

Theses of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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**The Union of Hungarian Workers of Romania (MADOSZ)  
(1934-1944)**

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## 1. Antecedents of the research

The Union of Hungarian Workers of Romania (MADOSZ) was considered worthy of interpretation right after the Second Vienna Award. The varying historical interpretations appraised the organization after the Second World War above of its real importance and accomplishments, meanwhile, at the beginning of the era of post-socialist Eastern-European regimes it was valued below of its achievements, thereafter, became essentially ignored.

MADOSZ first was evaluated by lawyer Imre Mikó in 1941. He considered the ideas of the Opposition of the Magyar Party (the predecessor of the organization) far leftist and clarified that their stances on the national question were purely “a disguise”. He described MADOSZ as the only leftist movement of the period “without Jews”.<sup>1</sup> It is striking though that overall Mikó’s evaluation of MADOSZ wasn’t nearly as negative as other historians would interpret the organization’s performance from greater historical distance – as we’ll see in the following.

After the Second World War and the upsurge of the Romanian Communist Party, the reshaping of the Romanian history began. The history of MADOSZ was met in place in the new party history by no other than László Bányai, the second and most important first secretary of the organization. The Romanian history writing, initially curious for the progressive movements of the Hungarian minority of Romania lost its interest for the question in the 1980’s. During the era of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule, Romanian historians focused on the question of the continuity of Romanians on the actual territory of the country and the might of the Romanian nation.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the historians of socialist Hungary paid more and more attention to the Hungarians living beyond the borders. The oeuvres of Dániel Csatári, Magdolna Töttössy and Ildikó Lipcsey are worth mentioning from this period.<sup>3</sup> These historical pieces were although deeply under the auspices of their political context. MADOSZ and its successor, the

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<sup>1</sup> Imre Mikó: *Huszonkét év. Az erdélyi magyarság politikai története 1918. december 1-től 1940. augusztus 30-ig* [Twenty-two years. The political history of the Hungarians of Romania between 1918. December 1. and 1940 August 30]. (Budapest, Stúdium, 1941), 167.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough analysis see Lucian Boia: *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* [History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness]. (Bucharest, Humanitas, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Dániel Csatári: *Forgószélben. Magyar-román viszony 1940-1945* [In a whirlwind. Hungarian-Romanian affairs 1940-1945]. (Budapest, Akadémiai, 1968); Dániel Csatári: *A Vásárhelyi Találkozó* [The Meeting of Târgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely]. (Budapest, Akadémiai, 1967); Magdolna Töttössy’s doctoral dissertation, defended in 1986 was published in 2005: Magdolna Töttössy: *A Magyar Népi Szövetség története 1944-1953. 1-2. kötet* [The History of the Hungarian People’s Union]. (Miercurea-Ciuc/Csíkszereda, Pallas-Akadémia, 2005); Ildikó Lipcsey: *A Román Kommunista Párt nemzetiségi politikája. A Magyar Népi Szövetség 1944–1953 (Kandidátusi értekezés)* [The national politics of the Romanian Communist Party. The Hungarian People’s Union 1944-1953]. (Budapest, 1988).

Hungarian People's Union (MNSZ) were used to emphasise the stereotypically constructed image of the peaceful coexistence and interdependence of the Hungarian and Romanian people. This approach had its roots in the Hungarian response to the nationalistic turn of the Romanian historical discourse in the 1980's.

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern-Europe brought the opening of the state archives for researchers. The newfound academic freedom made the diversification of the interpretations possible as well. The Hungarian historiography newly perceived the MADOSZ and the MNSZ as the servant of the Romanian state, even against the expressed or supposed political stances of their community, the Hungarian minority of Romania. It became widely accepted that their standpoint on the question of Transylvania explained their unsuccessful attempt to gain large public support during the interwar period. After this viewpoint the MADOSZ accepted the historical right of the Romanian state for the region held before by Hungary. Even worse, MADOSZ was presented merely as the *cover organization* of the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>4</sup>

The Hungarian Historians of Romania started to pay more attention to the era thanks to Nándor Bárdi and Gábor Vincze. In this context, the history of the MNSZ was reconsidered as well. In his work on the MNSZ, Tamás Lönhárt mentioned MADOSZ as the *mass organization* of the Communist Party of Romania.<sup>5</sup> Zoltán Mihály Nagy addressed the same question in his doctoral dissertation. He described MADOSZ as having an evanescent historical and political importance, and highlighting that the organization was an outsider of the internal public life of the Hungarian minority of Romania.<sup>6</sup> The sole historian to contest this idea on public support of MADOSZ was Ferenc Horváth Sz., who wrote in His historical piece that between 1935-1937 the organization was “widely supported”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ildikó Lipcsey: “A román kommunista párt a nemzetiségi kérdésről (1921—1945)” [The Romanian Communist Party on the National Question 1921-1945], *Tiszatáj* (9) 1987: 79-98; Another example: Gábor Vincze: “A Magyar Népi Szövetség válsága” [The Crisis of the Hungarian People's Union]. (Online: <http://epa.oszk.hu/02100/02169/00012/990230.htm> – Last accessed: 2019.05.16.)

<sup>5</sup> Tamás Lönhárt: *Uniunea Populară Maghiară în perioada instaurării comunismului în România (1944–1948)* [The Hungarian People's Union in the period of the establishment of Communism in Romania], (Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, Argonaut, 2009), 110. Although I prefer using the term *mass organization to cover organization*, I find acceptable differentiating the modality of referring to the organization after the regime change.

<sup>6</sup> Zoltán Mihály Nagy: *Kisebbségi érdekképviselő vagy pártpolitika? A Magyar Népi Szövetség története (1944-1953) (Doktori disszertáció)*. [Minority Representation or Party Politics? The History of the Hungarian People's Union 1944-1953], (Pécs, University of Pécs Press, 2011) (Online: <http://pea.lib.pte.hu/bitstream/handle/pea/16151/nagy-mihaly-zoltan-phd-2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> – Last accessed: 2018.05.16.)

<sup>7</sup> Ferenc Horváth Sz.: *Elutasítás és alkalmazkodás között. A romániai magyar kisebbségi elit politikai stratégiái (1931-1940)* [Between Rejection and Accommodation. Strategies of the Hungarian Minority of Romania 1931-1940], (Csíkszereda, Pro-Print, 2007), 151.

Relevant assertions in relation with MADOSZ were made by Ágoston Olti, who discussed the changes in the stances of the Communist Party of Romania regarding the national question in his paper.<sup>8</sup> First of all, he made it clear that the Communist International wasn't supporting minority national movements based on their level of oppression, but by the needs of the fight against imperialism of the Soviet Union. Secondly, they weren't thinking really of a *national self-determination even to the right of separation*, but just of the means of revolutionizing and annexing the region to a bigger federal entity, dominated by the soviets.

On the other hand, the Romanian historiography didn't address especially the question of MADOSZ after the change of regime in 1989.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the Romanian historians have started rethinking the interwar period of the communist movement in the country based on thorough archival research. They revealed many interesting aspects of the movement and helped achieving a better understanding of MADOSZ as well.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Research aims

The history of the Union of Hungarian Workers of Romania wasn't addressed by an unbiased historical work using a complex approach until today. This doctoral dissertation focuses on the history of the organization during the interwar period and the Second World War. Using a chronological construction and a political and intellectual history approach, I made efforts to investigate the organization's history on its own means and not as simply an annex of the history of the Hungarian People's Union.

My research questions can be separated in three categories. Firstly, given the ideologically burdened aspect of the interwar period's left-wing organization's history, it was necessary to find and process the archival sources related to the organization. My questions were accordingly the following: exactly from when to when, with whom leading, and participating was the organization functioning? Where was its place in the era's political

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<sup>8</sup> Ágoston Olti: "A Romániai Kommunista Párt és a romániai nemzetiségi/területi kérdés a két világháború között" [The Romanian Communist Party and the National/Territorial Question during the Interwar Period]. *Regio* (1) 2007: 109-132. (Online: <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00036/00065/pdf/109-132.pdf> – Last accessed: 2019.05.16.)

<sup>9</sup> Ioan Scurtu (ed.): *Enciclopedia partidelor politice din România. 1859-2003* [Encyclopedia of Parties in Romania 1859-2003] (Bucharest, Meronia, 2003), 150-151; Ioan Scurtu (ed.): *Minoritățile naționale din România. 1931-1938* [National Minorities of Romania 1931-138]. (Bucharest, National Archives of Romania, 1999), 401-403.

<sup>10</sup> The most important works here to mention are Tismăneanu Vladimir: *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003); Cristina Diaç: *Zorii comunismului în România. Ștefan Foriș, un destin neterminat* [The dawn of Communism in Romania. Ștefan Foriș, an unfinished destiny]. (Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2014).

scene? Analysing the intellectuals who created MADOSZ, what kind of general aspects can we highlight of their group using the means of the collective biography?

Secondly, I was interested in answering the following political and intellectual history questions: what were the Romanian, Hungarian and Transylvanian political and societal milieus during the existence of the organizations and which were the connexions of the organizers of MADOSZ? Can we describe an ideology of the party? How was this intertwined with the era's great ideological platforms? I was interested in answering whether the MADOSZ could give an authentic answer to the challenges of the Romanian political and societal situation or it was solely an object of the ones questioning the dominance of the period's representative Hungarian minority party in Romania, the Magyar Party? The question of how the MADOSZ can be evaluated in the era of the royal dictatorship (between February 1938 and September 1940), and after Transylvania had been divided between the Hungarian and Romanian state, had to be addressed too.

In addition, I wanted to clarify the extent of the control exercised on MADOSZ from Moscow. Was the organization simply a tool of the Soviets or it was more of a product of an attempt to break the barriers of the national minority status of a generational movement? But more importantly, the organization had to be placed in the left-wing tradition of the Hungarians of Romania and in the Twentieth Century History of Transylvania.

### **3. Research methods and sources**

I initially started to be preoccupied with this subject during the time of my university studies in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár. Even though I have used the historical works focusing on MADOSZ, I employed especially the primary sources of archives, the articles appeared in journals of the interwar era and the life path interviews of the leading figures of the organization. I have conducted my research in Budapest, Bucharest, Miercurea Ciuc/Csíksereda and Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár.

The most important part of my research took place in Bucharest, at the headquarters of the National Archives of Romania, the National Central Historical Archives (ANR ANIC). Here I consulted the fonds related to the Hungarian People's Union (Fonds Nr. 27.). Due to the close relationship between MADOSZ and the Communist Party of Romania, I explored the organizational and cadre fonds and the Regional and Provincial Committee of the CPR as

well. In interpreting these documents, I made good use of the Romanian historiography's essential works for this era, the cited books of Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cristina Diac.

I investigated the collections created concerning the repression and secret service conducted surveillance of the communists and their allies between the two world wars (especially Collections Nr. 50, 95 and 96.). These were extremely useful on understanding how these organizations perceived MADOSZ and even though maximal precaution was needed in dealing with them, they were full of essential details and clarifications concerning my subject.

In Romania I visited several other state and private archives. In Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár I explored the documents to be found in the Central Library of the Babeş-Bolyai University, and the Cluj county branch of the National Archives of Romania. I explored the personal documents of some of the most important personalities of the Hungarian left-wing sphere of the era in the Transylvanian Museum Society's Collections of Heritages and Repositories (János Demeter and Lajos Jordáky).

In Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda I explored the documents regarding my subject in the Harghita county subsidiary of the National Archives of Romania and the Szekler Museum of Ciuc. In the latter I found the personal heritage of one of the most important politicians of MADOSZ, László Bányai. Although these documents were essential for my research, I had to complement them with the other parts of the documents preserved in Budapest. In the Ráday Archives of the Danubian Reformed Church District and the Archives of the Institute of Political History I consulted the remaining accessible parts of the heritage of Bányai. On the other hand, I conducted research on the literary heritage of József Méliusz in the Petőfi Literary Museum as well.

For understanding the era's Hungarian State's perspective on the organization, I consulted in the National Archives of Hungary the fonds of the Foreign Ministry (K 63, K 64), of the Minority and Nationality Department (K 28) and the documents returned to the National Archives by the Institute of Political History (K 149). These provided essential details on the organization's history and helped me with source criticism. In addition, I watched the life path interviews of József Méliusz, Lajos Csögör and Pál Péter Domokos held in the Széchényi National Library. Moreover, I found the interviews of Gusztáv Molnár extremely useful, which were conducted along with the Romanian communists of Hungarian origin and held by the Jakabffy Elemér Foundation in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár.

## 4. New scientific results

The history of MADOSZ wasn't previously addressed by its own means. Knowing that the organization is highly controversial I analysed it trying to apply the upmost source criticism and prudence possible. One of the main novelties of my work is the presentation of the national-revolutionary phase of MADOSZ, before the Comintern's Popular Front turn. The life and role in the organization of László Mayer, the premier first secretary of MADOSZ has been hardly known before, as has been the exact process of his cousin's, László Bányai's way to replacing him. On the other hand, by analysing the group of the Intellectuals, who had played an essential role in creating MADOSZ, I tried to make a cautious generalization of their backgrounds and their previous views. I was interested in highlighting the main striking differences between them too.

Although I analysed the organization's political activity between 1936 and the February of 1938, the period of its legal existence, I tried to identify the ideological and personal links to the Communist Party of Romania and the National Peasant Party (an ally during this era). Analysing the period of the royal dictatorship of Carol the Second of Romania I had to address the general internal and external political context of these events and follow the paths of the ones remaining active politically. I tried to compare the ideology of MADOSZ and the Hungarian Populist movement. Although I found them deeply intertwined, there were some striking differences as well (principally on the Question of Transylvania and the Soviet Union's perception).

During this period, MADOSZ took part in the regime's antirevisionist mass rallies and aligned itself with the royal dictatorship fighting for the integrity of the Romanian state. This widely known stance of the MADOSZ is contrasted with the relatively obscure episode of the MADOSZ's second and short-lived national-revolutionary turn in 1940 – the real reason behind the persecution of the organization before the Second Vienna Award. In this case, they supported the idea of an independent Transylvania under soviet auspices. After the division of Transylvania between Romania and Hungary, MADOSZ ceased to exist for real as a separate movement. The ones being previously active in the movement had three main options ahead of them. First, they could act from then on illegally as professional revolutionaries, like László Bányai, Gyula Rácz, János Vincze and Árpád Szabó did in Southern-Transylvania. Secondly, they could also go on with their lives in the newly enlarged Hungary as public intellectuals, like Edgár Balogh did. But most of the members of the dismantled organization

preferred to stay out of the movement and avoid being attracted by illegal activities – it could be explained with their satisfaction with the turn of events, or with their fear for their liberty. During the period, most of whom played a role in the activities of MADOSZ previously and continued to oppose the regimes under they were living, suffered serious repression. After the Second World War, MADOSZ was reorganized and rebranded as MNSZ, the Hungarian People's Union, an ally of the Communist Party.

In conclusion, MADOSZ had been addressed before merely as an annex of the more important MNSZ. However, by analysing closely the organization, we can see that MADOSZ had a specific and interesting history of its own. For some, the organization meant a particularistic political socialisation milieu (like for Domokos Bács or Károly Tar), for others, MADOSZ was a modality to live out their views on the idealised role of the servant of the people (like for Edgár Balogh), and for some it constituted a political project for their personal ambitions for power (like for János Vincze).

This story is essential to be analysed meticulously for understanding the personalities of Hungarian origin, who became all powerful during the process of the communist state grip. MADOSZ is closely related to the Hungarian Populist Movement and constitutes an organic and essential part of the leftist tradition of the Hungarian minority of Romania. Meanwhile, many of the dilemmas and questions burdening nowadays Hungarian minority society of Romania have their roots in the era discussed. These Transylvanian debates, questions, life paths and fateful choices can help us to understand a segment of the Twentieth Century History of Transylvania, full of twists.



## 5. List of publications<sup>11</sup>

1. János Főcze: A gyimesvölgyi parasztlázadás [The Gyimes Valley Uprising]. *BBC History* (4) 2016: 68-71.
2. János Főcze: A romániai magyarság önszerveződési törekvései Trianon után [Attempts for self-organization of the Hungarians of Romania after the Treaty of Trianon]. In: Ballabás Dániel (ed.): *Mozaikok a 18-20. századi magyar és egyetemes történelemből* [Mosaics of the 18-20. Century's Hungarian and World History]. (Eszterházy Károly Egyetem Líceum Kiadó, Eger, 2017), 79-108.
3. János Főcze: Bányai László börtönben - Egy kommunista "megtérésének" története [László Bányai in prison – The Repentance of a Communist]. In: Béczi Tibor (ed.): *Árnyak és árnyalatok. Tanulmányok a kommunizmus 20. századi történetéről* [Shadows and Shades: Studies on the Communism's 20. Century History]. (Budapest, Prima Forma Tudományos Egyesület, 2017), 34-51.
4. János Főcze: A Magyar Dolgozók Országos Szövetségének 1934-es megalakítása és megalakítói [The founding and founders of the Union of Hungarian Workers of Romania]. In: Romsics Ignác (ed.): *Közelítések. Tanulmányok Erdély 19-20. századi történetéhez* [Approaches: Studies on the 19-20. Century of Transylvania]. (Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, Komp-Press Kiadó, 2018) 107-147.
5. János Főcze: Kommunista diákmozgalmak Kolozsváron a harmincas évek elején [Communist Student Movements in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár at the beginning of the Thirties]. *Erdélyi Krónika*, 2018. (Online: <https://erdelyikronika.net/2018/07/kommunista-diakmozgalmak-kolozsvaron-a-harmincas-evек-elejen/> – Last accessed: 2019.05.25.)
6. János Főcze: Kikiáltani a független Erdélyt vagy elfogadni a második bécsi döntést? A Kommunisták Romániai Pártja Erdélyi és Bánsági Tartományi Bizottsága vargabetűi 1940 júliusa és szeptembere között [Proclaiming an independent Transylvania or accepting the Second Vienna Award? The contradictory decisions of the Regional Committee of Transylvanian and Banat of the Communist Party of Romania between 1940 June and September]. *Archivnet* (4) 2018. (Online: <http://archivnet.hu/kikialtani-a-fuggetlen-erdelyt-vagy-elfogadni-a-masodik-becsi-dontest-a-kommunistak-romaniai-partja> – Last accessed: 2019.05.25.)

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<sup>11</sup> Only my publications closely related with the subject of my doctoral dissertation are included in this Theses Booklet. For the full list of my publications see my page on MTMT (The Store of Hungarian Scientific Works). (Online: <https://m2.mtmt.hu/gui2/?type=authors&mode=browse&sel=10054306>).