact that they were considered apolitical and incorruptible. Moreover, in the case of military officers, the expectation to uphold law and order “with an iron fist,” especially in the bordering counties and the counties populated by other ethnic groups, was also added. Therefore, it cannot be considered a mere coincidence that a military officer was appointed in 1919 as the prefect of Odorhei county, where the population was of Hungarian ethnicity.⁴⁸

An overview on the sequence of Lord Lieutenants/prefects shows that, until 1918, the group of the Transylvanian Lord Lieutenants was characterized by a slow change. Although the change of the ruling party did result in people being replaced, there was no replacement of the elites. Another slow change can be observed in the group of Lord Lieutenants in office during the outbreak of World War I – most of them came to this position after having served, for a long time, as officials in the public administration of the county, and almost all of them had legal qualifications. In the autumn of 1918, a partial change of the elite took place, since part of the newly appointed Lord Lieutenants had a very different social and family background than their predecessors and most of them did not have any experience in working in the local government.

Then, when the political status of Transylvania changed, it brought radical modifications in the elite: in every county, the Hungarian Lord Lieutenants were replaced by Romanian prefects, who did have qualifications, but had no prior experience in the local government. Since the Lord Lieutenant/prefect held a key position in the county as the

⁴⁷ Sora, *A difficult*, 56–62.

⁴⁸ Sora, *A difficult*, 62.

representative of the government, reliability was a highly important trait. If we look at the similarities between the two turning points in Transylvanian history, in both cases, the Lord Lieutenants/prefects played an important role in state and nation building. Following 1867, the Transylvanian Hungarian elite, and after 1918, the Transylvanian Romanian elite, both successfully maintained much of their influence at the local level, as reflected in the appointment of Lord Lieutenants/prefects.

| County | Lord lieutenants in 1914 (initial year of the office) | Lord lieutenants in office at the beginning of 1918 | Government commissioners appointed in Nov.-Dec. 1918 | Prefects in 1919 |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Alsó-Fehér/ Alba de Jos | József Szász (1910) | Baron Kázmér Bánffy | Kálmán Asztalos / Albert Fogarasi | Ioan Popu |
| Beszterce-Naszód/ Bistrița-Năsăud | Jenő Fejerváry (1910) / Count Balázs Bethlen (from 2. 11. 1914) | András Ugron / Nándor Inczédy-Joksman | András Ugron | Gavril Tripon |
| Brassó/ Brașov | Count Zsigmond Mikes (1906) | Count Zsigmond Mikes | Deputy Lord lieutenant | George Baiulescu |
| Csík/ Ciuc | Sándor Gyalókay (1910) | Lajos Tolnay | Domokos Györgypál | Silviu Moldovan / Valer Neamțu/ Gheorghe Dubleşiu |
| Fogaras/ Făgăraș | József Széll (1907) | György Lengyel | | Octavian Vasu |
| Háromszék/ Trei Scaune | Baron Béla Szentkereszt y (1910) | Aladár Király / Baron János Bornemisza | Aladár Király | Nicolae Vecerdea |
| Hunyad/Hunedoara | László Mara (1910) | Béla Pogány | Lajos Szentiványi | Toma Vasinca |
| Kis-Küküllő/ Târnava Mică | Baron Ákos Kemény (1906) | Elemér Gyárfás | Elemér Gyárfás | Marcian Căluțiu |
| Kolozs/Cojocna | Count Ödön Bethlen (1913) | Zoltán Velits | Emil Grandpierre | Simeon Tămaș |
| Maros-Torda/ Mureș-Turda | József Szász (1912) | Nándor Inczédy- | József Halász / József Szenner | Ioan Vescan |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| | | Joksman | | |
| Nagy-Küküllő/ Târnava Mare | István Somogyi (1910) | Baron Emil Petrichevich -Horváth | Julius Schaser | Dionisie Roman |
| Szeben/ Sibiu | Friedrich Walbaum (1910) | Friedrich Walbaum | Friedrich Walbaum | Nicolae Comşa |
| Szolnok-Doboka/ Solnoc-Dăbâca | Count Balázs Bethlen (1910) | Baron Zsigmond Diószeghy | Miklós Torma | Teodor Mihali |
| Torda- Aranyos/Turda- Arieş | Miklós Betegh (1910) | Count Sándor Bethlen | Gábor Kemény | Zosim Chirtop |
| Udvarhely/ Odorhei | János Ugron (1912) | György Lengyel / Ákos Ugron | Ferenc Valentsik | Valer Neamţu |