

**ANTI-LIBERALISM AND ANTISEMITISM IN DUALIST
HUNGARY:
THE RUTHENIAN ACTION**

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Abstract

Liberal nationalism had been dominating the Hungarian political scene for several decades after the Compromise of 1867, and remained in power until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918. However, the politics of governments are always shaped by their political opposition. In Dualist Hungary, towards the end of the 19th century, the rise of neo-conservatism and agrarianism resulted in the formation of several anti-liberal political organizations, putting the liberal government under serious pressure to end up with its *laissez-faire* economic policy. My thesis will focus on the Ruthenian action, a state-run aid program carried out in Subcarpathia, a periphery region in Northeastern Hungary, presenting it as the first instance when anti-liberalism entered state politics. As is shown, this anti-liberalism walked hand in hand with “practical” antisemitism. Such an antisemitism was inherent in the model of co-operatives and credit unions, where local Jews were altogether excluded from, based on the prejudiced image of the ‘usurer Jew’. The contemporary press coverage of the action shows that the governmental communication was cautiously avoiding framing the problems of the Subcarpathian region as a Jewish (or how they called: ‘denominational’) question. However, based on the archival sources found in the archives of the Ministry of Agriculture, I argue that this was rather a strategic move, which was necessary to keep the liberal Jewish middle and upper bourgeoisie as allies, as this alliance was of key importance for the liberal establishment to hold on to their power.

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Introduction

The end of the 19th century saw the crises of liberalism throughout the European continent. After the era of steady economic growth - the *Gründerzeit* - had ended with the economic crisis starting from the Viennese stock exchange in 1873, in most of the European countries the liberal political elite had been losing support. New anti-liberal political organizations were emerging in most of the European countries, but anti-liberalism reached the highest level of organization in Imperial Germany, where from the 1870s onwards, the critique of liberalism spread quickly across various strata of German society.¹ Political organizations of a new kind were created, led by social elites but aiming to gain mass following. Next to the German Conservative Party (*Deutschkonservative Partei*) founded in 1876, the most significant anti-liberal organization was the Agrarian League (*Bund der Landwirte*). This was not a traditional political party, but rather a pressure group, which worked on channeling the interests of the landed class and, increasingly, the interests of small-scale agricultural producers, including the peasantry.² The *Bund der Landwirte* did not have an openly antisemitic agenda (as it would not allow the organization to grow to a mass scale), but in some cases antisemitism was utilized to help bring together different interest groups, such as the Junkers (the Prussian landed nobility) and peasants.³ This flexibility in taking on or dropping antisemitic rhetoric proved useful for the *BdL* when it tried to combat antisemitic farmers' organizations in some regions of Germany. In the Kurhessen region, for example, the antisemite Otto Böckel was leading such an organization, named *Mitteldeutsche*

¹ Pulzer, Peter G. J. 1988. *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria*. Rev. ed. London: P. Halban. xvi

² Pulzer, Peter 'The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria' 122-132.

³ For the discussion on the relationship between anti-liberal reform movements and antisemitism in Germany, see Peal, David. 1987. "Antisemitism by other means? The rural cooperative movement in late 19th-century Germany." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*.

Bauernverein, which had on its agenda to combat Jewish “usurers”, using the same co-operative model as an instrument to gain mass followership⁴. The logic of the struggle for political power suggested that for the sake of winning seats in parliamentary elections, various factions were trying to co-opt the Agrarian League, incorporating claims of the interest group it represented into their political agenda.

The rise of anti-liberalism in Dualist Hungary in the form of Neo-conservatism and Agrarianism fits into this broader European context. The first half of the Dualist era, the start of which is signified by the Compromise between Austria and Hungary in 1867, saw the heyday of the *Gründerzeit* in the Hungary as well, an era marked by economic liberalism in whole Europe, which facilitated the emergence of a small but growing bourgeoisie.⁵ This momentum had significant consequences on the Hungarian Jewry, who - since their legal (though not complete) emancipation in 1867 - had been linked with thousand ties to the liberal establishment, and had acquired a prominent place in the bourgeoisie, the economic elite of Hungary. The end of the *Gründerzeit* shook the liberal political elite in many European countries, of which the German case was already mentioned. In Hungary, however, political liberalism remained in power until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918 – despite the growing discontents with economic liberalism among various segments of Hungarian society. However, as it will be shown in my thesis, the fact that the political hegemony of the liberals remained unchallenged, does not mean that it was not affected by the ant-liberal trends emerging in the broader society. Neo-conservatism and agrarianism were such anti-liberal political trends, which, parallel to their

⁴ On Otto Böckel's antisemitic movement in Germany, see Peal, David. 1987. "Antisemitism by other means? The rural cooperative movement in late 19th-century Germany." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*.

⁵ For a general overview of Hungarian History, including the Dualist period, see Sugar, Peter F., et al. *A History of Hungary*. n.p.: London : I.B. Tauris, c1990

German and Austrian⁶ relatives, attempted to channel the discontents of the landowners with economic liberalism, and enforce their interests against those of the bourgeois industrialists.

Miklós Szabó, scholar of 19th and 20th century political history, based in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, sees the rise of neo-conservatism and agrarianism as strongly interconnected anti-liberal and anti-modernist counter-reactions - but both using quintessentially modern political tools to achieve their political goals.⁷ Szabó argues that antisemitic tendencies had become integral parts of the neo-conservative critique of liberalism, which was also in part a critique of capitalism and the unrestricted freedom of the market. The declining landed nobility, the gentry was at the forefront of the agrarian movement, and their resentment towards their Jewish creditors, as well as the fundamental conflict between the agrarian and industrial interests, made antisemitism appealing to them. Being the biggest losers of the modernization period starting from the mid-19th century, they constituted the most frustrated element of Hungarian society. Szabó explains their antisemitic upheavals as clear manifestations of a social-psychological concept: scapegoating.⁸ Paul Hanebrink, historian of Christian nationalism in Hungary, sees the foundation of the League of Hungarian Landholders (*Gazdaszövetség*) by Sándor Károlyi, a member of the governing Liberal Party in 1896 as a manifestation of the gentry's demands for defense of landowners' interests against Jewish investors, who were allegedly buying up property from bankrupt gentry.⁹ The formation of credit unions (*hitelszövetkezet*) and consumers' co-operatives (*fogyasztási szövetkezet*) to circumvent "Jewish capital" was the means the League of Hungarian Landholders turned to, thus creating a country-wide institutional network containing strong political potential regarding the mass dissemination of the agrarian idea. The agrarian movement, emerging around

⁶ Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio in *Fin-de-siecle Vienna : politics and culture*. Schorske, Carl E., Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992

⁷ Szabó, Miklós. 2015. Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918. Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei. 130-142

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hanebrink, Paul A. *In Defense of Christian Hungary : Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944*. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 2006. 30-31.

the League, can best be resembled to a lobby/pressure/interest group, which grew beyond the bipolar post-*Ausgleich* political spectrum divided between the supporters of the 1867 compromise - the Liberal Party - and its opponents, the Independence Party.¹⁰ The agrarian movement was by character a conservative movement, but, as I have already mentioned, aiming to grow to a mass scale - for which it was necessary to address the small-scale landowners and the peasantry as well. The establishment of co-operatives aimed to mobilize – under the banner of “self-help”¹¹ - the peasantry against the local tradesmen and artisans. In many regions of Hungary, these local artisans and tradesmen were largely (but not exclusively) Jews, which gave an ethno-religious angle to a fundamentally class conflict, and an *à propos* for antisemitic agitation. As a typical anti-liberal movement, the agrarians demanded more state involvement in the country’s social and economic life, and the Ruthenian action is a good example of how the movement imagined this state involvement.

The Ruthenian action was a state-run developmental project that was started in 1897 in Subcarpathian Rus, an impoverished periphery region in North-Eastern Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹² The initiators of the project: the liberal government advised by the Greek Catholic clergy, aimed to help and elevate the impoverished Ruthenian peasant population.

¹⁰ Szabó, Miklós. 2015. *Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918.* Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei. 130-142

¹¹ Torsten. *Cooperatives in ethnic conflicts: Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th century.* n.p.: Berlin : Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, c2006

¹² A comprehensive study has not yet been written about the Ruthenian action. The topic rather appears in chapters, sections of publications about Hungarian Jewish history: Bányai, Viktória, Csilla Fedinec, Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy, and Victor Karády. *Zsidók Kárpátalján : Történelem És Örökség a Dualizmus Koráról Napjainkig.* Budapest : Aposztróf Kiadó, 2013,; the history of the Ruthenian minority in Subcarpathia: Mayer, Mária. *The Rusyns of Hungary : political and social developments, 1860-1910.* n.p.: Ocala : Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, 1998,; agricultural history: Gottfried Barna. A "rutén akció" Bereg vármegyében. /1897—1901./ *Szabolcs-szatmár-beregi levéltári évkönyv.*13. (1999), and political historical works about the rise of anti-liberalism (Szabó, Miklós. 2015. *Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918.* Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei, 2015) and the developments of the „nationality question” in Dualist Hungary: Szabó, Miloslav. ““Because words are not deeds.” Antisemitic Practice and Nationality Policies in Upper Hungary around 1900.” *Quest : Issues In Contemporary Jewish History* no. 3 (2012). Vigh, Kálmán. “A Hegyvidéki Akció És a Kárpátaljai Zsidóság.” *Partes Populorum Minores Alienigenae*, no. 1. (1994): 167–81. is a valuable study using unique local sources.

The Ruthenian action was carried out in the cooperation of several ministries of the Kálmán Széll government, but it was supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture which supervised the action.¹³ In my thesis, I will attempt to place the action into its larger historical context: interpreting it as a momentum when the demands of new, anti-liberal political forces, such as agrarianism and neo-conservatism were incorporated into the politics of the liberal government. This incorporation happened through the agrarian elements of the governing party. There is a consensus among political historians that Ignác Darányi, who held the post of Minister of Agriculture between 1895 and 1903, was a government member who had been affiliated with the agrarian movement¹⁴, representing the conservative trend in the transforming Hungarian political spectrum. (This transformation that had been going on since roughly the 1880s signified a shift from the pro- and anti-*Ausgleich* bipolarity towards the liberal-conservative antagonism.) As Miklós Szabó argues, Darányi was the one who channeled the reform ideas of the neo-conservatives and agrarians, which concerned mostly social policy.¹⁵ The Ruthenian action undoubtedly served state interests, and the motivations of running it shall be discussed later, but what is important here is to emphasize that the tools applied were borrowed from anti-liberal movements by a liberal government.

If we are to accept that antisemitism was instrumental for the anti-liberal social and political movements to achieve their goals, like it has been argued in the case Hungary and Germany¹⁶ as well, the question is there: did this antisemitism enter as well into state politics with the Ruthenian action through co-operatives and credit unions originally propagated by agrarians and neo-conservatives? In this thesis, I will attempt to answer another question as well. As it will be shown in the second chapter of the main body, the Ruthenian action was a project which had to

¹³ Gyurgyák, János. *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*. [The Jewish Question in Hungary]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001, pp. 351

¹⁴ Szabó, Miklós. 2015. *Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918*. Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei. 158.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ About how anti-liberal political movements utilized antisemitism, see for example Peal, David. 1987. "Antisemitism by other means? The rural cooperative movement in late 19th-century Germany." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*.

be handled carefully, due to its anti-liberal character, which was becoming more and more obvious by the beginning of the 1900s. The questions emerge: what strategy did the government apply to legitimize an anti-liberal state program in a liberal establishment (especially in front of the liberal-minded public opinion, including the urban Jewish bourgeoisie), and how did the Ministry of Agriculture handle certain conflict situations that emerged locally following the initiation of the action?

There is a wide range of sources available for research about the Ruthenian action. The most important - because mostly unpublished - sources I have identified are the documents of the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the Ruthenian action, which can be found in the National Archives¹⁷. There, the so-called “bureau documents” fond contains, among others, reports submitted by Ede Egan and his associates, letters of complaint by local Jewish tradesmen and innkeepers, as well as thank-you letters by Ruthenian Greek Catholic priests, or policy recommendations on the necessary measures for the limitation of Jewish (Galicianer) immigration to the region. Some documents submitted by the Ministry’s Subcarpathian branch office - responsible for carrying out the action - can also be found in the National Archives. The branch office was established in 1899, two years after the action was started in Bereg county’s 56 settlements. Later on it moved to Munkács. The action was expanded gradually to all the 4 counties of Subcarpathia (Bereg, Ung, Ugocsa, Máramaros) by 1904, and later - by 1911 - parts of Szepes and Szatmár counties were also included into the action.¹⁸ The branch office made yearly reports to correspond about the results and measures taken to the various ministries (Commerce, Finances, Justice, Religion and Public Education) involved in the action, although these were being systematically published only from 1903 on, when Egan’s position was filled by another trustee,

¹⁷ Hungarian National Archives, Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture. K 178 (‘Presidential documents’ [Elnöki iratok]). (later referred to as MNL, K 184.)

¹⁸ For a general chronology, see for example: Vígh, Kálmán. “A Hegyvidéki Akció És a Kárpátaljai Zsidóság.” *Partes Populorum Minores Alienigenae*, no. 1. (1994): 167–81.

József Kazy after his predecessor's death.¹⁹ Next to the archival sources, the articles covering the Ruthenian action broaden up our view on the contemporary significance of the Ruthenian action, because they inform us how the action was received in various social circles - ranging from the loyal liberal *supporters of the government* to the neo-conservative, agrarian circles who would be the *supporters of the Ruthenian action*, being an anti-liberal, agrarian protectionist state aid programme. Other sources are: minutes of parliamentary sessions discussing the Ruthenian action (or the 'Ruthenian question'), essays and pamphlets published especially in the 1910s which evaluate the Ruthenian action.

¹⁹ "Egan Ede – öngyilkos" [Egan Ede – Suicide]. *Budapesti Napló* (September 20, 1901)

Chapter I. The Agrarian Movement: Anti-Liberalism, Antisemitism

The end of the 19th century saw the decline of Liberalism in continental Europe. One big factor in this was the 1873 crash in the stock exchange and the economic depression following it that shook the liberal establishment the strongest in Germany and Austria. The failure of economic liberalism is considered by many of the historians of political antisemitism to be the root cause for the start of the antisemitic movement in Germany, where Wilhelm Marr, Albert Treitschke, Adolf Stöcker and others have laid down the foundations of a completely new type of Jew-hatred.²⁰ Antisemitism, instead of relying on old Christian arguments against Jews and Judaism, despised the Jews as a race - although elements of the religious anti-Jewish rhetoric were also used widely in the antisemitic literature.²¹ Jacob Katz in his book *From Prejudice to Destruction* argues that the antisemitic movement had, from the very beginning, a universal character, because of the active correspondence and networking of its proponents. Antisemitism in Hungary, which I set out to discuss here, therefore, should also be placed in a universal, mainly European context. Even more so, because there are common features among the social and political preconditions for the birth and growth of political antisemitism in the emerging nation-states of the European continent. In the case of Hungary, antisemitism in Habsburg Austria will be the most important comparison, due to its geographical and political proximity and the shared experience of the Dual Habsburg Monarchy. However, neither Austrian, nor Hungarian antisemitism could be understood without regarding their German parallel, from which also many of the Hungarian antisemitic ideologues took inspiration. On the other hand, the Hungarian situation is not fully comparable to the Austrian

²⁰ The intention to understand the rise of Nazism in Germany drove many scholars to research political antisemitism in Imperial Germany and in Austria. See: Peter G. J. Pulzer's book, "The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria" from 1964, along with Shulamit Volkov's seminal study "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany." from 1978, and a part of Hannah Arendt's "Origins of Totalitarianism" from 1951.

²¹ Bein, Alex. *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem*. Rutherford, N.J.: Herzl Press, 1990

and German one, and this is due to the periphery situation of Hungary, which influenced the social, political and economic developments also at the time period under examination here. Andrew C. Janos in his *Politics of Backwardness in Hungary* approaches Hungarian history with this periphery situation in mind. In the context of this research, this periphery situation gains significance regarding the relationship between the Jewish businessmen and the native elite, which will lead us to the understanding of the antisemitism of the agrarians – a group mostly composed of lesser landowners. In Hungary as a periphery country in Europe, modernization and bourgeois industrial revolution came belated, moreover, they found no native middle class – as ethnic Magyars comprised mostly the thin layer of nobility and the vast masses of peasantry. Thus, the motors of modernization and logically the first ones to go through rapid embourgeoisement were non-Magyars: Jews and ethnic Germans. However, due to the remaining feudal structure of the Hungarian society (again very much characteristic for periphery countries), the Magyar feudal elites managed to retain their power in the political sphere, where Jewish bourgeoisie was excluded from. This ‘ethnic division of labor’, again, was common in other periphery regions as well, like partitioned Poland. This resulted in an ambivalent relationship between the Jewish bourgeoisie and the native landed elites. On one hand, the political machine needed the Jews to create a modern economy, and the large landowners “would profit from the skills and meticulousness”. On the other hand, the lesser landowners, whose prosperity started to decline with the emergence of the agrarian crisis, “resented their indebtedness to Jewish creditors” out of fear of losing their property to them.²²

²² Janos, Andrew C. *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825-1945*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982. 115.

Antisemitism and anti-Liberalism

Reinhard Rürüp²³ argues that antisemitism in the 1870s and 1880s emerged as a counter-reaction against the insecurity produced by liberal capitalism than as a rejection of Jewish emancipation. Rürüp explains the rise of antisemitism as social unrest that accompanied industrial revolution, blaming the Jews for the evils of liberal capitalism. The background of this phenomenon is that as the quintessential middleman minority of Europe²⁴, the Jews have long played an important role in the financial/commercial sector in various realms of the continent, mainly because they were not allowed to buy and own land or enter guilds prior to their emancipation. The image of the usurer Jew, who takes excessive interest and profits from the poverty of others originates here. One of the most important proponents of Jewish emancipation, Christian Wilhelm Dohm in his *Über die Bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (On the Civic Improvement of the Jews) expressed his conviction that the poor moral condition of the Jews in Europe is to be explained by the fact that they are restricted to professions of such low moral standards, and that by freeing them from these circumstances they would become better civilians. Dohm and other proponents of emancipation wished to see a shift in the social stratification of the Jews, including their influx to more productive occupations. However, in Central and Eastern Europe (including Germany), despite the legal actions granting Jews equality directly following the act of their emancipation, in varying degree Jews remained excluded from many occupational strata. The 19th century saw - next to the national economies - the emergence of national bureaucratic systems as well. However, statistical data from Central Eastern Europe and Germany provide proof that Jews could enter the public sector only in low proportions, whereas the private sector was open to Jews and non-Jews alike. Viktor Karády calls it “a more or less unofficial

²³ Rürüp, Reinhard. "Jewish emancipation and bourgeois society." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (1969):67.

²⁴ For the detailed discussion of Jews as a middleman minority, see: Slezkine, Yuri. *The Jewish century*. n.p.: Princeton : Princeton University Press, c2004

institutionalized discrimination” in civil service, and it contributed to the high number of Jews in the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie.²⁵ Thus, the critics of emancipation and the proponents of its reversal could easily refer to the unsuccessful restratification, and retain the image of the usurer Jew, claiming that Jews have an “inborn disposition” to practise usury.²⁶

The aforementioned advancement of Jews in embourgeoisement and entrepreneurship that made them be perceived as the biggest benefactors of the era of economic liberalism, the *Grunderzeit* in Hungary, Austria and Germany, hit back when the economic prosperity declined. In Germany and Austria the crash of the stock exchange in 1873, in Hungary the agricultural crisis rearing its head at the end of the 1870s made the Jews - whose social, economic and political interests had tied them to liberalism - vulnerable to the social groups discontented with this liberalism. “The failure of liberalism left the Jews a victim” to “new anti-liberal social forces” - writes Carl Schorske in his book on Fin-de-Siecle Vienna. Among these anti-Liberal mass movements Christian Socialism, the German Bund der Landwirte, and their Hungarian counterparts: neo-conservatism and the agrarian movement will be the focus of this chapter’s discussion. However, before going on to their discussion, the precursors of these anti-liberal movements should be identified. In the case of Hungary, it was the dead-ended attempt of Gyozo Istoczy to make political antisemitism the foundation of a political party. Originally the representative of the Liberal Party in the Hungarian parliament Istoczy, gaining political capital from the blood libel of Tiszaeszlar (1882-1883), founded the National Antisemitic Party (Országos Antiszemita Part) in 1883.²⁷ Andrew C. Janos gives an overview of genealogy of the foundation

²⁵ Karády, Viktor. "Continuities of the “Jewish Question” in Hungary since the “Golden Age”." In *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, edited by Braham Randolph L. and Kovács András, 45-72. Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2016. 50-51.

²⁶ Peal, David. 1987. "Antisemitism by other means? The rural cooperative movement in late 19th-century Germany." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*. 137.

²⁷ Handler, Andrew. *An early blueprint for Zionism: Gyozo Istoczy's political anti-semitism*. n.p.: Boulder : East European Monographs, 1989

of what he calls an “antisemitic platform” of “a dozen or so deputies from the Independence and Forty-Eight parties”. In his words:

“...in the seventies and eighties there were sporadic flare-ups of antisemitic sentiment in the countryside, fueled as much by the xenophobic superstitions of the peasantry as by the resentment of petty landowners whose acres often wound up in the hands of Jewish landowners.”²⁸

Istoczy’s part achieved its biggest success in the 1884 elections, when they won altogether 17 seats in the Parliament. However, throughout its lifespan the Antisemitic Party remained marginal in the political scene, and finally disappeared from the political spectrum after its dissolution in 1892. Scholarship explains the gradual dying out of the movement with the strength of the ‘liberal consensus’, in the framework of which the non-Jewish liberal political elite provided protection for the Jewish bourgeoisie. The antisemitism, however, did not disappear from Hungarian politics with the failure of Istoczy’s political experiment. In the section about the “conservatives in the liberal machinery”, the continuity between Istoczy’s antisemitism and the anti-liberal movements we departed from will be explained in the section titled “Conservatives in the liberal establishment”.

Hungarian Specificity: the Hegemony of Liberalism

As previously indicated, drawing a comparison between turn-of-the-century Hungary, Germany and Austria can only be beneficial, if the differences between the social and political settings where antisemitic actors operate are properly noted. In Hungary, the major difference compared to Austria and even more so to Germany, liberalism remained in power until much later in politics. The Dualist period following the Ausgleich is basically about the unquestionable hegemony of liberal nationalism, and until the end of the Dualist era none of its opponents

²⁸ Janos, Andrew C. *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825-1945*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982. 141.

managed to challenge it seriously. Even the Catholic People's party (entering into Parliament in 1896), about which I will write later, failed to achieve real influence - even between 1906 and 1910 when it rose to executive power within the so-called coalition government.²⁹ However, the fact that the liberal political establishment remained in political power does not mean that anti-liberal social forces did not influence its politics. The agrarian movement as a pressure group, and the Catholic People's Party as a rivaling political organization, as the case of the Ruthenian action will clearly demonstrate, both shaped the liberal government's policies - from within and from outside.

Not an exclusively Hungarian specificity, but rather the consequence of Hungary's "backwardness" that at the beginning of the Dualist era, the majority of the population still belonged to the peasantry and the thin layer of landed nobility and aristocracy. Therefore in Hungary, the bourgeois middle class which is the main motor of modernization, was crowded by the freshly emancipated, steadily growing Hungarian Jewry, which became the most successful confessional group in contemporary Hungarian society. The word confessional needs to be emphasized here, because after their legal emancipation the Jews of Hungary became Hungarians of the Israelite faith - that is they no longer constituted a separate ethnic/national group. This was not an abruptly imposed decision, but a result of an integrational process that had started already in the first half of the 19th century, a milestone in it being the patriotic Jewish participation in the War of Independence of Hungary in 1848-49. Inviting the Jews to the making of the nation has its explanation in the fact that in the wake of Hungary's nation-building process ethnic Magyars, the group to become the titular nation of the country, did not constitute a majority at the time of the birth of the Dual Monarchy.³⁰ Jews who emigrated to Hungary from other Habsburg lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Galicia) were willingly Magyarizing, helping Magyars to constitute a

²⁹ Konrád, Miklós. 'Jewish perception of antisemitism in Hungary before World War I' in 'Jewish Studies at the Central European University' 4 (2004-2005) 180.

³⁰ Sugar, Peter F., et al. *A History of Hungary*. n.p.: London : I.B. Tauris, c1990 274-275.

majority in multi-ethnic Hungary. In return they were promised protection under the liberal establishment. This - unspoken - consensus is termed as the “assimilationist social contract”³¹ by Viktor Karády, and this helps explain why it was impossible for overt political antisemitism to take roots in parliamentary politics in the early 1880s.

Conservatives in the liberal machinery: On what terms were the agrarians and the neo-conservatives antisemites?

Before I set out to discuss the anti-Liberal influence within the liberal government through the agrarian wing, and the neo-conservative pressure coming from the Catholic People’s Party, it seems necessary to explain why I discuss the agrarian movement and the neo-conservative Christian People’s Party in the context of antisemitism in Hungary. Jacob Katz in *From Prejudice to Destruction* identifies continuity between Győző Istóczy’s antisemitic movement that after a short peak of success had lost its followership by the end of the first half of the 1880s, and the Catholic People’s party, whose aims - he claims - “were emphatically antisemitic”.³² They stood for the preservation of the Christian character of Society and the state, which they declared to be possible only by the elimination of Jews from certain economic and other positions. They also painstakingly opposed the *receptió*, that is the acceptance of the Jewish confession among the “received” churches in Hungary that, after a long debate, took place in 1895.³³ It was really the Christian People’s Party and the neo-conservatives who introduced the idea of consumer organizations and financial institutions in the 1890s - which later on came into life as the “Hangya

³¹ Karády, Viktor. 'Asszimiláció és társadalmi krízis' ['Assimilation an Social Crisis'] Világosság 34, no. 3, p. 37.

³² Katz, Jacob. *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980. 257-258.

³³ For detailed discussion, see the chapter 'The Origins of Christian Nationalism, '1890-1914' Hanebrink, Paul A. *In Defense of Christian Hungary : Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944*. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 2006.

szövetkezetek” (“Ant Co-operatives”). These organizations, Katz argues, were designed to “compete with Jewish concerns”, promoting a new spirit of hostility to Jews and Judaism”.³⁴

Miklós Szabó, historian of 19th-20th century Hungarian political history likewise argued that antisemitic tendencies had become integral parts of the neo-conservative critique of liberalism, which was also in part a critique of capitalism and the unrestricted freedom of the market. However, Szabó emphasizes the novelty of this political movement. He sees the rise of neo-conservatism and right-wing radicalism - two strongly interconnected counter-reactions against liberalism and modernism - but both using quintessentially modern political tools to achieve their political goals. For the Christian People’s Party, to gain popularity after its 1895 foundation, the co-operatives and credit unions were such tools. However, the Hungarian electoral system remained heavily elitist until relatively late, and voting right was based on the level of income - therefore, the landed nobility remained at the forefront of the neo-conservative movement. Their aforementioned resentment towards their Jewish creditors, as well as the fundamental conflict between the agrarian and industrial interests, made the declining landed nobility the carriers of antisemitism. Being the biggest losers of the modernization period starting from the mid-19th century, they constituted the most frustrated element of Hungarian society. Szabó explains their antisemitic upheavals as clear manifestations of a social-psychological concept: scapegoating.³⁵

The Agrarian movement, on the other hand, made a conservative influence on the liberal government from within the establishment. There is a consensus among political historians of Hungary that Ignác Darányi, minister of agriculture in the Hungarian Government between 1895 and 1903 was a government member who had been affiliated with the agrarian movement, representing the conservative trend in the transforming Hungarian political spectrum. The agrarian movement can best be resembled to a lobby/pressure/interest group, which grew beyond the

³⁴Katz, Jacob. ‘From Prejudice to Destruction’ 278-279.

³⁵ Szabó, Miklós. 2015. *Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918*. Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei. 130-142.

bipolar post-Ausgleich political spectrum divided between the supporters of the 1867 compromise - the Liberal Party - and its opponents, the Independence Party. The agrarian movement as a pressure group sought to represent the interests of the landowners - mostly large-scale landowners with aristocratic backgrounds - as opposed to the strengthening economic claims of the bourgeoisie. It was by character a conservative movement, which demanded protectionist measures from the state to improve the position of Hungarian agricultural producers who were unable to compete with the import of cheap grain from the United States.³⁶ As Miklós Szabó argues, Darányi was the one who channeled the reform ideas of the neo-conservatives, which concerned mostly social policy. Several actions of Darányi indicate his conservative background, and the Ruthenian action is one of them.³⁷ The importance of this project lies in its “model” function - that it was supposed to be the test version of a larger socio-political project which - as the neo-conservatives had been expecting - could be implemented on a larger, country-wide level. The main purpose of this state programme was to improve the situation of the impoverished rural population in the North-Eastern periphery region of Hungary by engaging them in agricultural production. The government leased a large part from the latifundium of Count Schönborn and distributed it among the Ruthenian agrarian proletariat for subleasing. However, it is the establishment of co-operatives of various sorts, such as credit co-operatives (hitelszövetkezet) and goods/consumer cooperatives (fogyasztási szövetkezet) that needs to be examined in detail here, as the spreading of these local organizations - mobilizing the peasantry against the local tradesmen and artisanry - were potentially able to generate and channel anti-Jewish attitudes. The reason for this is that these local artisans and tradesmen were largely (but not exclusively) Jews, which gave an ethno-religious angle to a fundamentally class conflict, and an á propos for antisemitic agitation. As Szabó argues, with the implementation of the Ruthenian action the state actually made the first

³⁶ Reference to Konrád

³⁷ Szabó, Miklós. 2015. *Az újkonzervativizmus és a Jobboldali Radikalizmus Története: 1867-1918*. Budapest: Szabó Miklós örökösei. 148-159.

step towards the incorporation of neo-conservative methods of making social policy into state politics. To take this argument a step forward, the adoption of the cooperative model to state policy was to catch the wind from the sail of the Catholic People's party and the Christian conservative course, which, as I mentioned, was actively using the establishment of cooperative networks to gain popularity among the rural agrarian population. Also, the state intervention helping the largely non-Magyar impoverished was to accelerate their assimilation and Magyarization.³⁸ The problem is that by adopting the cooperative model, antisemitism also entered state politics alongside this social policy propagated by neo-conservatives. The Ruthenian action will be presented in this context in the next chapter.

David Peal³⁹ argues for the distinction between "practical antisemitism" and "political antisemitism", the first one combating the Jews as usurers, the latter combating the Jews as an evil race.⁴⁰ Practical antisemitism as a term was used and shaped by the radical antisemite Otto Böckel, who had used it to legitimize the establishment of cooperatives and credit unions in Hessen in the 1880s. Thus, antisemitism became a practical tool for the anti-capitalist movement and ceased to be a separate ideology - which it was when it entered the German political scene. This transformation of antisemitism, I argue, had also happened in Hungary, but got a twist due to the ethnically heterogeneous character of the country. The image of the usurer Jew is heavily ethnicized in the Hungarian context, as it refers to the Eastern European Jews who immigrated to Hungary from Galicia, Romania and the western territories of the Russian Empire. They had a heavily stigmatized public image, strongly resembling to that of the *Ostjude* in Germany⁴¹, and were called Khazars, which was an antisemitic reversal of the so-called "Khazar theory" which

³⁸ Szabó, Miloslav. "'Because words are not deeds.'" Antisemitic Practice and Nationality Policies in Upper Hungary around 1900." *Quest : Issues In Contemporary Jewish History* no. 3 (2012), 170.

³⁹ Peal, David. 1987. "Antisemitism by other means? The rural cooperative movement in late 19th-century Germany." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 146.

⁴¹ See the discussion of the *Ostjude*-Khazar parallel in the section titled 'The Neolog/Assimilationist attitude, in Chapter III.

suggested that the Hungarian Jews were the descendants of Jewish nomads who had come to Europe together with Magyars. This ethnicization came handy for the state to distinguish these “immigrant”, foreign Jews from “our” established Israelites, and to circumvent the accusations about the state-established cooperatives institutionalizing antisemitism. However, when we examine the language that is being used after the necessary disclaimer that this is not antisemitism, what we see is that the accusations towards Khazars/Galicians/Polish Jews/Immigrants, etc. are evoking alleged general Jewish traits - they essentialize and generalize. The development of such a coded language (the agrarian lobby for example used the terms “cosmopolitan” and “mobile” as antonyms to “Magyar” and “fixed” capital”) is thanks to the aforementioned liberal hegemony.⁴² Anti-liberals, who did not want to be identified as antisemites although their rhetoric was rich of antisemitic elements, shifted the antisemitic discourse from “political” to “practical” in character.

In the next chapter, I will turn to the Ruthenian action, the state-run developmental project that was started in 1897 in Subcarpathian Rus, an impoverished periphery region in North-Eastern Hungary to help and elevate the impoverished Ruthenian peasant population – which was said to be oppressed by local Jewish merchants, moneylenders and inn-keepers. The Ruthenian action provided a context for propaganda against “Eastern Jews”, around 1900, and had been successfully thematizing public discourse during the years it had been running. This was a huge challenge for the liberal government, which continuously had to make efforts to reconcile the “cognitive dissonance” that one of its main political principles is promoting the equality of the citizens regardless their denomination, while in the multi-ethnic periphery regions their cooperatives are bound to generate inter-ethnic, or inter-denominational conflicts. The essentially anti-liberal programme of the Ruthenian action also becomes problematic when its resonance in the contemporary public discourse is concerned. Even if the government was careful not to create a Jewish question from the Ruthenian action, the Ministerial Trustee responsible for carrying out the

⁴² Szabó, Miloslav. ““Because words are not deeds.” Antisemitic Practice and Nationality Policies in Upper Hungary around 1900.” *Quest : Issues In Contemporary Jewish History* no. 3 (2012) 168.

action, Ede Egan, was scandalizing the programme by - using the rhetoric of “practical antisemitism” - framing it as a rescue project of the poor Ruthenian agrarian masses from the wild, fanatic, but more clever “immigrants” exploiting and oppressing them.

Chapter II. The Ruthenian action

In 1897, Gyula Firczák, bishop of the Greek Catholic Church in Subcarpathia, submitted a “Memorandum” to the Prime Minister and five other Ministries: Religion and Education, Commerce, Interior, Agriculture and Finance, calling for state action to improve the conditions in the impoverished periphery region of Northeastern Hungary. This document is considered to be the direct antecedent of the Ruthenian action, which was started already in the same year, under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, first in the township of Szolyva in Bereg county, to spread all over the Subcarpathian region by 1902. Ede Egan, an expert on the methods of agricultural production was appointed as ministerial trustee in October 1897, to plan and carry out the project, in cooperation with the above-listed ministries.⁴³ Egan soon moved to Szolyva, where the so-called *Hegyvidéki Kirendeltség* (Highland Branch Office) was set up for the management of the action.

Subcarpathia: a multi-ethnic periphery region

Subcarpathia was a border region of Hungary, bordering with West Galicia, formerly a territory of Poland, annexed to the Habsburg Empire after the Third Partition of Poland in 1795. The term Subcarpathia refers to four historical counties of the Hungarian Kingdom: Máramaros, Bereg, Ung and Ugocsa.⁴⁴ As the north-eastern periphery region of the country, the wave of modernization in the Age of Dualism (1867-1913) hit Subcarpathia later and more gradually than the central or western territories of Hungary. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the majority of its inhabitants were peasants or agrarian workers, supported by a layer of petty bourgeoisie serving

⁴³ Gottfried Barna. A "rutén akció" Bereg vármegyében. /1897–1901./ *Szabolcs-szatmár-beregi levéltári évkönyv*. - 13. (1999) p. 195.

⁴⁴ Bányai et al., *Zsidók Kárpátalján : Történelem És Örökség a Dualizmus Koráról Napjainkig*. Budapest : Aposztróf Kiadó, 2013, 7–8.

their, and the local estate owners' needs. Only a thin layer of burghers lived in the urban centers of the counties such as Ungvár, Munkács, Máramarossziget or Beregszász. The existing literature on the region covering the Age of Dualism states that large landed estates - called *latifundia* - dominated the local economy, leaving little space for the agricultural activities of smallholders.⁴⁵ One of the biggest estates belonged to the Schönborn and Buchheim families, who alone possessed 37% of the land in Munkács-Szentmiklós manor.⁴⁶ The limited economic possibilities of the local smallholders and the high ratio of day-laborers working on these large *latifundia* already set the stage for social problems. These were ranging from exploitation of cheap labor to the sustainability problems of smallholder households. Next to the lack of the industrial sector and the relative low level of infrastructure, the other indicator of the periphery position of Subcarpathia was the small number of educational institutions. According to Viktor Karády's article about the secular public and higher education of the Jews of Subcarpathia,⁴⁷ the elementary schooling was mostly provided by the various denominations. Most of the elementary schools in the region were maintained by the Greek Catholic Church, and the language of education was mostly the language of the Ruthenian population.⁴⁸ This didn't changed much until the implementation of the so-called Lex Apponyi in 1907, which made teaching Hungarian language obligatory in every school - independently from state or private maintenance. There were altogether only four secondary schools in the four counties – ran by the Calvinist and Catholic churches. Also, the establishment of the state education system was rather delayed in the region. However, as Karády points out, the low level of participation in education in the statistics of the time always has to be read as the

⁴⁵ Gönczi, Andrea. Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején. Ungvár-Beregszász: PoliPrint – II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, 2007. 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bányai et al., Zsidók Kárpátalján : Történelem És Örökség a Dualizmus Koráról Napjainkig., chap. Értelmiség, világi iskolázás és elitképzés 78-84.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

participation rate in public education. Most of the children actually might have participated in unofficial, more traditional forms of education.⁴⁹

The Ruthenians and the nationality question

Subcarpathia was - and to some extent has remained - a multi-ethnic region. In the time period under examination, three major ethnic groups were present in the region: Magyars, Ruthenians and Jews.⁵⁰ The Ruthenians constituted the largest ethnic group in the Subcarpathian region. Kálmán Víg⁵¹ in his article about the ‘Ruthenian action’ describes the Ruthenians as an ethnic group which traditionally occupied social strata of peasantry in the Hungarian economy, with the exception of a thin layer of the Ruthenian intelligentsia consisting of Greek Catholic pastors rather than secular intellectuals. Víg emphasizes that Ruthenians in the region did not develop a strong ethno-political movement, partly because the Ruthenian priests – who possibly could lead such a movement in the absence of secular intellectuals – were allied with the Roman Catholic Church and most of them were Magyarized, that is linguistically and culturally assimilated to ethnic Hungarians⁵² The roots of this alliance go back to the so-called “Ungvár union” declared in 1646, when many of the Ruthenian parishes in the region, led by that of Munkács, previously belonging to the Greek Patriarchate of the Byzantine Catholic Church, voluntarily swore allegiance to the pope and went under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church and became ‘Greek Catholics’.⁵³ This step represented a turn towards the Western world, and had been a decisive factor in the Ruthenians’ becoming a favored nationality in the eye of the ruling magyar political elite of Hungary during the Dualist times. Another element of the

⁴⁹ Bányai et al., *Zsidók Kárpátalján : Történelem És Örökség a Dualizmus Koráról Napjainkig.*, chap. Értelmiség, világi iskolázás és elitképzés 78-84.

⁵⁰ McCagg, “A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918”, 168.

⁵¹ Full ref.

⁵² Víg, “A Hegyvidéki Akció És a Kárpátaljai Zsidóság.”

⁵³ Gönczi, Andrea. *Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején.* Ungvár-Beregszász: PoliPrint – II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, 2007. 24-25.

Ruthenians' public image comes from the times of Rákóczi's War of Independence (1703-1711), the uprising of a group of Hungarian noblemen against Habsburg rule. For their participation in the War of Independence on the Hungarian side, prince Francis II Rákóczi, the leader of the uprising, called the Ruthenians *gens fidelissima*, the most loyal nationality.⁵⁴ Many Ruthenians participated in the 1848-1849 War of Independence as well: mainly Greek Catholic priests, who fought in the Hungarian Militia (*Nemzetőrség*), served as army chaplains or war correspondents. However, this participation was not as solid as in the Rákóczi Uprising. In the Beregszász State Archives there are documents which report about attacks on the Hungarian Army and several "guerilla actions" in the Subcarpathian region.⁵⁵

During the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century, the Orthodox Church had been trying to win the Ruthenians of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for the panslavic idea, and led a Russian cultural movement - part of which was a schismatic movement that brought about the return of a significant number of parishes to the Greek Orthodox Church. Andrea Gönczi, who writes about the schismatic movements of the Ruthenians argues that schismatic movements – that is the return of whole parishes to their 'original' church, to 'pravoslavie' – had more socio-economic than religious motivations. She argues schism was a reaction of the Ruthenians to their increasing exploitation by the Greek Catholic Church, an attempt to get rid of their economic burdens which became unbearable by that time.⁵⁶

In the Dualist period, the Ruthenians of Hungary were also subjected to Magyarization, which became primary state policy after 1867.⁵⁷ The means the Hungarian state used were 1) the gradual strengthening of the public education system, and 2) making Hungarian language the official language of state bureaucracy. The urban culture was also 'Magyar' culture, as the

⁵⁴ Gönczi, Andrea. "Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején", 13.

⁵⁵ Gönczi, Andrea. "Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején", 15.

⁵⁶ Gönczi, Andrea. "Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején" 5-7.

⁵⁷ On the broader context of Magyarization in Nationalism Studies see: Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, New York, 1991

Hungarian elite lived mainly in the regional centers. The schismatic movement met the strong resistance of the Catholic Church, and the state was also interested in stopping it. The reason for Church and state discontents with the schism was that while the Greek Catholic Church was supporting Magyarization in the region, joining to the Orthodox Church meant joining the ‘panslavic’ movement. In the eyes of the government the spread of the schismatic movement endangered the stability of the nationalizing Hungarian state, and fought against this perceived ‘political agitation’ with every means possible. The Ruthenian action can be interpreted as one chapter in the history of the Hungarian government’s ‘quest for the Ruthenian soul’.

Jews/Khazars/Immigrants - the significant Other

The Jews living in in the Subcarpathian counties had migrated to the region mostly from Galicia, were Yiddish-speakers, and many of them were followers of Hasidism, the spiritual religious movement within Judaism originating from late 18th century Eastern Europe. However, the following of the Orthodox congregation was also significant. Using Péter Hanák’s three-phase assimilation model⁵⁸, the Jews who migrated from Galicia to Subcarpathia mostly between 1850s-1880s arguably were somewhere between the first and the second phase of assimilation (between the “settlement” and the “bicultural stage”). We know from contemporary journalistic reports and personal accounts from the region that interaction between the traditional rural Jewish population and other ethnic groups was very limited. Although the socio-economic integration of the Jews (integration to the local economy) has already started, linguistically, culturally and by appearance they remained distinct from other groups. When Anikó Prepuk writes about the role of the Jews in the economy in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century, she refers to the Galician Jewry as a population very much lagging behind the Hungarian Jewry in terms of social mobility. The

⁵⁸ Hanák, Péter. “Problems of Jewish Assimilation in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” in *The Power of the Past. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick, Roderick Floud (eds.), MIT Press p. 238.

social layer of bourgeoisie did not really develop within this Jewish community. Most of the urban Jewish population engaged in petty trade and artisanship, while the Jews living in rural areas either worked on large estates of landowners or ran of inns and taverns.⁵⁹ From this occupation-wise very diverse population, only a small strata consisted of financiers and moneylenders, who were often criminalized for engaging in usury, that is lending money with an unreasonably high interest. In the contemporary public opinion – not just in the antisemitic discourse – the Subcarpathian Jews were associated with this image of the usurer. The ratio of the unemployed was also very high in the region. Although Prepuk presents a data from Galicia saying that 85% of the Jewish population lived under the minimum of living standards, most of the immigrants from Galicia who settled down mostly in the villages of the Subcarpathian region were presumably just as poor as the Jewry of the territories they left behind.⁶⁰ The Subcarpathian Jews were also characterized as paupers in their public image. For example, an article published in *Egyenlőség*, the weekly of the Hungarian reform (Neolog) Jews, stated saying that actually 99% of the Jewish population, living in Máramaros, Bereg and Ugocsa counties at that time were “just as poor as the Ruthenians”⁶¹, the ethnic group which constituted the majority of the population in the region.⁶²

The activities of the Ruthenian action

In the initial phase of the Ruthenian action Ede Egan, the Ministry of Agriculture’s trustee responsible for the project, prepared reports about the current state of affairs in the region. The Ministry, aiming to increase the productivity of the Ruthenian peasantry, advised by Egan’s reports, decided to give land to the Ruthenians through land lease (*földbérlet*). From the local

⁵⁹ Prepuk, Anikó. *A zsidóság Közép-Kelet Európában a 19-20. Században* [The Jewry of Central-Eastern Europe in 19-20th Centuries], Budapest: Csokonai, 1997 p. 155.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ ‘A munkácsi riadalom’ [Fear in Munkács], *Egyenlőség*, no. 7 (18. February 1900) 1-2.

⁶² McCagg, William O., *A History of Habsburg Jews 1670-1918*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992 p. 168.

landowner Schönborn family's estate, the state leased 12622 cadastral acres of land for 25 years, which the poorest Ruthenian peasants could sub-lease.⁶³ Besides providing access to land, quality grain for sowing was distributed among the leaseholders, and model farms were established to promote the usage of modern agricultural technology. Modernizing attempts also reached the animal husbandry in the framework of the Ruthenian action, for example by the improvement of the quality of the cattle stock.⁶⁴

From the point of view of this paper, however, it is the other angle of the Ruthenian action that needs to be discussed more in detail. The establishment of credit unions and consumers' cooperatives was the other means to help out the Ruthenian peasant population and decrease their poverty. László Braun, historian of the Subcarpathian region wrote a thorough study about the implementation of the co-operative model in the region, using the archival material of the Highland Branch Office that can be found in the Ukrainian State Archives of Zakarpattie Oblast. His findings show that the first credit unions were established in 1898 in Bereg county, and functioned in the institutional framework of the National Central Credit Union (*Országos Központi Hitelszövetkezet*), created in the same year for the improvement of agriculture and domestic industry. The financing of the credit unions was twofold: one investor was the state, through the interest-free deposits of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the other creditor was the National Central Credit Union, which functioned with an independent body to decide which local credit union should get funding, and what should its scale be.⁶⁵ The credit unions were led by the president, who in most cases was the local Greek Catholic pastor or nobleman, its vice-president was usually the local school-master (who was also an accountant and in some cases the secretary). The National Central Credit Union sent out inspectors to supervise the co-operatives. The condition for the

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Gottfried Barna. A "rutén akció" Bereg vármegyében. /1897–1901./ *Szabolcs-szatmár-beregi levéltári évkönyv.* - 13. (1999) p. 201

⁶⁵ Braun, László. *Hitelszövetkezetek a hegyvidéki kirendeltség keretében 1898-1910 között*. Ungvár : PoliPrint, 2011 12-13.

membership in the credit union was the regular payment of dues, and the co-operative members could get credit for various purposes: for example to be able to expand their cattle-stock or to buy a piece of land or meadow.⁶⁶ The consumers' co-operatives, which were simple stock-houses, were the extensions of credit co-operatives, where the members of the co-operatives could sell the surplus of their produce, but there were household products, other foodstuff and alcohol products on stock as well. These stock-houses supplied the shops of the co-operatives with products.

The ethnicization of socio-economic problems

Based on the previous description of the social situation in Subcarpathia, one motive of the 'Ruthenian action' could have been to eliminate, or at least to ease its periphery situation with all the socio-economic problems that come with it. The solution was clear: breaking the dominance of large landed properties, and supporting small-scale agricultural production; making the impoverished peasant population more productive, for example by improving the agricultural technology and teaching them new production methods. Giving access to leasing land to those segments of the population who had not been engaged in agricultural production before could have been an option as well, thus restructuring the local economy. Voices were heard from the liberal wing of the public opinion that the Ruthenian action should be used as an opportunity to direct Jews in the region from the commercial sector to agriculture.⁶⁷ However, instead of neutrally emphasizing the overwhelming social problems hitting hard the whole population – Jews and Ruthenians alike - regardless their ethnic or religious characteristics, the 'Ruthenian action' was framed as a nationality question – in other words, it was heavily ethnicized. This gives the Ruthenian action its major layer of interpretation. It can be interpreted as a demonstrative act of support towards an ethnic group which is well advanced in Magyarization, aimed to strengthen the

⁶⁶ Braun, László. 'Hitelszövetkezetek...' 12-13.

⁶⁷ "Az Egan kliensei".[The Clients of Egan] *Budapesti Napló* (February 15, 1900):1-2.

ties between Hungary's ethnic Magyars and the Ruthenians. The intention of the action on a more abstract level may well have been to keep them within Hungary's sphere of influence, against the Russian (Orthodox influence) – and reset the political “balance” in the multiethnic Hungarian state, meaning the absolute political-cultural dominance of Magyars. In the years preceding this state programme, there was a growing awareness about the accelerating emigration of the Ruthenians from the Subcarpathian counties. Géza Halász, a Hungarian publicist published a brochure with the title “Ötvenezer bereg-megyei orosz létkérdése” [The fate of 50 thousand Russians in Bereg county], in which he argues that only state intervention can save the Ruthenians from final decay, and it needs to be done because the Ruthenians as a nationality are integral parts of the “body of the nation” (*nemzettest*).⁶⁸ Firczák's letter follows the same line of thought, moreover, he is representing the Greek Catholic Church, which - as it is common to other Eastern Catholic Churches - have been associated with the Ruthenians as an ethnic group. As we have already seen their position in the co-operatives institutional hierarchy, the Greek Catholic pastors were very much involved in carrying out the Ruthenian action, which is another account for the ethnicization of the social problems of the Subcarpathian periphery region.

Thus, as I have pointed out, the Ruthenian minority, lacking a nationalist intellectual elite was especially exposed to Magyarization, and in return for their “loyalty” to the Hungarian nation-state they got economic protectionism from the state. To show how far the efforts to Magyarize the Ruthenians went, I will present the argumentation of a publication from 1918 titled “The Ruthenian question”, written by Ottó Hoffmann, a member of the parliament that time.⁶⁹ Hoffmann considers the complete incorporation of the Ruthenians into the Hungarian society urgent, because he thinks they are the last resort in the middle of a growing threat of nationalist agitation. The pamphlet was written on the eve of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy, when the various nationalities were very vocal about their secessionist claims. Hoffmann says that the Slovak and

⁶⁸ Halász Géza. *Ötvenezer beregmegyei orosz létkérdése*. Munkács : Farkas K. Kny., 1896.

⁶⁹ Hoffmann, Otto *A rutén kérdés*. Pécs : Dunántúl, 1918.

Romanian ethnic minorities had already been affected by this nationalist agitation, but not so much the Ruthenians, because the Ruthenian intelligentsia who would lead a national movement had already Magyarized.⁷⁰ To stop the growing panslavic, eastern influence, Hoffmann suggests that the Hungarian state should stop treating the Ruthenians as an ethnic minority, and should react to the Ruthenians' willingness to Magyarize with establishing institutions that would support their Magyarization. "We could involve a crowd of half million to the blood circulation of Magyars within a lifetime, which crowd is only able to fight against the khazar [meaning in this context the Eastern European Jewish] plague and baffle - serving primarily our interests - the developing threat of the Eastern neighbors this way" - Hoffmann wrote⁷¹

Social question - Jewish question

The ethnically-framed Ruthenian action has another characteristic that is important in this context. It seems that in the public discourse, as well as in the official governmental rhetoric, the Ruthenian action was represented as some kind of a solution to a social problem - caused by the local Jews, who, even though they had been living in northeastern Hungary for generations already,⁷² were still named as "immigrants" in the public discourse and in the documents of state bureaucracy. They were mostly of Galician origin, and occupied commercial, small-scale financial and service-provider roles in the region that time.⁷³ In the discourse about the Ruthenian action the 'Galicianer' Jews are represented as the oppressors and exploiters of the Ruthenians, whose interest is to keep the impoverished Ruthenian peasants in an inferior position to be able to exploit them further economically - by usury, and other immoral practices. The victimization of the Ruthenian peasantry and the representation of their Jewish neighbors as immoral entities served

⁷⁰ Hoffmann Ottó 'A rutén kérdés' 15.

⁷¹ Hoffmann Ottó 'A rutén kérdés' 21.

⁷² Pietsch, Walter. "A magyar vidéki zsidóság fejlődésirányzatai a 19. század első felében" ["The Ways of Development of the Hungarian Rural Jewry in the First Half of the 19th Century] in *Múlt és Jövő*, 14 (2003) 3. 75–82.

⁷³ *ibid*

as justification for the state intervention on behalf of the Ruthenians. As mentioned earlier, Magyarization had been the major social and political project of the Hungarian government in the Dualist era. Along these lines, the Ruthenians' advancement in Magyarization was also emphasized in the contemporary discourse, and it was contrasted with the slowness of the assimilation of the Galician Jews, who showed little willingness to change Magyarize their names or to send their children to Hungarian public schools instead of traditional Jewish schools. The rhetoric that scapegoated the Jews (despite calling them by another name) was not at all an accepted mode of speech in official state circles in Dualist Hungary. We are at the time of the liberal consensus, when officially no-one could be treated differently because of their religion and nationality - it was supposed to be a private matter whether someone was an *Israelite*, Protestant or Catholic.⁷⁴ Also, as it was previously indicated, the liberal Jewish bourgeoisie was the primary ally of the liberal Magyar political elite in the modernization of the Hungarian economy - and their contribution was honored by protection from antisemitism. Thus, it requires explanation why the Ministry of Agriculture's trustee, Ede Egan, appointed to carry out the Ruthenian action, could openly blame the local Jews for the problems of the Ruthenian peasantry in his infamous speech in Munkács, held on 12th February, 1900 - without ever being penalized for this by his employer, the government. The speech was published as a brochure shortly after it was delivered, however, the publication has to be used with some reservations, as it might already be a censored variation of the original speech. The event was widely covered throughout the Hungarian press, however, due to the heavy political polarization of that scene, the political orientation of the newspapers has to be kept in mind when reading the correspondence about the meeting of the 'Ruthenian committee' in Munkács. The Munkács speech, which helps to understand how Egan conceptualized the Ruthenian action and the problems of the periphery region, will be presented in the next section.

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The Munkács speech

In Egan's view, the problems in Subcarpathia were not at all unique to that region, but were the problems of periphery regions - "in remote parts of Hungary" -, which, due to the overly centralized state machinery had been "deprived of certain privileges", and their local interests had been neglected.⁷⁵ Thus, he argued for the extension of the action to the lands all along the Carpathian, to "improve the lives of ethnic Slovaks, Romanians, Szeklers and Magyars alike".⁷⁶ The problems which he described were derived from the critique of capitalism, free market and the *laissez-faire* policy of the liberal state, which, in Egan's words "degraded the land to a simple commodity",⁷⁷ and such a policy (wrongly) saw no significance in who owned the land - as long as he paid taxes. Egan endorsed his "employer", Ignác Darányi, Minister of Agriculture for being the first one in Hungary to openly broke up with the *laissez-faire* principle, and with the introduction of the Ruthenian action – Egan emphasized - he acted along the lines of the slogan: "Who owns the land, owns the country!"⁷⁸ The protectionist logic of the agrarian ideas is at work here. The Ruthenian action - Egan claims - prioritizes the "protection of the land and the men who cultivate it."⁷⁹ And here we arrive to one key element of the model of the Ruthenian action: that it aims to put the Ruthenian peasants at an advantage, while it excludes the part of the population which has not been engaged in agricultural work before. Egan calls this constructed group as "*kereskedők*" (tradesmen), and makes a lengthy argumentation about why it is crucial to keep these tradesmen away from sub-leasing parts of the local estate-owner's land, and why they should not be let join or lead credit unions and consumers' co-operatives. The most important reason for this exclusion is the concern that the "resourceful" tradespeople would soon flood these institutions,

⁷⁵ Egan, Ede. *A hegyvidéki földművelő nép közgazdasági helyzetének javítását célzó állami akció ügyében Munkácson 1900 febr. 12-én tartott értekezletről szóló jelentés*. Werbőczy ny. 1900. 8.

⁷⁶ Egan, Ede. 'A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...', 8.

⁷⁷ Egan, Ede. 'A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...', 17.

⁷⁸ Egan, Ede. 'A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...' 18.

⁷⁹ Egan, Ede. 'A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...' 18.

and turn them to their own benefits - as they are being intellectually superior, and their mind is quicker in financial matters than that of “slow-in-thinking” peasants.⁸⁰

It is telling that, from the very beginning, Egan keeps emphasizing that through the Ruthenian action the state provides help to people regardless their “nationality” (*nemzetiség*)⁸¹ and “denomination” (*hitfelekezet*). Such a disclaimer is clearly a reaction to the criticism of his activities in the Ruthenian action. “Some said this is a denominational question; others that it’s a nationality question. There were some who wanted to see antisemitism in this movement, motivated by noble intention” - he said,⁸² setting the scene to repulse these accusations. However, in his Munkács speech Egan only paid lip-service to “denominational neutrality” in the first half of the speech. On several points he indirectly revealed he had the Ruthenians in mind as the only beneficiaries of the action. For example, when he talked about the employment of Greek Catholic pastors in the boards of the co-operatives, he called them the “natural leaders for the people”.⁸³ Also, even if the Ruthenians are never specifically named as the only beneficiaries of the state aid programme, clearly they are the ones who conform to the aforementioned criterion: being engaged in agricultural production. In the Subcarpathian region, from the beginning of their migration to Hungary from Galicia in the first half of the 19th century, Jews by and large had been occupying a middleman status, engaged in selling the agricultural products of the estates and supplying the needs of the tenant farmers and their master⁸⁴ - therefore were represented in the agricultural sector in relatively low numbers. This phenomenon can best be resembled to “ethnic economy”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 61.

⁸¹ The term “nationality” in the Hungarian context means ethnic minority, accordingly, the “nationality question” concerns the treatment of ethnic minorities in Hungarian nation-state where ethnic Magyars constitute the titular nation.

⁸² Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 5.

⁸³ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 67.

⁸⁴ Pietsch, Walter. “A Zsidók Bevándorlása Galiciából és a Magyarországi Zsidóság.” *Valóság : Társadalomtudományi Közlöny : A Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat Társadalomtudományi Folyóirata* 31., no. 11. (1988): 46-59.

⁸⁵ For the discussion of the phenomenon see: Portes, Alejandro, and Robert D. Manning. 1986. “The Immigrant Enclave: Theory and Empirical Examples.” in *Competitive Ethnic Relations*, edited by Susan Olzak and Joane Nagel. New York: Academic Press. pp. 47-78

meaning that ethnic stratification in a certain multi-ethnic society coincides with the economic stratification of it. Here, this meant the affiliation of the Ruthenians with agricultural production, and the affiliation of Jews with commerce and moneylending. Thus, by implementing a program which targets the agricultural sector in the region, this program actually targets the Ruthenian population.

In the beginning of the second part of his speech, Egan stated that what he was about to say was his very own opinion, not the official stance of the government. He needed this disclaimer, because what followed was anything but conform to the basic principles of the liberal Hungarian government.

“There has been a discussion going on for long time here, about the emigration [of the Ruthenians], and its reasons are the subject of research. In my opinion, and anybody else who knows this area will affirm it, in these border counties the main reason of emigration is immigration. (...) Who are these immigrants? I will start out with this one: they are not even Jews!”⁸⁶

This quotation is to show how Egan’s rhetorical strategy functions. When he mentions “immigrants”, Egan obviously means the Jews of Galician origin, who came to Hungary in the course of the 19th century. Egan applies this term regardless of the length of residency of the Galician Jews in Hungary, just as he would call an “immigrant” someone who has Galician ancestry but was born already in Hungary and has Hungarian nationality. Calling the Jews by the code-word: immigrants, rather serves a strategic purpose here - it helps Egan to distance, if only in rhetoric, the despised Subcarpathian Jews from the established Hungarian Jewry. The exclamation: “they are not even Jews!” corresponds about another tool of distinction-making. Egan introduces the racist argumentation to his public by saying that the “mostly blond or ginger type kaftan Jews” are not Jews “in the common sense”, because they do not belong to the Semitic race.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 140.

⁸⁷ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 141.

“As I know, these are the direct descendants of the Khazars, whose essential wildness they inherited, and who only partially assimilated to the Jewish people” - Egan told about the alleged racial profile of the Subcarpathian Jews.⁸⁸ The Khazar theory, which I have mentioned already is being applied here probably under the influence of Miklós Bartha, who, in the collection of his reportages titled *Kazárföldön* [On the Land of Khazars], subverted the original (Jewish, Kohnian) Khazar origin myth to create a new, heavily orientalizing term for the backward, immoral usurer.⁸⁹

There are many points in the text which suggest that the above described attempts to secure himself from the accusations with antisemitism are only situational, strategic steps. The distinction between Khazar and Jew disappears in the following quotation, and in the meantime, classic antisemitic phrases (clannishness, desire for dominance) appear.

“The lust for power and mastery, and the racial clannishness of these local Jews is so strong that it makes them incapable of participation in the co-operatives’ work, especially with regard to their would-be co-members, who have such an infantile, simple mindset and overly humble, almost cowardly and subservient habitus like our Ruthenians.”⁹⁰

Egan goes on with how much he feels Jews threaten Hungary, and endanger the country’s “national character”. He expresses his fear that if the Jews’ influence would keep on spreading in this speed, it would endanger the “existence” of the [Hungarian] nation, which is already in a more fragile situation than other European countries, because its minorities are being more exposed to agitation from their ethnic kin, residing in neighboring countries.⁹¹

Despite all these, Egan still insists on not being an antisemite - “at least not in the vulgar sense of the word”, he says. He claims he is not an antisemite, because he has no problem with assimilated, “patriotic” Jews, “who don’t want to maintain a state within a state” and work

⁸⁸ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 140.

⁸⁹ Bartha, Miklós. *Kazár földön*. San Francisco, Calif. : Hídfő Baráti Köre, 1970.

⁹⁰ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 145.

⁹¹ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 117.

“together with us” in “building this country”.⁹² These people he considers Hungarians. Those Jews, however, who “show no interest in the public affairs of this country” but “ask for and get instructions from the Paris Alliance⁹³” and who reject “Christian morales”, the “backbone” of the Hungarian “patriotic public opinion”⁹⁴, are not considered Hungarians. In Egan’s visions, one aim of the Ruthenian action is to make these people leave the country.⁹⁵ The twist and turn in the story is that he invokes the Hungarian (Neolog) Jews as a point of reference – who themselves, he writes, also demanded official measures for the restriction of immigration from Galicia to Hungary.⁹⁶

The myth of Galician immigration

From the last two decades of the 19th century onwards, the Hungarian public opinion was preoccupied with the “danger” of the unlimited immigration of “proletarian elements” – an unpronounced reference to Galician Jews.⁹⁷ Even the liberal circles supported the idea of a bill regulating and restricting immigration, and they had the northeastern border region and the allegedly intensifying Galician migration in mind. Indeed, Jews inhabiting the so-called Unterland, signifying the northeastern region of historical Hungary, by and large migrated there from Galicia, their immigration starting from the late 18th century, after the annexation of Galicia to the Habsburg Empire in 1772. However, while the immigration of Jews from this over-populated, economically worse-off region, as statistical data show, was more or less steadily increasing up until the beginning of the 1850’s, it definitely started decreasing – although remaining significant – between 1850 and 1867, to lose statistical visibility in the years after the Compromise.⁹⁸ Thus, it appears that the Hungarian authorities and the public opinion were concerned about Galician

⁹² Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 150.

⁹³ [*Alliance Israelite Universelle*] Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 151-152.

⁹⁴ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 152-153.

⁹⁵ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 153-154.

⁹⁶ Egan, Ede. ‘A hegyvidéki földművelő nép...’ 159.

⁹⁷ Konrád Miklós. „Az államhatalom és a régió más népeiségeinek viszonya a zsidósághoz” in *Zsidók Kárpátalján. Történelem és örökség*. Bányai et. Al. (eds.), Budapest : Aposztróf Kiadó, 2013. 114-119.

⁹⁸ Varga, László. "Zsidó bevándorlás Magyarországon." *Századok* no. 1 (1992) 72-73.

Jewish immigration when there was practically no such thing. Miklós Konrád calls this phenomenon “the myth of Galician immigration”, and attempts to explain it in one of his essays. Konrád argues that the Hungarian public opinion could have perceived the internal migration of culturally more distinct Eastern European Jews from the rural border regions towards the urban centers of the country as immigration. Though, there were attempts already in the contemporary public discourse to dissolve this false perception, the public opinion was not receptive to them.⁹⁹ Not even the liberal Neolog Jews, who, as later will be shown, found it feasible to blame the Galician immigrants and their separatism for every possible obstacle to the process of Magyarization. The result of the increasing public demand for the legal restriction of immigration was a bill passed in 1903, which 1) made it harder for foreigners who can freely enter the country (as Galicia was the part of Austro-Hungary, border closure was not an option) to get permission, and 2) gave especially strong power to the police to expel non-naturalized immigrants who “pose a threat to public safety and order”.¹⁰⁰ Konrád suggests that passing this bill, indirectly but obviously directed against Jews, was a populist act on behalf of the Széll government. In such a way, they made a gesture to the agrarian wing of the Liberal Party led by Sándor Károlyi, which demanded the restriction of immigration.¹⁰¹ Of course, a careful disclaimer was made that not the Hungarian citizens of the Israelite faith, but the foreign Galician Jews were concerned, and the issue was not “denominational”.¹⁰² Upholding the myth of Galician immigration, I argue following Konrád’s line of thought, served also as a good strategic move for the legitimation of the Ruthenian action in the eyes of the liberals (including now the Neolog Jewry in this heterogeneous group as well). The Ruthenian action, as I have previously described it, was about to expel Subcarpathian Jews from their position in the local economy, and as Egan made it clear in his Munkács speech, they would “ideally” leave the country as a consequence. Sometimes even second and third

⁹⁹ Konrád Miklós. ‘Az államhatalom és a régió más népességeinek viszonya a zsidósághoz’ 116.

¹⁰⁰ Konrád Miklós. ‘Az államhatalom és a régió más népességeinek viszonya a zsidósághoz’ 118.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Konrád Miklós. ‘Az államhatalom és a régió más népességeinek viszonya a zsidósághoz’ 117.

generations of Galician Jews were alienated from the rest of Hungarian Jewry, and considered not worthy for citizenship.

Chapter III. The state in the Ruthenian action

In this chapter, I will focus on the role of the state and its liberal government in the Ruthenian action, the background and motivation of which had already been discussed. It became clear through the previous sections that the Ruthenian action was a project which had to be handled very carefully, due to its anti-liberal character, which was becoming more and more obvious by the beginning of the 1900s. What was the reaction of the liberal wing of the public opinion to such a discrepancy, and how did it affect the position and reputation of the liberal government? These are the questions I will attempt to answer in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, I will present the findings of the archival research I have done in the Hungarian National Archives where the documents of the Ministry of Agriculture of Dualist Hungary can be found. Due to the unfortunate situation that most of the items concerning the Ruthenian action that can be found in the registry books were lost or destroyed at times of reorganization, there are only a handful of documents that help us find out how the Ruthenian action, this controversial project was handled within the Ministry. Still, when compared to and complemented by the appearance of the government's stance on the issues related to the Ruthenian action in the liberal press and in the minutes of the parliamentary sessions, we will get a sharper (though never complete) picture about how certain problems, antagonisms and controversies emerging around the Ruthenian action were dealt with 'behind the curtains'.

Egan and the Ruthenian action in the public discourse – the liberals' opinion

There are numerous articles in the contemporary press about the Ruthenian action. There is a whole discourse revolving around the figure of Ede Egan, who seems to be a highly controversial character. The positive or negative evaluation of his activity as ministerial trustee in the contemporary press depends on whether the text concerned appears in the conservative-

agrarian or the liberal press. The most important representative of the latter was *Budapesti Napló* at the time period of our concern, which was run by József Vészi, a prominent Jewish newspaper editor and liberal Jewish politician.¹⁰³ *Budapesti Napló* was very much concerned with the rise of agrarianism, neo-conservatism and clericalism, and was usually endorsing the liberal government for its tireless attempts to keep these anti-liberal political and social forces under control. The newspaper took on the topic of the Ruthenian action after the infamous speech of Egan in Munkács. In the next few days after the speech delivered on 12th February 1900, *Budapesti Napló* published several articles¹⁰⁴ on the topic, establishing its opinion about the content. Surprisingly, their conclusion was that “there is no Egan-case, there is no Jewish question.” This was the initial sentence of an editorial published on the 18th of February, titled “Epilogue”.¹⁰⁵ Its author argued that there was no reason to be panicked that Egan was an antisemite, because what he said, he meant only for the Galician Jews, and had nothing to do with the established Hungarian Jewry. The reason he claimed so was that after the outbreak of the scandal about Egan, the Minister of Agriculture, Ignác Darányi spoke in the House of Representatives to clear up the situation. Beside stating that it stands far from the liberal agenda of the government to run a program that is denominationally not impartial, he made public Egan’s statement submitted to the Ministry - in which the trustee clearly distinguished between the “proletarian elements who immigrated from Galicia” and the Hungarian Jews as “members of a received denomination”, and apologized from the latter if parts of his speech “offended their sensibilities”¹⁰⁶. This was enough for the faithful believers in the liberal establishment. About the other factor in their easy satisfaction, namely, the hostile attitude of the liberal Neolog Jewry towards the Eastern European Jew, their *Ostjude*, I will write in a later section.

¹⁰³ Buzinkay Géza. *Kis Magyar Sajtótörténet*. Budapest : Haza és Haladás Alapítvány, 1993. 54.

¹⁰⁴ See the list in Bibliography.

¹⁰⁵ “Epilógus” [Epilogue]. *Budapesti Napló*, (February 17, 1900):1

¹⁰⁶ Reference to that BN article

It becomes clear from the articles, that the basic idea of the Ruthenian action, which was to help the impoverished population of the Subcarpathian region out of purely humanistic motivation thus strengthening their ties to the nation-state, was sympathetic to Vészi and his circle. They were also convinced that the liberal government of Kálmán Széll was not and had never been betraying the idea of liberalism, which meant treating every subject of the state equally as citizens, regardless their ‘denomination’¹⁰⁷. They were even convinced - or rather hoped? - that Darányi, the Minister of Agriculture, who had already been widely considered affiliated with the agrarian movement, was free from this denominational impartiality with which the agrarians in the public discourse turned towards the Ruthenian action. The problem for Vészi was the personality of Egan, who, in his view, voiced in his newspaper, made the whole project corrupted. Many times Vészi more or less directly pronounced his hope for the removal of Egan, so that the action could, after some corrections, though, go on peacefully, as a “patriotic project”.¹⁰⁸

However, the liberal opposition had to get disappointed in their government time and again, because Egan was never removed from his position - even, when he aired antisemitic statements, although covering it with xenophobia, talking about the Jews of Subcarpathia as Galician immigrants. The murder of a Ruthenian worker of a consumers’ cooperative in Zsdenyova, one settlement in Volovets district in Subcarpathia provides a good insight into what was the mode of speech of Egan, and to be sure, many sympathizers of the agrarian movement and neo-conservatism. Moreover, it is also a good example of ‘ethnic conflict in the making’. The murder of Zsdenyova took place in 28th or 29th of September, 1900, when a Ruthenian carter shot a Ruthenian shopkeeper of the local consumers’ cooperative in Zsdenyova.¹⁰⁹ It seems that Egan took the situation into his own hands immediately, and thus managed to frame the incident as he wanted: in a telegram he sent to the press on behalf of the Subcarpathian Sub-Office of the Ministry

¹⁰⁷ “Epilógus” [Epilogue]. *Budapesti Napló*, (February 17, 1900):1

¹⁰⁸ “Epilógus” [Epilogue]. *Budapesti Napló*, (February 17, 1900):1

¹⁰⁹ “Megint Egan” [Egan Again]. *Budapesti Napló* (September 29, 1900):1

of Agriculture, he claimed that the Ruthenian murderer was only a hitman, hired by a Jew, and the motivation of the commission was to discredit the cooperative model, to show that it is not working.¹¹⁰ Obviously, one half of the press embraced this narrative, while it met the fervent opposition in the other. József Vészi wrote an editorial in *Budapesti Napló* titled ‘Egan again’, where he denounced Egan’s behavior.¹¹¹

The closest its proponents could get to Egan’s removal was the appointment of Frigyes Páris, a former public prosecutor of the state, as the surrogate of Egan in February, 1901.¹¹² Páris was considered to be an expert on the cooperative model, and he personally claimed he had always been closely following the developments around the Ruthenian action. His appointment, according to his memoir on his role in the Ruthenian action, was an attempt by Darányi to consolidate and neutralize the Ruthenian action,¹¹³ which was turned into an anti-Jewish action by Egan, who thus broke the “denominational peace” of the country – as Páris remembered Darányi had told him during one of their meetings.¹¹⁴ However, after a short time a serious conflict started to develop between Páris and Egan, which never could be resolved due to Egan’s sudden death in September 1901. The core of the conflict was that Páris was from the beginning critical towards Egan’s way of leading the Ruthenian action, including his hostile attitude towards the Jews of Subcarpathia. He argued that Egan should rather work on winning all the segments of the Subcarpathian population for the cause of the Ruthenian action, including the Jewish petty bourgeoisie.¹¹⁵ After a while, he thought, they would recognize that the increasing level of welfare in the region is also beneficial for them. Páris said he disapproved of a state aid program “which intended to help one group of citizens by depriving another group of citizens from their livelihood”,¹¹⁶ referring to the

¹¹⁰ “Megint Egan” [Egan Again]. *Budapesti Napló* (September 29, 1900):1

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Páris, Frigyes. *Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől*. Budapest, 1904.

¹¹³ Páris, Frigyes. ‘Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől’ 20.

¹¹⁴ Páris, Frigyes. ‘Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől’ 21.

¹¹⁵ Páris, Frigyes. ‘Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől’ 22.

¹¹⁶ Páris, Frigyes. ‘Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől’ 16.

exclusionary character of the consumers' co-operatives especially. These institutions, in his opinion, were destroying the small- and middle-size commercial enterprises if they were to trade with a wider range of products than the basic goods (flour, corn, salt, fat, etc.), and this process would create an economic crisis in the region. "I saw it clearly that the movement of consumers' cooperatives took an aggressive direction in the country. This movement mercilessly destroys the small-scale tradesmen! – wrote Páris in his memoir, then he added: "it is being done on state money and by state infrastructure".¹¹⁷ Seeing the consumers' co-operative as the core of all the flaws of the Ruthenian action, Páris argued for cutting down on the number of these institutions. He also suggested to focus more on the other element of the Ruthenian action, which is the improvement of the agricultural production in the region. He – and this is where he differed the most from Egan – was a proponent of the inclusion of local Jews into the circle of the beneficiaries of the Ruthenian action. He proposed the program should also concentrate on the re-training some of the Jews from commerce to farming and domestic industry, that is directing them towards "more productive occupations", because too many of them are engaged in "commerce, speculation and in business mediation".¹¹⁸ Páris, just as the liberal public opinion represented here by Vészi and the Budapesti Napló, shared the myth of the Galician immigration and kept emphasizing that he supports the restriction of immigration from Galicia: according to Páris, the immigration of the poor unemployed Jews, those "harmful to the economy" should not be allowed to settle in Hungary.¹¹⁹ When he could not reconcile his views conflicting with Egan's, Páris appealed to Darányi regarding "his untenable position", but, as he claims, Darányi that time took the side of Egan in the conflict of the two, and accused him of maintaining secret relations with the press opposing the Ruthenian action, thus undermining the project.¹²⁰ The end of the Páris-Egan controversy was

¹¹⁷ Páris, Frigyes. 'Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől' 30.

¹¹⁸ Páris, Frigyes. 'Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől' 19.

¹¹⁹ Páris, Frigyes. 'Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől' 18.

¹²⁰ Páris, Frigyes. 'Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől' 38.

that Egan was kept in his position as trustee, while Páris - not being able to work and cooperate with Egan anymore - had submitted his resignation which was immediately approved by Ignác Darányi.¹²¹ To much of the disappointment of Vészi and the *Budapesti Napló*, who openly supported Páris in his conflict with Egan, and were expressing their hope he would replace Egan soon as new trustee.¹²²

The Neolog/Assimilationist attitude towards Subcarpathian Jews: the Hungarian Ostjude

The Neolog and assimilationist circles had a highly negative opinion about the Jews inhabiting the Subcarpathian region, mainly because they considered them “backward” *hasidim*, who still lived in the state of intellectual decay, and because they did not join the program of assimilation and religious reform that the Neology advocated for.¹²³ Many Hasidic groups joined the Orthodox congregation in the struggle to preserve the traditional Jewish communal setting in the midst of modernizing trends, and this alliance was institutionalized after the schism of Hungarian Jewry in 1868.¹²⁴ Along with the Orthodoxy, Hasidic groups were condemned for slowing down the triumphant march towards full emancipation, and after it was (legally) achieved in 1895, they held them partly responsible for the louder and louder voices of antisemitism from the 1880s – the decade of the Tiszaeszlár blood libel (1882-1883) and the formation of Istoczy Gyozo’s Antisemitic Party.¹²⁵ To show the standpoint of the Neolog Jewry on the Ruthenian action, I’ve selected articles from *Egyenlőség*, the opinion-leading press organ of the Hungarian

¹²¹ Páris, Frigyes. ‘Tájékoztató a rutén akciónál való működésem felől’ 38.

¹²² “Egan alkonya” [Egan’s Twilight]. *Budapesti Napló* (May 25, 1901)

¹²³ Silber, Michael. “The Historical Experience of German Jewry and Its Impact on Haskalah and Reform in Hungary” in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* ed. Katz, Jacob (New Brunswick : Transaction Books, c1987) 107-157.

¹²⁴ Katz, Jacob. *A House Divided : Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Central European Jewry*. n.p.: Hanover, NH : University Press of New England, c1998

¹²⁵ Hanebrink, Paul A., *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Neolog Jewry¹²⁶, directly concerned about the Ruthenian Action. It is the feature of all the articles I've looked at, that whenever a governmental policy is criticized the article never extends it into a broader government criticism; it never questions the legitimacy of the Széll government. In the case of the Ruthenian Action, the figure of Ede Egan is always distanced from his principals, who are actually the Minister of Agriculture and, on a higher level, the Prime Minister.

The article reacting to the Munkács speech, published in *Egyenlőség* on 18th February 1900, written by Miksa Szabolcsi,¹²⁷ reminds the reader of the anti-immigration attitude of *Egyenlőség* that was expressed in one of their earlier articles. In this 1899 article, the author argued for the limitation of the immigration of Galician Jews, reacting to voices from these immigrants expressing their will to settle down in the North-Eastern boarder region.¹²⁸ The reason for calling an end to the liberal immigration policy of the state is the following: the region cannot bear more “Polish Jews”, because those already living there need some time to amalgamate to the recipient society, and “what you need for it is 25 years without immigration”.¹²⁹ The article also calls for actions from the „official circles of Jewry” (possibly meaning Jewish representatives in the Parliament) to propose protectionist actions (limiting or banning the immigration) to the government. With this – the article says – they could pre-empt the blaming of Hungarian Jewry for “bringing Galician caftan Jews and depraving Hungary”¹³⁰ Another article published that year December has the same approach, bringing in the cultural argument by saying: the environment and the circumstances in the region are just simply not right for receiving more immigrants. The author points out that the immigrating Polish Jews would not disperse in the country but settle in the border regions, where they would stick together without being forced to mix with the

¹²⁶ Szabolcsi, Lajos. *Két emberöltő: Az Egyenlőség évtizedei 1881-1931* [Two Generations: The Decades of Egyenlőség 1881-1931]. Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993

¹²⁷ 'A munkácsi riadalom' [Fear in Munkács], *Egyenlőség*, no. 7 (18. February 1900) 1-2

¹²⁸ 'A munkácsi riadalom'

¹²⁹ 'Ám, zárják el a határokat!' [So, close down the borders!], *Egyenlőség*, no. 50 (10. December 1899) 2-3.

¹³⁰ 'A munkácsi riadalom'

Hungarian society.¹³¹ The author makes it clear that the success of the assimilation process is risked by the newcomers, saying: „The only obstacle of the process of Magyarization is immigration.”¹³² The article informs the reader that *Egyenlőség* initially supported the Ruthenian action. They even published the public letter of a member of the parliament, Ármin Neumann, calling for the social support of the reform project. It is written that the Ruthenian Action “enjoyed the support of the whole Hungarian Jewry,” and that they hoped “it would help to improve the poor region and to speed up the process of Magyarization”. But what caused huge disappointment to the author was Egan Ede’s speech at Munkács where – as written in the article – “he tried to pit the Ruthenians against the Jews”, thus tried to fabricate „a Jewish problem” out of it – by generalizing the problem caused by the Jews engaged in usury and showing them representative to the whole Jewish community. The article attempts to deconstruct Egan’s argumentation by saying that actually 99 percent of the Jews living in Máramaros, Bereg and Ugocsa counties are as poor as Ruthenians, and that they are working really hard when they have a job (for example in mines, in constructions, etc.) and that Egan is actually not helping but making the situation just worse. “He causes unrest in the region” and this unrest between Jews and non-Jews will have an effect on the situation of the whole Hungarian Jewry. So it is actually a defensive attack, but not on the government, rather on Ede Egan himself. The various ways to mock Egan through his personal qualities (How Hungarian is he having Irish ancestry?; How well he speaks Hungarian?) are good indicators of this.¹³³

The Ruthenian Action offered a position to the modern Neolog/Assimilationist Hungarian Jews which they desired for long time: to be distinguished from the Orthodoxy and more importantly the *hasidim*, who were more traditional, more foreign. In this story the urbanized,

¹³¹ ‘Ám, zárják el a határokat!’ [So, close down the borders!], *Egyenlőség*, no. 50 (10. December 1899) 2-3.

¹³² ‘A munkácsi riadalom’ [Fear in Munkács], *Egyenlőség*, no. 7 (18. February 1900) 1-2

¹³³ Ibid.

educated, qualified Hungarian Jews, as a higher entity (who are, according to Egan, also supposed to be racially different from the Galician ‘khazars’¹³⁴) would – as an ally of the paternal state – educate and ameliorate the rural Galician Jewish population. In this set-up of strong binary oppositions the Neolog/Assimilationist Jews are collectively moral while the foreign Galician Jews (Hasidim) are collectively immoral. However, as we saw it from the analysis the position was not accepted as it was originally offered. The Neolog/Assimilationist circle rejected the moral/immoral dichotomy, by opposing the generalization. Instead of condemning the masses, the authors of the articles accused the communal leaders of abusing their power and repressing the high potentials of the Galician immigrant Jewry. They also rejected – in the article with humor and irony - the racial argumentation of Ede Egan used for distinguishing the Hungarian Jews from the Galician by making them even more foreign (echoing the antisemitic ideas of Miklós Bartha). However, they eagerly took the position of the educator and – as a trusted ally of the government they called for more autonomy in organizing the Jewish denominational education in the region and countrywide.¹³⁵

The attitude of the Neology, the reform wing of Hungarian Jewry towards the originally Eastern European “Galicianers” can best be understood by applying a comparison: the image of the *Ostjude* in the German Jewish context.¹³⁶ The term *Ostjude*, referred to the Eastern European “shtetl” Jews who were by and large Hasidim, and in the course of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries had been migrating westwards – mainly to Germany, Great Britain and the United States – but instead of assimilation they had retained their cultural and physical differences.

¹³⁴ In the article Szabolcsi also ridicules the ‘Kazár argument’ Egan introduced in his speech - hat actually Galician Jews are not of the same “race” as the Hungarian Jews, they are the descendants of kazárs. ‘A munkácsi riadalom’ [Fear in Munkács], *Egyenlőség*, no. 7 (18. February 1900) 1-2.

¹³⁵ ‘A ruthén vidéki zsidókról [About the Ruthen Land Jews], *Egyenlőség*, no. 9 (4. March 1900) 2-3.

The *Ostjude* is rather an image that the Germans and German Jews have constructed about the Eastern European Jew – argues Steven Ascheim,¹³⁷ who wrote the history of the concept's development based on *belles lettres*, pamphlet literature and articles in the contemporary press. This image had always been rather negative, both Germans and German Jews regarded the *Ostjuden* as backward, superstitious and dirty. According to Ascheim, who in his book often makes his point through psychological argumentation, German Jews were reacting against their “ghetto past” in their anti-East European feelings. Jack Wertheimer¹³⁸ approached the *Ostjude* concept from a more practical point of view, and focused on the actual situation of Eastern European Jews in Germany, implicitly emphasizing that the attitude of the German society in general, and the German authorities in particular towards the *Ostjuden* had been strongly influencing the attitude of German Jews towards their Eastern European brethren. Wertheimer found that in Germany even liberal-minded persons showed an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards the *Ostjuden*, but the difference between them and the antisemites was that the latter saw the negative characteristics of the *Ostjuden* as applying to all Jews. Concerning the attitudes of the German authorities, Wertheimer argues that the immigrant Eastern European Jews enjoyed equal status only in law but not in reality, because in the provincial administrative procedure, petty officials were almost completely free to discriminate Jewish immigrants, and expel them if they were considered “undesirable” foreigners. In my opinion, the *image* of the Jews of Subcarpathia, whether called as immigrants, Galicianers or Khazars, is similar to the image of the *Ostjude*, both in the eyes of the Hungarian Neolog Jewry and the Hungarian authorities. Looking at the general society's perception exceeds the scope of this thesis, but from the press articles I've looked at in the liberal *Budapesti Napló*, it becomes clear that Jewish immigration was considered a threat to

¹³⁷ Ascheim, Steven E. *Brothers and Strangers : The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

¹³⁸ Wertheimer, Jack. *Unwelcome Strangers : East European Jews in Imperial Germany*. Studies in Jewish History. New York : Oxford University Press, 1987

“denominational peace” (*felekezeti béke*), and was identified as one of the main causes of the problems of the north-eastern periphery region – thus to be restricted and kept in order¹³⁹. About the image the editorial board of *Budapesti Napló* harbored about the “Galicianers”, I would refer back to the Neology’s standpoint, as *Budapesti Napló*’s opinion – I found – was undoubtedly similar to that. The resonances of the *Ostjude* image in the Hungarian authorities’ attitude towards the Subcarpathian Jews will be shown in the section discussing the state’s strategy to distinguish between native Hungarian Jews and the “immigrant” Jews of Subcarpathia. The peculiarity of this case, and also the major difference between the Hungarian and German cases, is that these Jews, in most of the cases, were not recent migrants, but had been residing in the region in some cases for more than one generation. Thus, the *Ostjude* is even more an image in the Hungarian context than in the German one, where the “problem” of immigration was realistic, not a complete construction.

Denominationally neutral?

The last part of the presentation of my interpretation of the Ruthenian action as an anti-liberal project in a liberal establishment is the reconstruction of the role of the state, and in particular, the liberal government’s Ministry of Agriculture in the Ruthenian action. Based on the information collected about the Ruthenian action from its press coverage, from the published Egan speech and from Páris’s memoir about his conflict with Egan, I have formulated three questions which I sought to answer when reading the documents in the archives of the Ministry of Agriculture. The first question is concerning the “denominational neutrality” the liberal government, and even the agrarian-affiliated Egan was keen to emphasize in their public statements. Was the Ruthenian action, and its initiator, the liberal Széll-government’s Ministry of Agriculture really blind to religion and ethnicity as they publicly claimed to be?

¹³⁹ “Az Egan kliensei”. [The Clients of Egan] *Budapesti Napló* (February 15, 1900):1-2.

One item in the Archives of the Ministry of Agriculture informs us that in March, 1900, shortly after his Munkács speech, Egan wanted to take out a life insurance policy. He claimed, the risk of someone making a criminal attempt on his life had increased significantly since he delivered his speech at the public assembly on the Ruthenian action, held in Munkács in February. He appealed to Darányi requesting that the expenses of his insurance be covered by the state, and he also asked the Ministry to approve the employment of a guard (he uses the word *legény*, which has this meaning in the contemporary context), who would accompany him on all his journeys – for the sake of his personal safety.¹⁴⁰ Egan made no secret about who he believed to pose a threat to his life, and why. He argued that the “immigrants” (*bevándorlottak*), whose interests were harmed by the Ruthenian action – especially by one of its acts which gave the license of selling alcohol to consumers’ cooperatives – mean a greater than ever danger to his life. Egan characterized these people as wild and aggressive in nature.¹⁴¹ By “immigrants”, he obviously meant Jews of Galician origin.

The Ministry’s reaction was ambivalent. On one hand, one document testifies about the intention of the Ministry – based on Egan’s request of a guard – to hire “detectives” (which in this context rather means plainclothes police officers) who would take care of his safety. Egan, in one of his letters, discouraged the Ministry to do so because in his opinion it would have been too “spectacular”, and would make the immigrants believe that Egan was afraid of them. Moreover, it would turn the “fanatic, wild immigrant folk” against the personnel of the Ministerial Branch Office, the Greek Catholic pastors and the laymen supporting the Ruthenian action - he argued.¹⁴² In the end, Egan managed to convince the Ministry that it is better to hire a personal guard undercover, who would be employed as a “servant”. On the other hand, the Ministry’s reaction was much different regarding Egan’s other request: the coverage of his life insurance from

¹⁴⁰ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-1370.

¹⁴¹ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-2001.

¹⁴² MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-2001.

ministerial budget. Darányi did not approve of this request and an internal note written by his ministerial counsellor is telling why:

“[In the view of the department responsible to handle Egan’s request], in Hungary, public order nowhere is and nowhere can be in such a bad condition that the life of either public servants, or employees like the ministerial trustee himself, whose mission is the improvement of the welfare of the people, who thus impersonate the paternal care and aid of the state, could be endangered.”¹⁴³

- argues the ministerial counsellor in a somewhat hypocritical way, then he goes beyond this idealism, and gives a more pragmatic explanation why Egan’s insurance cannot be subsidized by the state:

“The acknowledgement that the life of the ministerial trustee is endangered because of his work, and thus his protection is necessary, would be the verification of those accusations echoed by certain circles, lacking any realistic basis, which claim that the state wages a war against a denomination in the northeastern border counties. The region where the ministerial trustee is on duty is not dangerous for his life if he goes by the instructions he gets from the Ministry, and only does what he is entitled to do.”¹⁴⁴

This was the reasoning of the Ministry’s rejection of Egan’ request, and it is to be interpreted as an indicator of how much the Ministry and the government was concerned about the possibility that the Ruthenian action, after Egan’s speech especially, would be framed as a “denominational” question and, what is even worse, it would be considered a program with antisemitic motives. Upholding the claim to be “denominationally neutral” was one of the biggest concerns of the Ministry and the government, because this was the key to ensure the support of the liberal Jewish bourgeoisie and to keep the ‘liberal consensus’ alive.

¹⁴³ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-2001

¹⁴⁴ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-2001

Handling the conflict situations within the government

The second question relates to the ethnicization of the Ruthenian action which I have previously discussed. As I have previously stated, the Ruthenian action was openly regarded - by the government and by its liberal supporters, as a project to rescue the impoverished loyal ethnic group, the Ruthenians, from economic and social deprivation. Egan and the anti-liberal agrarian circles saw the exploitation and oppression of the “poor Ruthenian folk” by Galician Khazars as the main cause of the region’s problems. My question is twofold: had the ethnicization of the action in the public discourse created ethnic conflicts on the local level? What were these conflicts, and how the Ministry handled them? Did they accept, reject, or simply overlook Egan’s narrative?

As we have seen with the case of Egan’s insurance, the Ministry was not receptive to Egan’s beliefs about the outrage of the “immigrants”, that is the local Galician Jews. However, the ministerial documents suggest that Egan’s scandalous public statements - made at the assembly in Munkács - did not discredit him in the eyes of Darányi. Instead of considering his dismissal, the Ministry did a lot to clear up the mess the trustee made with stepping up to the podium in Munkács. Shortly after the news coverage about the assembly reached the public, a lawyer from Munkács, a certain Lipót Kis accused Ede Egan for “inciting against the Israelites” in his Munkács speech.¹⁴⁵ Most of the documentation of this case was not available in the archives, but the approximate reconstruction is possible. It seems, that the Ministry of Justice was in close correspondence with the Ministry of Agriculture about the case, and the Minister of Justice intervened on Egan’s side, so both the Prosecution of Bereg county and the Attorney General of Kassa dropped the case, stating that the content of Egan’s speech did not constitute the criminal offense of incitement.¹⁴⁶ The seemingly problematic point of this issue is that the decisions of the Kassa and Bereg attorneys were based on the transcript of Egan’s speech, provided by the Ministry, which was considered a

¹⁴⁵ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-4243.

¹⁴⁶ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-4243

fully reliable source, while the accuser Lipót Kis's version was easily found unreliable. The Attorney General of Bereg in his report gives another reason why the case does not need to be taken to court. He writes that Darányi, after the scandalous Munkács event, delivered a speech in the Parliament and “poured oil on troubled waters”. “Since then, even the Munkács Jews had come to terms with the issue” – the attorney claimed.¹⁴⁷

The Ruthenian action provoked far more controversies under Egan's leadership than later, when it was run by József Kazy, who came to head the Highland Branch Office from his former position as the head of the Statistical Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. From 1902, the Ruthenian action was renamed to “Highland action” (*Hegyvidéki actio*) in the state bureaucracy, and the annual reports about the action, prepared by Kazy and published in book format, without exception begin with the disclaimer that in the early years of the action it was mistakenly named as “Ruthenian action”, which gave way to rightful worries that the project was not treating all the inhabitants of the region equally – regardless of their nationality and denomination.¹⁴⁸ These attempts to reframe the action can be considered signs of conscious de-ethnicization from the government's side. However during the 1910s, when the “nationalities question” was high on the agenda in Hungary's public discourse, the Ruthenian action was considered ever so important as a program to once and for ever engage the Ruthenians to Hungary, leaving no space for slavish nationalist agitation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-1896

¹⁴⁸ For example: Kazy, József. *Az északkárpatmenti hegyvidéki nép gazdasági helyzetének javítására irányuló állami segélyakció 1904. évi működésének ismertetése* Budapest : Pallas Ny., 1905.

See full list in “Bibliography”

¹⁴⁹ Hoffmann, Otto *A rutén kérdés*. Pécs : Dunántúl, 1918

The strategy of distinguishing between Our Hungarian Jews and the Immigrant Khazars - creating the problem of immigration

The third, and final question that was posed before consulting the archival sources was concerned about the legitimizing strategy that the government employed to make the Ruthenian action acceptable for the Széll-government's liberal supporters, among them a big part of the Jewish bourgeoisie. As I have previously argued, in the public discourse it was, on one hand, the creation of the problem of immigration that helped to alienate the Subcarpathian Jews from their Magyarized brethren, "our Hungarian Jews". On the other hand, it was the creation of the image of the "Khazar problem" that served this distancing strategy in the public discourse. My third question is how do the internal documentation of the Ruthenian action reflect these strategies – basically: how these documents talk about the Jews of Subcarpathia.

The best evidence that the myth of immigration was well and alive is the documentation of an appeal of the Lord Lieutenant of Máramaros county, baron Ervin Roszner, who, however, made his appeal as the "president of the Ruthenian committee" of Máramaros.¹⁵⁰ In his letter he explained that he wanted to set up a bureaucratic unit to "control" Galician immigration in Máramaros county. For this record office of sorts, Roszner stated he needed ten new employees. He appealed to the Ministry of Interior to subsidize the expenses of the establishment of this new unit, but the Minister of Interior rejected his request, referring to lack of available funding in the budget. Roszner turned to the Ministry of Agriculture for help, because he stated it was indispensable to establish this office which would oversee the Galician immigration, as it is in large part the cause of the impoverishment of the Ruthenian population the state seeks to combat. Roszner turned to Daranyi to ask him to intercede on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant, and the cause he had presented in his letter, so that the establishment of the unit monitoring Galician immigration

¹⁵⁰ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-4053

would be calculated into the next year's budget.¹⁵¹ This is the most important element in the story: the Lord Lieutenant of Máramaros county saw the Ministry of Agriculture and Darányi as the best advocate for the prioritization of the regulation of the alleged Galician Jewish immigration. In the end, the Ministry asked Egan's opinion about Roszner's plans, but, surprisingly, the trustee did not support them. He disapproved of the realization of an immigration-regulating system in a decentralized manner. He argued such a system should be centrally established and managed by the Ministry of Interior.¹⁵²

From another valuable source from 1902, that is already after Egan's death, it becomes clear why it was so easy to maintain the myth of immigration: simply because of the total negligence of the authorities in gathering information about immigration, or about migration in general. The Ministry of Agriculture wanted to fact-check an article that was published in *Budapesti Napló* in January 1902, about Jews in Szinevér (or Szinéváralja), who got bankrupt because they were pushed out from the economic sector following the initiation of the Ruthenian action.¹⁵³ Someone from the local authorities (his signature appears on the document, but I could not spell it) commented every part of the article – whether its author was right or wrong in what he wrote. When he arrived to the part where the author points out that Galician immigration is not an issue at all in Máramaros, thus countering the general belief that there is such a problem, the reporting public servant claims the author was wrong. He argues the author of the article was “naive” to say there is no immigration problem, but his report are also based on hearsay. He describes the patterns of Galician Jewish immigration as it follows:

“Like a municipal magistrate mentioned to me during one or two journeys of mine to the settlement of Borsa, they see new and new people turn up in the village, without anyone knowing who are they and where they come from - then they settle there or in another nearby village permanently. The immigration usually happens in a way that the person who comes is hosted by an acquaintance of his for a while as a servant, then he starts courting for his daughter, and

¹⁵¹ MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-4053

¹⁵² MNL, K 178. 1900-1294-11287.

¹⁵³ MNL, K 178. 1902-1296-749

eventually becomes his son-in-law - then when he had already taken roots here, he finds a suitable house, moves there, opens up a shop or looks for another occupation."¹⁵⁴

The public servant continues with another method of Galician Jewish immigration he heard about, and this account is particularly interesting in its own right as a non-Jewish public servant's perception of Hasidic lore.

*"Another - not less interesting - method of immigration is the following: from Galicia some wonder rabbis [csoda-rabbi was the Hungarian name for the rebbe or tzaddik, the religious leader in Hasidism] are coming to Hungary with the pretence of visiting, bathing or fulfilling religious functions, and they are touring around the counties neighboring Galicia. A wonder rabbi usually comes with a big group of followers, but some of them never ever returns to his place of origin - moreover, in some cases even the wonder rabbi stays here."*¹⁵⁵

The public servant goes on giving some examples he heard of the above-described phenomenon, and concludes his commentary on the Budapesti Napló article with the remark that the article is positively biased towards the immigrants when discussing their economic misfortunes, and the fact that he himself is an Israelite forms the basis of his bias.

¹⁵⁴ MNL, K 178. 1902-1296-2279

¹⁵⁵ MNL, K 178. 1902-1296-2279

Conclusion

In my thesis, I interpreted the Ruthenian action as an anti-liberal project of a liberal government. It was anti-liberal in terms of economic policy, because it broke with the *laissez-faire* economic liberalism that was characteristic to the previous governments' mode of governance. And it was anti-liberal in terms of social policy, because of the unequal treatment of two ethno-religious groups in the local population: the Ruthenians and the Jews. The Ruthenian action was anti-liberal for yet another reason: because the means it was using, the model of credit unions and consumers' cooperatives was developed as a reaction to the perceived failure of liberalism, and thus reflect all the discontents anti-liberals had with the liberal establishment. In their place of origin, Wilhelmine Germany, credit unions and consumers' cooperatives were used as an infrastructure to spread "practical" antisemitism, which, as opposed to political antisemitism which combatted the "Jew as an evil race", combatted the "Jew as a usurer".

In Hungary, this "practical" antisemitism was also inherent in the credit unions and cooperatives that were established both in- and outside the framework of the Ruthenian action from the mid-1890s onwards. It was the antisemitic trope of the "usurer Jew" that formed the basis of the almost total exclusion of Subcarpathian Jews from the co-operatives and credit unions, despite the fact that only a thin layer of the Jewish population was engaged in financing and moneylending that could possibly turn into usury. As historians who drew the Subcarpathian Jewry suggest, most of the Jews were actually belonged to the proletariat, were poor, and many of them were unemployed. As I have suggested when discussing the background motivations of the Ruthenian action, the project could have been targeted towards them as well. As for example Egan's unsuccessful challenger Frigyes Páris argued, Jews could have been thus integrated to the agricultural sector.

The sources suggest that the initiators of the Ruthenian action did not intend to direct it against the local Jewry. Instead, the government and the Ministry of Agriculture advised by the

Greek Catholic clergy seem to have intended to make a gesture towards the Ruthenian minority counting around 300.000 members in the region, and engage them to the cause of Magyarization, and more importantly, to the liberal political elite. The Jews of Subcarpathia were not equal to Ruthenians in the eyes of the government and the state. They were considered “immigrants”, despite the fact that many of them were already long-time residents of the country at the time of the Ruthenian action. Miklós Konrád’s term “the myth of Galician immigration” was very useful to understand the state’s attitude towards the Subcarpathian Jews, who were thus alienated from the rest of Hungarian Jewry.

The alienation of the Subcarpathian Jews from the rest of Hungarian Jewry, but most of all from the liberal Neolog Jews was of strategic importance for the state, because only this way they could keep the alliance of the Jewish bourgeoisie, which was necessary to hold on to power – in not less pragmatic terms than keeping the govern position. The government was painstakingly cautious on emphasizing that the Ruthenian action had nothing to do with antisemitism, and that they remained loyal to the principle of the equality of the citizens of Hungary, regardless their “denomination”.

The liberal Jewish bourgeoisie, like the articles in *Budapesti Napló* show it, were extremely loyal to the Széll government, thus supported the Ruthenian action as well, as a “patriotic enterprise” helping the impoverished Ruthenian folk to integrate into the body of the nation. Their loyalty was shaken only once, after Egan’s Munkács speech, when the ministerial trustee made openly antisemitic statements, which no longer applied only for “Galician immigrants”, but to the Jewish race as a whole. The Ministry of Agriculture– and the archival sources support this statement – had to perform intensive political communication work to pacify the situation and clean up the mess caused by Egan. Ignác Darányi, Minister of Agriculture received numerous interpellations in the House of Representatives, and in his answers he publicly rebuffed any allegations about the government “waging a war” against Jews in Subcarpathia. The liberal Jewish

bourgeoisie's readiness to accept the Ministry's narrative can be explained by their own attitude towards the Subcarpathian Jewry. In this paper I have made a parallel between the image of the "immigrant Khazars" in the Hungarian context, and the image of the *Ostjude* in German and German Jewish consciousness, arguing that the first fulfills the same function for Hungarian Neolog Jewry as the latter does for assimilated native German Jews. The Hungarian Neolog Jews looked down upon their eastern brethren, but they also felt responsible for their successful integration into Hungarian society – obviously through Magyarization.

The combination of the archival sources and the contemporary press coverage of the Ruthenian action revealed some important characteristics of the Ruthenian action. First of all, the Ministry of Agriculture was cautious about the project's potential to create serious tensions among the local population, thus it made constant efforts to keep up the guise of "denominational neutrality", like we have seen concerning the protection of Egan's personal safety. Secondly, the archival sources and the press coverage suggest that conflicts and controversies related to the Ruthenian action mostly arose after Egan's Munkács speech, and that is when the extensive press coverage of the project starts. The controversies are in most of the cases heavily ethnicized – like the murder of Zsdenyova, when, according to Egan's narration, a Jew hired a Ruthenian peasant to murder a Ruthenian shopkeeper of the local consumers' co-operative. Finally, the archival sources confirmed my assumption that the first and foremost strategic tool that the government implied to distance the Subcarpathian Jewry from the magyarized Jewish bourgeoisie considered more worthy was to create a xenophobic atmosphere, keep up the "myth of immigration", and categorize Subcarpathian Jewry altogether an immigrant community.

The paper I am concluding is far from being a complete study of the Ruthenian action for several reasons. First of all, it only focused on a certain time period of the project, namely its first 5 years, which mostly overlap with the activity of Ede Egan as a ministerial trustee in the project. The other limitation of my research was that its limited scope did not allow me to visit the Ukrainian

State Archives of Zakarpattie Oblast for the documents of the Highland Branch Office, which could have been valuable for this research. Also this thesis lacks the discussion of the reception of the Ruthenian action within the opposition of the liberal government, especially the neo-conservative Christian People's Party and the circles affiliated with it. The reason for this omission is that I intended to focus on the effects the initiation and the controversial beginning had on the alliance of the liberal political elite and the Jewish bourgeoisie. Finally, it would form the basis of another interesting research to look into the implications of the Ruthenian action and the intensifying anti-immigration campaign for the future of the Subcarpathian Jewry towards the interwar period and the eve of the Holocaust.

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