

## SOME ASPECTS OF THE INTEGRATION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBA IULIA IN THE ROMANIAN ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

SZABOLCS ANDRÁS<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** This paper addresses the changes that took place after World War I in the life of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Alba Iulia led by Bishop Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. This was the only new diocese in Romania to retain all the historical territory it had previously held in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, whereas all others that have suffered significant territorial losses. The Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania was largely ethnically Hungarian. The diocese was thus faced with the challenge of integrating in the Romanian ecclesiastical-administrative structures, while preserving its religious and ethnic characteristics. We are witnessing here the beginning of a “diplomatic game” between the Romanian Government, the Holy See and Bishop Mailáth. The issue at stake for the Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania was the preservation of confessional and ethnic identity in a new political framework. The integration culminated with the signing of the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See in 1927, but the road to the completion of this document is marked by many interesting developments, which provide an insight in the challenges of preserving confessional and ethnic identity while accommodating to new political circumstances and redefining the mission of a Catholic Church belonging to an ethnic minority.

**Keywords:** Concordat, Holy See, Romania, Bishop Mailáth, Transylvania, Catholic Church, Hungarian minority.

### Introduction

The self-understanding and mission of religious institutions is strongly shaped by political realities. I will address this issue on the example of the Roman Catho-

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, PhD, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, and doctoral student at the Population Studies and History of Minorities Doctoral School. Email: andras.szabolcs@ubbcluj.ro.

lic Diocese of Alba Iulia in the aftermath of World War I. This large bishopric, previously part of Hungary under the name of Diocese of Transylvania, was compelled to adapt to the new political and social realities resulting from its integration into Romania.<sup>2</sup> Aside adjustments to the new political framework, the diocese was also required to redefine its identity and mission. In what follows I will explore this process discussing firstly the issues raised by the name of the institution, and then turn to the changes involving the political role of the bishop, largely based on documents from the Archdiocesan Archives of Alba Iulia.

### Preliminary considerations

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Alba Iulia developed certain historical particularities worth considering before discussing the way the interwar circumstances shaped the identity and functioning of the institution. These concerned mainly the relationship between the bishop and lay institutions, leading to the increased role of the latter, and emerged in the Principality of Transylvania in the post-Reformation era.<sup>3</sup> Although Transylvanian Catholics represented one of the four recognised denominations (*religio recepta*) and were not formally prohibited to practice their faith, during the Reformed Principality they were deprived of the right to have a bishop.<sup>4</sup> In this ecclesiastical vacuum, the Catholic nobility

<sup>2</sup> On the contemporary history of the Diocese of Alba Iulia see Janice BROUN, “The Catholic Church in Romania”, in *Christianity Under Stress II: Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Durham – London: Duke University Press, 1990, 207–212.

<sup>3</sup> On the Principality of Transylvania: István KEUL, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe: Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality and Corporative Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526-1691)* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 143) (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions), Leiden: Brill, 2009 (from a Protestant perspective),

<sup>4</sup> Károly VESZELY, *Erdélyi egyháztörténeti adatok III. Erdélynek a XVI és XVII században országgyűlésileg hozott, vallást tárgyzó törvénycikkei*, Kolozsvár, 1860, 240–241; Antonius JAKAB, *De hierarchia Ecclesiae Transsylvaniensis tempore principatus (1527-1697)* (doctoral dissertation), Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2000; Antal JAKAB, “Az erdélyi római katolikus püspöki szék betöltésének vitája a 17. században [The Controversy Regarding the Nomination of a Transylvanian Roman-Catholic Bishop in the 17th Century]”, *Erdélyi Múzeum* 49 (1944) 5–20; KEUL, *Early Modern Religious Communi-*

undertook the responsibility to manage church-related, mostly financial matters, notably through the establishment of the Catholic Status. This institution managed church property and endowments, established and subsidised Catholic schools, and provided for the subsistence of the clergy.<sup>5</sup> The Catholic Status continued to function after the integration of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire and the restoration of the episcopate. This created a rather particular situation in the Catholic Church, as the bishop administered a significant part of the church property and part of the Catholic schools in partnership with an essentially lay organization. While Rome was not particularly favourable to this model of church management, it nevertheless accepted it. Within the political and ecclesial realities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Catholic Church in Transylvania benefited from this model of administration, when the State sought full control over the educational network, confessional schools included.<sup>6</sup> The private nature of the Status limited the powers of the Hungarian State in Transylvania and this led to political controversies between Budapest, Alba Iulia, and Rome. These concerned in particular the oversight of Church-owned property, notably that of forest estates.<sup>7</sup>

In ecclesial circles, this Transylvanian model stirred discussions about the idea of Catholic autonomy that would allow a local church to become independent of state regulations. Such issues provoked intense socio-political debate in Hungarian society.

These precedents show that the position of the Roman Catholic bishop of Transylvania was peculiar. He enjoyed a special status among the bishops even

---

*ties*, 60–61, 86–87, 129, 149, 178–183, 209–218 (from a markedly Protestant perspective, mentioning only in passing the fact that the Diet of Bistritz, 1610, prohibited Catholics to have a bishop, a condition that lasted up to 1713, and severely restricted Catholic religious practice in several towns).

<sup>5</sup> László HOLLÓ, “The Impact of Reformation in the Transylvanian Diocese and the Beginnings of Catholic Revival”, *Studia Theologica Catholica Latina* 2 (2019) 35–72.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of the role of the Catholic Status in acquiring autonomy: László HOLLÓ, “Die Römisch-Katolische Autonomie von Siebenbürgen: Der Siebenbürgische Römisch-Katolische Status”, *Studia Theologica Catholica Latina* 2 (2012) 3–24. The Catholic Status functioned up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century under various forms of organization.

<sup>7</sup> Krisztián TÓTH, “Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus igazgatónácsának 1873-as újjáalakulása és dualizmus kori tevékenységi köre”, *Studia Theologica Transylvaniensia* 2 (2021) 331–360.

while the province was part of Hungary, and this granted him a certain degree of autonomy from the state. What matters here is not the ethnic nature of the state, but the stance of the bishop in relation to political authorities with a certain political-ideological orientation.<sup>8</sup>

In the interwar period under consideration in this essay, the diocese was led by bishop Gustáv Károly Mailáth. He was not of Transylvanian descent but came from a family of counts from southern Hungary. Nonetheless, as head of the Transylvanian diocese, he strove to defend the particular status of his diocese already prior to 1918, especially in the matter of schools.<sup>9</sup> Hungarian church historians call him the bishop of schools, because even after the Eötvös education reform<sup>10</sup> he struggled to preserve the autonomy of Catholic education and had an important role in founding confessional schools. He continued these efforts after World War I, as well. Thus, the Diocese of Transylvania was headed by a bishop concerned with the social, economic, and educational autonomy of the Church, attempting to limit the interference of the State in the affairs of the Church.

### **The integration of the Diocese of Transylvanian into the Romanian ecclesiastical structures**

In the following, I will briefly examine the integration of the Diocese of Transylvania into the Romanian Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> To start with, I will address the

---

<sup>8</sup> Gábor ADRIÁNYI, *A katolikus egyház története a 20. században Kelet-, Közép-Kelet és Dél-Kelet Európában*, Budapest: Kairosz, 2005, 180.

<sup>9</sup> Mailáth's brief biography see Marton József-Jakabffy Tamás, *Az erdélyi katolicizmus századai*, Kolozsvár: Gloria, 1999, 99–103.

<sup>10</sup> The reform of József Eötvös (1868) modernised the Hungarian education system. Zoltán András SZABÓ, Imre GARAI and András NÉMETH “The History of Education in Hungary from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to Present Day”, *Paedagogica Historica* (2022), DOI: 10.1080/00309230.2022.2090849. However, the Church opposed it because it established state control over denominational schools. Kálmán Attila SZABÓ, “Bevezetés”, in Attila Kálmán SZABÓ (ed.), *Az erdélyi magyar tanító- és óvóképzés évszázadai 1777-2000*, Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2009, 55–69.

<sup>11</sup> The organisation of the Catholic Church in Romania was closely linked to the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty. The presence of the Catholic Church in the Orthodox-majority country was important to King Charles I, but it was not until 1883 that the Archdiocese of Bucharest and the Bishopric of Iași were established. Ofelia MILOȘ,

change of the name of the diocese, from that of Transylvania to that of Alba Iulia (after the bishop's residence), based on the documents. The change of the name was politically motivated, as it indicated the intention to break its traditional ties with the Catholic Church of Hungary.

The Diocese of Transylvania was founded by King Stephen of Hungary around 1009. Due to the special status of the province, the diocese was named after the region rather than the episcopal see, and it was subordinate to the Archdiocese of Kalocsa (Hungary).<sup>12</sup> In accordance with this tradition, Károly Gusztáv Mailáth always signed documents as Bishop of Transylvania.

The change in the name of the diocese in the first years following the war was not yet settled. Before the Treaty of Trianon,<sup>13</sup> in a letter to Mailáth, issued on 10 November 1919, the Agrarian Council of Alba County asked him, as Bishop of Alba Iulia, to allot part of the lands of the bishopric to the population to prevent

---

*România și Sfântul Scaun în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, Doctoral thesis, Cluj-Napoca: Babeș-Bolyai University, 2008, 278 (published: București: Expert, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Konrád SZÁNTÓ, *A katolikus egyház története I*, Budapest: Ecclesia, 1983, 314. Even after the Treaty of Versailles, the Archbishop of Kalocsa considered it important to deal with Transylvanian affairs, and he intervened by the Archbishop of Esztergom and Rome several times to represent the Transylvanian Catholics. BEKE Margit (ed.), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919 – 1944 között I*, München – Budapest: Aurora, 1992, 427.

<sup>13</sup> Hungarian public opinion holds France as such (i.e. the entire French society) responsible for the outcome of the Treaty of Trianon. However, documents from the Archdiocese of Esztergom confirm that French bishops intervened on behalf of Hungary: “Votre Éminence a bien voulu me transmettre une lettre du Cardinal Primat de Hongrie, [qui] vous demande d’intervenir afin d’empêcher si possible le morcellement de la Hongrie, tel qu’il résulterait des dernier accords diplomatique avec Tchecoslovaquie, la Roumanie et l’Autriche. Les représentants du Gouvernement Hongrois sont à Paris pour discuter avec la conférence de la Paix les termes du traité avec la Hongrie. Ils ne manqueront pas de faire valoir les arguments qui peuvent militer en faveur de leur pays, mais il est impossible de revenir sur des accords qui ont reçu la signature des Puissances et dont quelques-uns [sont] déjà exécutés. Pour moi, je serais toujours heureux d’être votre interprète pour qu’il soit tenu compte, dans la mesure du possible, des considérations que son Éminence le Primat de Hongrie a fait valoir auprès de vous”. *Letter of Jules Cambon to Léon-Adolphe Amette, Archbishop of Paris*, Archive of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest (hereafter AAEBp), 672/1920 D/c, 20.01.1920.

a possible uprising.<sup>14</sup> The matter was eventually concluded by the agrarian reform that deprived the diocese of a significant part of its estates.<sup>15</sup>

The inconsistency in the naming of the Diocese and the ambiguity of its relation with the ecclesial structures of Romania persists in the drafts of the Concordat with the Holy See. After the end of the war, the negotiations between Romania and the Holy See concerning a future Concordat,<sup>16</sup> which had begun under Carol I, resumed. Both the bishopric and the Hungarian side<sup>17</sup> followed these

<sup>14</sup> *Letter of Agrarian Council of Alba County* in: Archive of the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia (hereafter AAAI), I.13.e. Different documents, 161/919, 13.11.1919.

<sup>15</sup> As a result of the agrarian reform, the Transylvanian bishopric lost a large part of its estates, for which the Hungarian government tried to intercede with the Holy See: „Just recently, I have had enough opportunity to put the anti-Hungarian and anti-church policies of the Romanians in perspective. In connection with the Glattfelder case, I not only handed over the bishop’s incriminated pastoral letter, accompanied by appropriate commentary, to both the Secretary of State and Mgr. Borgongini (I also communicated it to several other Cardinals), but I also gave a little lecture on the way in which the Romanians were carrying out the land reform in Transylvania (...) I therefore prepared the ground as best I could for a worthy reception for the Foreign Minister” – wrote ambassador to Vatican József Somssich. *The cause of Gyula Glattfelder bishop of Csanád*, National Archives of Hungary, Documents of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter NAH), K105, Embassy at Vatican, Box 39: 1920–1931. R1 Romania 2039/pol., 15.05.1923.

<sup>16</sup> For a thorough discussion of the negotiations for the Concordat and the historical background, see Mózes NÓDA, “The Historical, Political and Ecclesiastical Background of the 1927 Concordat between the Vatican and Romania”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9.27 (2010) 281–301, ID., *Biserica Romano-Catolică din Transilvania în perioada interbelică*, Cluj-Napoca: Studium, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> For a long time, the Hungarian government hoped that the Holy See would use its international influence to restore the Hungarian Church to its pre-war status, thus challenging the Versailles system. This is evidenced by a letter from the Hungarian Ambassador to the Holy See, Somssich, in 1922: „Schioppa nuntius itt van. Néhány nap előtt volt a Szentatyánál audientián. Azt mesélte nekem, hogy az audientia lefolyásával nagyon meg van elégedve, és hogy sok szeretetet és megértést talált a Szentatyánál Magyarország és a magyar ügyek iránt. A nuntius különösen arra helyezett súlyt, hogy az elszakadt részeknek az egyházhoz való viszonylatában minden a régiben maradjon, és azt a benyomást nyerte hogy Ő Szentsége hajlandó a mi ebbeli kívánságunkat a lehetőség szerint teljesíteni.” [Nuncio Schioppa is here. A few days ago, he had an audience with the Holy Father. He told me that he was very pleased with the way the audience went and that he

negotiations with great interest. They usually received drafts of the text and commented on them. Here, too, the name and boundaries of the diocese and its place within the Romanian ecclesiastical structure are recurrent topics.

In the first post-war drafts of the Concordat, the diocese appears as *Diocesis Transylvaniensis/Alba Iulia*, directly subordinated to Rome, alongside that of Csanád (Timișoara), Gran Varadino (Oradea) and Satu Mare, not as suffragan bishopric of the Archdiocese of Bucharest.<sup>18</sup> The opinion written in Italian on the margin of the draft also uses the designations Transylvania and Alba Julia interchangeably; it focuses on the way the diocese could retain its autonomy. Already the draft suggests that the four newly annexed dioceses should be merged, with Timișoara merging with Alba Iulia and Oradea with Satu Mare.<sup>19</sup> This would have had the advantage of extending the ecclesiastical autonomy of the Diocese of Transylvania to that of Timișoara. The Bucharest government endorsed the merger because it resulted in fewer Latin than Greek bishops. The continuation of

---

found a lot of love and understanding for Hungary and Hungarian affairs with the Holy Father. The Nuncio was particularly anxious that everything should remain as it was in the relations of the lost parts with the Church, and he got the impression that His Holiness was willing to fulfil our wishes in this respect as far as possible.] *Msrgr. Schioppa római látogatása*, NAH, K105, Embassy at Vatican, Box 35, 1929–1932, 19.01.1922.

<sup>18</sup> The majority of the believers in the Archdiocese of Bucharest were also Hungarian, which caused further tension between the Archbishop of Bucharest and the Bishop of Alba Iulia. *A bukaresti katolikus egyházmegye magyar anyanyelvű híveinek*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, Box 39: 1920–1931. R1 Romania, 2584/pol., 02.05.1922.

<sup>19</sup> The archival sources indicate that the Hungarian part also raised the idea of merging the truncated bishoprics: “The Hungarian side has asked the Vatican to unite the truncated parts of Oradea and Satu Mare with Csanád under Bishop Glattfelder, but Barcza considers it a bad idea, because it contradicts the view that historical dioceses should be preserved even in truncated form. [...] I emphasized very emphatically to Gasparri that this proposal is not prejudicial to our principled position and is merely a challenging de facto solution. This, of course, the Cardinal smilingly acknowledged. Now the situation is that what we asked for has not been granted, because the Vatican will appoint two separate administrators for the two parts in question, but with our proposal we have set a precedent which I believe will be used against us. So we ourselves have given the Vatican a weapon which it will use against us on occasion (quite logically) and we have received nothing.” Letter of Ambassador György Barcza to Archbishop János Csiszárík, published by TUSOR Péter (ed.) *Magyarország és a római Szentszék (Források és távlatok)*, Róma – Budapest: Gondolat, 2012, 200–201.

the Transylvanian Catholic Status within the Romanian legal framed remained uncertain and required further discussions, notably in relation to questions concerning ecclesiastical property.

In 1921, several versions of the Concordat were drafted. All share the alternating naming of the diocese, the focus on confessional schools and education, and concern for ecclesiastical autonomy. The drafts refer now to different possible mergers of the four annexed dioceses into two. Autonomy concerns mainly the preservation of the Catholic Status and its property, as well as cultural autonomy, probably referring to confessional education. To this end, the Diocese of Transylvania would be subordinated directly to Rome instead of the Archbishopric of Bucharest. The Archdiocese of Esztergom, Hungary also responded to the draft, opposing the transferal of the see of the Greek Catholic Archdiocese from Blaj to Cluj, arguing that the majority of the population did not belong to that denomination, and it also opposed the merger of the four bishoprics.<sup>20</sup>

In the same period, the Inter-confessional Council was established, joining the bishops of the Transylvanian Catholic, Unitarian, and Reformed Churches. The council met a number of times in the 1920s, attempting to act jointly on issues concerning the Hungarian-speaking churches, particularly on education-related matters. Perhaps the most significant result of this initiative was that the Hungarian bishops were able to mobilize the representatives and senators of the Hungarian Party on nationality and church issues. In this respect, the activity of Elemér Gyárfás stands out (I will return to this later on). Both in the Inter-confessional Council and on other occasions, Mailáth stressed that his title was Bishop of Transylvania. In a 1926 letter to Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> The Hungarian government was also opposed to the merger of the bishoprics, and constantly instructed its ambassador to the Vatican to protest by the Holy See against the plans. State Secretary Gasparri denied any such intention. Letter of Somssich to Minister of Foreign Affairs Gusztáv Gratz, NAH, Embassy to Vatican Box 40: 1920–1929, R2 Romania, 135, 25.03.1921.

<sup>21</sup> As a later ambassador's report reveals, the Hungarian government considered Gasparri both pro-French and anti-Hungarian: „From the point of view of the large number of Hungarian Catholics living in neighbouring states, it is very important here to observe and record how the Holy See's relations with the various Petite-Entente states evolve over time and through events. These observations then mirror the Vatican's attitude towards the Hungarian minorities. (...) The Cardinal Secretary of State himself has no small part to play in this. While his predecessor Cardinal Gasparri was decidedly pro-French and



on the status of the Concordat, he explicitly demanded that name of the diocese retained the designation of Transylvania, because the title of Alba Iulia referred to the Greek Catholic Archbishop.

The controversy over the name of the diocese was finally settled by the Concordat in 1927.<sup>22</sup> This established an archdiocese for the Latin rite in Bucharest, with four suffragan bishoprics. The bishopric of Transylvania was now officially designated as the Diocese of Alba Iulia, and it lost jurisdiction over the Armenian Catholic parishes.<sup>23</sup> The Diocese of Timișoara, which resulted from the large Hungarian Diocese of Csanád, retained its autonomy, but the Diocese of Oradea was merged into that of Satu Mare.

The name change from Diocese of Transylvania to that of Alba Iulia also indicated that the Romanian government did not intend to recognise the autonomy of the Catholic Status and its role in managing the property of this Diocese. With the Concordat a *patrimonium sacrum* was established, which comprised the merged and common property of the Catholic Church of the Latin and Greek rite. The partial autonomy of the Status was restored by the Accord of 1932 the Holy See and Romania.

---

only in the last years of his official activity did, he slowly switch to a more objective approach, his successor Cardinal Pacelli has a completely different mentality. A Szentszék viszonya a Kis-entente államokhoz, NAH, K105 Vatican Documents, Box 35: 1929 – 1932. Kiesentente, 48/pol., 06.05.1932.

<sup>22</sup> The documents of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry testify that Transylvanian Catholics were left out of the final formulation of the Concordat: “The [Transylvanian] delegation will be received by His Holiness this morning, but there will be little political discussion. The delegates have informed me that they do not intend to visit the Romanian Ambassador to the Vatican, Mr Pennescu. I did not inform the delegation that the Romanian Concordat had in fact been signed by both parties and that only the Romanian ratification was needed for its entry into force, nor did I give them the information which Mgr. Borgongini had given me, since the Deputy State Secretary had at the time asked me very emphatically to treat the information he had given me on this subject with the utmost secrecy.” – wrote ambassador György Barcza. *Az erdélyi katolikus küldöttsége Rómában*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, Box 39: 1920 – 1931. R1 Romania, 779/pol., 8.11.1927.

<sup>23</sup> The bishopric of Gherla was created for the Armenian Catholics, but the attempt failed because the faithful were native Hungarian speakers and insisted on the bishopric of Alba Iulia, so the appointed bishop did not occupy his place.

The renaming of the bishopric of Csanád to that of Timișoara was also related to the division of the former Diocese of Csanád belonging to Hungary into two new dioceses and the removal of bishop Gyula Glattfelder. The Holy See complied with the request of King Ferdinand I that bishop Glattfelder leave Romania, following his protest against the land reform.<sup>24</sup> Glattfelder moved the new see of the Diocese of Csanád to Szeged. De facto this meant that the diocese with the see in Timișoara was a new ecclesial entity.

The merger of the Diocese of Oradea into that of Satu Mare was politically motivated: part of the large property of the former was to be nationalized or redistributed within the Church.

### The question of political representation

In addition to the issue of renaming, the question of political representation may also shed light on the integration of the Diocese of Transylvania into the Romanian legal frame and on the way it redefined its mission, to include the political representation of the Hungarian minority. As early as 1925, the idea of Mailáth representing the Hungarians in the Romanian parliament was raised, but at that time the bishop rejected it and recommended Elemér Gyárfás, the lay president of the Catholic Status, for the position.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Bishop Gyula Glattfelder protested against the 1921 land reform in a circular letter, and called on the faithful to resist. King Ferdinand, who had previously been on friendly terms with the bishop, took the circular as a personal insult and broke off relations with the bishop. Taking advantage of this, the Romanian government demanded that Glattfelder leave the country. Despite the protests of the Hungarian government, the Holy See agreed to Bucharest's request, and Glattfelder moved his see to Szeged (Hungary). Szabolcs ANDRÁS, "New Details Regarding the Expulsion of Bishop Gyula Glattfelder from Romania", *Studia Theologia Catholica Latina*, 61.1 (2016) 87–98.

<sup>25</sup> „With the death of Senator Géza Szóts, it would be nice if a Catholic man who speaks Romanian well could be elected to Parliament in his place. Who would that be? Are you of legal age to run for office?” *Mailáth's letter to Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters, 26.02.1925. In virtue of the stipulations of the 1923-Constitution, Mailáth represented the Roman Catholic Church in the Romanian Parliament as ex officio senator, in his capacity of oldest bishop. In 1925, the debate on the new electoral law began. The Romanian government intended to replace Mailáth with the Archbishop of Bucharest. Mailáth proposed instead that Gyárfás take his place.

The Romanian electoral law provided for the political representation of each Church by a bishop, as senator. In the Roman Catholic Church, according to customary law, the position was supposed to be held by the most senior member of the episcopate, thus Mailáth became senator.<sup>26</sup> However, following his appointment as Archbishop of Bucharest, with the support of the government Alexandru Cisar claimed this right for himself, arguing that he held the highest position in the Romanian Catholic Church. In 1926, the Holy See attempted to settle the matter under customary law.<sup>27</sup>

---

His intention did not materialise, and Archbishop Cisar became senator in 1926. Gyárfás was elected senator on the list of the Hungarian Party in 1927.

<sup>26</sup> Previously, Mailáth was already a member of the Senate; in this capacity he spoke out on the grievances of the Hungarian community, provoking the disapproval of the government. Archbishop Cisar, conversely, was more in line with the politics of Bucharest. In one of his famous speeches, Mailáth objected to the consequences of the agrarian reform and the educational reform: “The measures of the government so far attacked the basis of our Catholic institutions: based on the Agrarian Law, the state expropriated the estates assigned to their maintenance without providing compensation. Only the Averescu government once gave our secondary schools an aid of 800,000 lei, compared to which we received nearly four million in aid from the state each year. The Catholic Church was ignored everywhere in the allocation of expropriated properties, so much so that although the large estates of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic State were also expropriated, 118 parishes and 71 affiliated churches did not even receive a small part that was due to them by law. Thus, the Catholic churches lost seven and a half thousand acres of land, which they should have received according to the provisions of the agrarian law.” Salacz Gábor, *A magyar katolikus egyház a szomszédos államok uralma alatt*, München: Aurora, 1975, 59.

<sup>27</sup> The Secretariat of the Hungarian Embassy at the Holy See also confirmed that the situation was unpleasant for Rome and was therefore treated as an internal matter: “The Office of the Secretary of State has stated that, as regards the relationship between Archbishop Cisar and Bishop Mailáth, it does not consider the former to be the most senior Romanian representative of the Church of Rome, which means, in other words, that despite their title and the rank of archbishop and their seat in Bucharest, the two diocesan princes hold a coordinated position in the eyes of the Holy See. This response was intended to avoid the possibility of invoking the Vatican as an excuse in the event of a possible anti-Mailáth decision by the Bucharest government. Apart from this seemingly neutral but in fact pro-Mailáth statement, no other action was taken by the Office of the Secretary of State, and the senatorial case is here seen as a purely Romanian domestic

Mailáth turned for help to his friend, Elemér Gyárfás, the lay president of the Status, whom he had nominated for senatorship after the death of Géza Szőcs.<sup>28</sup> Gyárfás was elected senator of the National Hungarian Party in 1926. The senatorship of the Transylvanian bishop was questioned in the summer of the same year. “The question arose and became acute” – Gyárfás wrote to Mailáth –, “when Archbishop Cisar petitioned the Minister of Religious Affairs in a letter dated 10 June, to issue a certificate stating that on the basis of the Electoral Law, and in view of the fact that he was the head of more than 1,200,000 Latin Catholics in Romania, he was the highest ranking among the Catholic bishops and as the head of the Catholic Church he was entitled to a senatorial seat.”<sup>29</sup> Gyárfás also reported on his negotiations with Vasile Goldiș, minister of religious affairs, who also opposed Cisar’s demand, arguing that he did not represent the Catholics, but Rome, but contended that he was entitled to the senatorial seat by virtue of his rank as archbishop. Minister of internal affairs Octavian Goga suggested that obtaining the support of the King might offer Bishop Mailáth a chance to preserve his senatorial seat. Gyárfás also pondered on the political chances of succeeding, provided Mailáth would have been backed by fourteen deputies and senators of the National Hungarian Part and perhaps four or five German deputies.

Mailáth wished to deal the issue privately, avoiding turning it into a subject of public discussion. Gyárfás conversely argued that the only way to influence the government was to acquire public support for the bishop. Mailáth suggested to

---

matter.” *The matter of the senatorship of Majláth, Bishop of Transylvania*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, Box 39: 1920 – 1931. R1 Romania, 60/pol. 18.09.1926.

<sup>28</sup> Géza Szőcs was first a senator of the Hungarian Party and then of the National Liberal Party.

<sup>29</sup> *Letter Elemér Gyárfás to Mailáth* AAAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. 16.06.1926. In the letter, Gyárfás also sets out the Minister’s response: „Goldis, on the other hand, who was already well acquainted with the issue and was visibly influenced by it, stubbornly insisted on his position that the archbishop was more than the bishop, and that he was therefore obliged to give the archbishop priority over the bishop. To my objection that, if he was so sure, he should put the matter to the nuncio, he replied that it was an internal affair of the Romanian state, and that they could not take delegated authority in the matter of senatorial eligibility.” Gyárfás also reports that he has discussed this issue with other ministers, but that the bishop himself has to submit a request to claim the senatorial seat. The government is divided on this issue, which could be a chance for Mailáth.

ask the intervention of the Holy See, who would nominate by the government the person who should be entrusted with the representation of the Catholic Church in Senate after listening to the position of the heads of the Latin Catholic dioceses. “The government also gives Muslims the opportunity to designate a senator themselves (...)”, the bishop argued. “For my part, I will also make this proposal to the Holy See through the Nuncio, but I cannot go any further, lest the whole action should appear to be a personal matter.”<sup>30</sup> On 30 October 1926, Mailáth submitted a formal request to the Presidency of the Senate to establish that he was entitled to the Senatorial seat on the basis of the Constitution, the Electoral Law and customary law.<sup>31</sup> In December, the bishop was informing the President of the Catholic Status that Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu<sup>32</sup> supported Cisar as senator, but was not opposed to Mailáth becoming a senator on a different legal ground.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Mailáth's letter to Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. 17.06.1926.

<sup>31</sup> “(...) by virtue of the rights arising from the old Constitution and in my quality as an eparchial bishop, I was and still am a member by right in the Senate of Romania. The new Constitution modified the old provisions concerning the representation of the confessions in the country's parliament for the future, granting a seat in the senate to the Catholic Church of the Latin rite, for the oldest and largest diocese in rank. But the new constitution did not touch the earned rights and provisions and refers – according to legal principles – only to those bishops, who in the future will enter the senate of the country without depriving of their seat those bishops who already had earned rights [...]” *Letter to the President of the Senate*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth, a.1. Letters. 30.10.1926.

<sup>32</sup> Ion I.C. Brătianu was a prominent Romanian politician, head of the National Liberal Party, and five times Prime Minister (1909–1910; 1914–1918; 1918–1919; 1922–1926, and 1927).

<sup>33</sup> „For his part, Brătianu considers the Archbishop of Bucharest to be the most suitable person to represent the Latin Church in the Senate as the archbishop of the country's capital, as a quasi-higher-ranking head of the Church. Brătianu, for his part, would like me, as a former senator, to remain on the same seat as the archbishop, and would not object to this, if it could be reconciled with the constitution. (...) I would only do this at the request and appeasement of the minorities, so that we do not neglect any attempt to assert our rights.” *Mailáth's letter to Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. 03.12.1926.

As much as Mailáth attempted to avoid making his senatorship a matter of public debate, the daily *Cuvântul* reported in a sarcastic article that the irredentist bishop could not preserve his political office, lacking even the support of Rome in the matter: “Our newspaper reported last week that Bishop Mailath, who was ‘recovering’ in Hungary<sup>34</sup>, intervened ‘through the usual channels’ to be appointed Archbishop of Alba Iulia, with jurisdiction over the Roman Catholic bishops over the mountains [the Carpathians, i.e. from Transylvania]. (...) Following the alarm we sounded, the Romanian government notified the Vatican that it could not approve the plans of Bishop Mailath.”<sup>35</sup> As this article shows, the Holy See heeded the request of the Romanian government, all the more as it had already made it clear to the Hungarian government, which wished to intervene by the Romanian authorities, that it considers the issue to be an internal matter of Romania. The Romanian government achieved thus an important success: although it could not expel Bishop Mailáth from Transylvania, as it did with Bishop Glattfelder of Csanád, it at least managed to remove him from political life, and subordinate him to the Archbishop of Bucharest, loyal to Romanian interests.

### Concluding remarks

Following World War I and the new political realities ensuing from the Treaty of Trianon, the situation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Transylvania / Alba Iulia, largely made up of ethnic Hungarians, was determined by two factors: the development of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Romania<sup>36</sup> and

---

<sup>34</sup> Archbishop Raymund Netzhammer confirms that Mailáth was indeed ill and was treated in Hungary. Raymund NETZHAMMER, *Bischof in Rumänien: im Spannungsfeld zwischen Staat und Vatikan*, II (Veröffentlichungen des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks 771), edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer in collaboration with Krista Zach, München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1996 (în Romanian: Raymund NETZHAMMER, *Episcop în România* II, București: Editura Academiei Române, 2005, 1426.

<sup>35</sup> “Auxiliarii cu drept de succesiune ai episcopului Majlath”, *Cuvântul*, 15.01.1927.

<sup>36</sup> Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholics believed that the policy of the Holy See was centred on supporting Greek Catholics in the hope that eventually the whole of Romania would convert to the Catholic Church: „The Vatican’s international policy may also think that by building up Romania it can gain more influence on the territory of the Greek Eastern Church, as from there it will gain a new, young and energetic country for the Ro-

the intention of the government to reorganize the Catholic Church within a new ecclesial, political, and ethnic framework. In this changed situation, the Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania attempted to provide not only for pastoral care but also for the political representation of the Hungarian minority in Romania. The Holy See faced a difficult challenge. On the one hand, Catholics of Latin rite from a territory belonging now to a different country expected the Vatican to voice its support for their ecclesial and political struggle. On the other hand, the prospect of a Concordat with Romania demanded the Holy See to acquiesce to the requests of the government. Diplomatic considerations often took precedence over the pleas of Roman Catholic bishops.

## Bibliography

### *Primary sources*

Archives of the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia:

*Letter of Elemér Gyárfás to Bishop Gusztáv Károly Mailáth*, AAAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. 16.06.1926.

*Letter of the Agrarian Council of Alba County to Bishop Gusztáv Károly Mailáth*, AAAI, I.13.e. Various documents, 161/919.13.11.1919.

---

man Catholic Church precisely through the Greek Catholics. It has already been pointed out that the political inclination of the Greek Catholics will not favour this calculation, and the development of Romania so far is an example of the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to gain ground there.” AAEBP, *Az erdélyi rom. kath. közönség memorandumuma az elszakítás ellen*, 1407/1920.51, 01.05.1920. This perception is confirmed by Raymund Netzhammer, archbishop of Bucharest between 1905–1924. A Benedictine monk of the Abbey of Einsiedeln. Netzhammer was appointed archbishop of Bucharest by Pope Pius X (1905). His uncompromising stance amidst complicated religious, political, and ethnic circumstances angered Romanian political authorities. He was therefore compelled to resign, on the advice of Pope Pius XI. His diary, published posthumously, is an invaluable source of information on the political and ecclesial circumstances in Romania. Raymund NETZHAMMER, *Bischof in Rumänien: im Spannungsfeld zwischen Staat und Vatikan*, I–II (Veröffentlichungen des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks 70–71), edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer in collaboration with Krista Zach, München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1995–1996.

- Letter to Senate's President*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. a.1. Letters. 30.10.1926.
- Letter of Bishop Mailáth to Elemér Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. a.1. Letters. 26.02.1925.
- Letter of Bishop Mailáth to Elemér Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. a.1. Letters. 17.06.1926.
- Letter of Bishop Mailáth to Elemér Gyárfás*, AAI, V.5. Personal legacy of Gusztáv Károly Mailáth. a.1. Letters. a.1. Letters. 03.12.1926.
- Archives of the Archbishopric of Esztergom-Budapest:  
*Az erdélyi rom. kath. közösség memoranduma az elszakítás ellen [Memorandum of the Roman Catholic community against the break-up]*, AAEBP, 1407/1920.51. 01.05.1920.
- Letter of Jules Cambon to Léon-Adolphe Amette, Archbishop of Paris*, AAEBP, 672/1920 D/c. 20.01.1920.
- National Archives of Hungary, Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:  
*A bukaresti katolikus egyházmegye magyar anyanyelvű híveinek [To the Hungarian-speaking faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Bucharest]*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, 39. box: 1920–1931. R1 Romania, 2584/pol. 02. 05. 1922.
- Az erdélyi katolikusok küldöttsége Rómában [The Transylvanian Catholic delegation in Rome]*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, 39. box: 1920–1931. R1 Romania, 779/pol. 8.11.1927.
- Glattfelder Gyula csanádi püspök ügye [The case of Bishop Gyula Glattfelder of Csanád]*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, 39. box: 1920–1931. R1 Romania 2039/pol. 15.05.1923.
- Majláth erdélyi püspök szenátorsága [Senatorship of Bishop Mailáth of Transylvania]*, NAH, K105 Embassy at Vatican, 39. box: 1920–1931. R1 Romania, 60/pol. 18.09.1926.
- Msgr. Schioppa római látogatása [Visit of Msgr. Schioppa to Rome]*, NAH, K105, Embassy at Vatican, 35. box, 1929–1932. 19.01.1922.
- Journal article:  
\*, “Auxiliarii cu drept de succesiune ai episcopului Majlath” [Auxiliaries with right of succession to Bishop Majlath], *Cuvântul* 15.01.1927.



*Secondary sources*

- Adriányi Gábor, *A katolikus egyház története a 20. században Kelet-, Közép-Kelet és Dél-Kelet Európában*, Budapest: Kairosz, 2005.
- András Szabolcs, “New Details Regarding the Expulsion of Bishop Gyula Glattfelder from Romania”, *Studia Theologia Catholica Latina* 1 (2016) 87–98.
- Beke Margit (ed.), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között*, vol. I., München – Budapest: Aurora, 1992.
- Broun, Janice, The Catholic Church in Romania, in *Christianity Under Stress II: Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Durham – London: Duke University Press, 1990, 207–212.
- Holló László, “Die Römisch-Katolische Autonomie von Siebenbürgen: Der Siebenbürgische Römisch-Katolische Status“, *Studia Theologia Catholica Latina* 2 (2012) 3–24.
- Holló László, “The Impact of Reformation in the Transylvanian Diocese and the Beginnings of Catholic Revival“, *Studia Theologia Catholica Latina* 2 (2019) 35–72.
- Jakab Antal, “Az erdélyi római katolikus püspöki szék betöltésének vitája a 17. században”, *Erdélyi Múzeum* 49 (1944) 5–20.
- Jakab Antonius, *De hierarchia Ecclesiae Transsylvaniensis tempore principatus (1527–1697)* (doctoral dissertation), Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2000.
- Keul István, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe: Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality and Corporative Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526–1691)* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 143) (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions), Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Marton József and Jakabffy Tamás, *Az erdélyi katolicizmus századai*, Kolozsvár: Gloria, 1999.
- Miloş, Ofelia, *România și Sfântul Scaun în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, Bucureşti: Expert, 2010.
- Netzhammer, Raymund, *Bischof in Rumänien: im Spannungsfeld zwischen Staat und Vatikan*, II (Veröffentlichungen des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks 771), edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer in collaboration with Krista Zach, München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1996.
- Netzhammer, Raymund, *Episcop în România*, Vol. II, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 2005.

- Nóda Mózes, *Biserica Romano-Catolică din Transilvania în perioada interbelică*, Cluj-Napoca: Studium, 2008.
- Nóda Mózes, “The Historical, Political and Ecclesiastical Background of the 1927 Concordat between the Vatican and Romania”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9.27 (2010) 281–301.
- Salacz Gábor, *A magyar katolikus egyház a szomszédos államok uralma alatt*, München: Aurora, 1975.
- Szabó K. Attila (ed.), *Az erdélyi magyar tanító- és óvóképzés évszázadai 1777-2000*, Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2009, 55–69.
- Szántó Konrád, *A katolikus egyház története*, vol. I, Budapest: Ecclesia, 1983.
- Tóth Krisztián, Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus igazgatótanácsának 1873-as újjáalakulása és dualizmus kori tevékenységi köre, *Studia Theologica Transylvaniensia* 24.2 (2021) 331–360.
- Tusor Péter (ed.) *Magyarország és a római Szentszék (Források és távlatok)*, Róma-Budapest: Gondolat, 2012.
- Veszely Károly, *Erdélyi egyháztörténeti adatok III. Erdélynek a XVI és XVII században országgyűlésileg hozott, vallást tárgyazó törvénycikkei*, Kolozsvár, 1860.