



LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

BY

FRANCIS HERCZEG

The last word on the question of the elementary education of children belonging to linguistic minorities was pronounced by the Order in Council which, abandoning the idea of minority schools graded A, B, and C, has invested parents with authority to choose the language in which their children are to receive instruction. This Order is worthy of the high political and cultural niveau of the Prime Minister and his Minister of Education. Of a truth, in a country where — to use Count Teleki's own words — “many different kinds of peoples are joined together in one form of life by common aspirations”, no more radical solution could well be conceived. We share the Prime Minister's avowed opinion that everybody is unquestionably entitled to cherish his own mother-tongue, his own ancient customs and traditions, and that it is the duty of every State to support its citizens in their endeavour to do so.

This must be recognized as a logical consequence inherent in St. Stephen's conception of the political State. The broad-mindedness of the policy advocated by the first king of Hungary is anyhow revealed by the fact that the thesis propounded by him at the dawn of Hungarian political life still holds good today and is one of the important requirements of the coming New Order in Europe.

It is, however, obvious — and this cannot be over-emphasized — that the great aim, the spiritual pacification of the peoples belonging to the Danube Valley, cannot be achieved until all neighbour States within whose borders Magyar linguistic minorities reside, also adopt the lofty ethical ideas revealed in the Order lately issued by the Hungarian Government. *If Hungary alone pursues the path entered upon with high hopes, if among her neighbours a single one is found that chooses to adhere to its old anti-cultural racial and*

educational policy, then the Hungarian Governments's Order must of necessity result in a series of fresh injustices to the Magyars.

Let us examine the practical aspects of the question, taking the problem of the Rumanians in Hungary as an example of the point at issue. All Rumanian parents will naturally send their children to schools in which the medium of instruction is the Rumanian language. Even were the Rumanians inclined to become Magyarized, which they are not and never were, their national propaganda, the most agile agents of which are the priests of the Orthodox Church, is too effective and makes too deep an impression on their minds, to allow of one single Rumanian father daring to send his son to a Magyar school. *The Rumanians of Transylvania will take full advantage of their legal rights, the result of which will be that a section of the Rumanian people will be comparatively well-educated, thanks to the higher grade of elementary education received in the schools in Hungary, and well-disciplined by their position as a minority.* For we know that intellectually and morally the Rumanians of Transylvania who grew up in Hungarian surroundings stood high above the level of the Rumanians of Old Rumania.

The question now is: *what is to be the lot of the Magyars of Rumania? If the Bucharest Government does not radically change its standpoint so far as the nationality question and the minority schools are concerned; if it refuses to take the same enlightened and generous view of these questions as the Hungarian Government does; if it goes on being as zealous as hitherto in causing the Magyar schools to fall into decline by means of name-analysis — unavowed but nevertheless practised — and by making the Magyar pupils fail en masse at their examinations; if it continues in the policy so ingloriously pursued during the past twenty-two years — then the return for the cultural work done by the Hungarian Government in raising the level of the Rumanians in Hungary will be a materially and spiritually repressed Magyar minority in Rumania.*

Every person with any commonsense will understand that so far as this question is concerned the principle of reciprocity must be allowed to assert itself, and it cannot be a matter of

doubt that little is to be expected in the way of reciprocity from the loyalty and consideration of the Rumanian Government and Rumanian public opinion. These questions must be settled, in a manner leaving no scope for ambiguity, by means of bilateral agreements. There are quite a number of questions awaiting settlement, for *there are Magyars enough in Bucharest alone to people a large town. Then there are the Magyar Csángós of Moldavia, who have never succeeded in obtaining permission even to confess to their priests in the Hungarian language, to say nothing of the fact that in their wildest dreams they have never dared to hope for Magyar schools. What has been said of Rumania is applicable more or less to other neighbour States too.*

When day by day we see how jealously the giant nations of Europe keep count of the smallest settlements of their racial brethren in foreign countries, we must understand that it would be an unpardonable blunder to have as little care for our Magyars living under alien rule in the future as we have had in the past. In the present circumstances that would be equivalent to onesided disarmament.

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár