

OSZKÁR JÁSZI AND THE CAUSE OF NATIONALITIES

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The fight for social and national emancipation of the Romanians in Transylvania entered a new phase of organisation at the beginning of the 20th century. The Memorandist and passivist variant which was the main target of the Romanian National Party in the last decades of the 19th century, was abandoned in favour of the activist movement which pleaded for the direct and imperious participation of the representatives of nationalities in the Austrian-Hungarian Parliament in Budapest so that, together with representatives of other oppressed peoples such as Serbs, Slovaks, Chekhs, Ruthenians, they could put up active opposition which would serve the general purpose of the nation. It is known that the new activist trend gained impetus after 1900 when V. Goldiș from Brașov was inclined to reconsider the old tactics of the party and Ioan Moța from Orăștie founded certain new publications to the repeated urge of Ilarie Chendi from București such as *Activitatea* (1901-1905), *Libertatea* (1902-1912) and *Bunul econom* (1899-1906), which openly discussed the issue of political activism¹. Some of the founders of the newspaper *Libertatea* in Orăștie, the first issue of which appeared on 1 January 1902, were front-ranking members of the Romanian Nationalist Party (RNP) such as Iuliu Maniu, Aurel Vlad, Ion Mișu, Victor Bontescu, Nicolae Comșa, etc, a grouping which prepared the 1903 election of Aurel Vlad into the Parliament of Budapest.

Under the pressure of new imperatives formulated on an international level and the mutations which occurred on a local level in the power structure, Transylvanian Romanians openly

¹ Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu. Naționalism și democrație. Biografia unui mare român (Iuliu Maniu. Nationalism and Democracy. The Biography of a Great Romanian)*, București, Sacculum, 1997, p.17.

decided to abandon the old passivist tactic and treat seriously the electoral campaign in the winter of 1905. With the consent of Maniu three front members of the Romanian Nationalist Party, T. Mihali, Aurel Vlad and Al. Vaida met in January 1905 in Orăștie to prepare a manifesto-program which announced the participation of Romanians in the 1905 elections. The new attitude was confirmed by the conference of the RNP in Sibiu on 10 January 1905, which gave the signal for the adoption of the new tactics. Although Maniu was defeated in Vințu de Jos and Vaida in Ighiu, the Romanians gained success in eight constituences: N. Comșa in Cristian, Vasile Damian in Baia de Criș, Teodor Mihali in Ileanda, Aurel Novac in Sasca, Ștefan C. Pop in Șiria, Ioan Russu-Sirianu in Chișineu, Ioan Suciuc in Boroșineu and Aurel Vlad in Orăștie¹. The Diet was dissolved and there were new elections in 1906, when the Romanians won 19 chairs of deputies, including Maniu, elected again in Vinț and Al. Vaida, having thus had the opportunity of manifesting themselves actively in the House of Commons where they had a common platform with the Serb and Slovakian parliamentaries forming the so-called “party of nationalities”² in the name of which Maniu spoke repeatedly in the House of Commons.

The situation of the Romanian nation was not at all easy because the Hungarian conservatives led by Kálmán Tisza were on offence and the “megalomaniac haughtiness” of Hungarian nobles manifested itself at every instant in their attempt to create a great Hungary, with a homogeneous Hungarian nation. The adage “Hungary will be Hungarian or else it won’t be” was applied with brutality by Count Albert Apponyi in 1907 when he became Minister of Public Affairs and introduced a system of education based on compulsory Hungarian language which led to the elimination of 420 Romanian schools. Romanian forces united against such measures and, besides the deputies in the House of Commons, there were new centres of power formed, such as Blaj

¹ *Ibidem* p.17.

² Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Vaida-Voevod între Belvedere și Versailles (Alexandru Vaida-Voevod between Belvedere and Versailles)*, Cluj, 1993, p.17.

and Sibiu with the two recognised Romanian churches which made their protesting voices heard even during their meetings with the heir to the crown, Franz Ferdinand. The pleading for “equal rights”, the assurance of economic, cultural and political development of each nation went hand in hand with claiming universal vote, condemning Hungarian “racial exclusivism” and the “class reign” of the reactionary nobility. According to the progress of the century and the situation in the majority of the developed countries in Europe, the Romanian nation emphatically asked for national rights, sensitivising the international public opinion regarding terror installed by the Austro-Hungarian police state, one of the most retrograde heterogeneous constructions of that time, based on the discretionary domination of a minority over a nation in majority; the regime in Budapest was the target of several ruthless criticisms from abroad, such as the criticism of Seton-Watson¹ (Scotus Viator), Björnstjerne Björnson² as well as French, Belgian and Italian politicians. It became clear for Romanian leading politicians in Transylvania that a dialogue with members of the government was only possible if the rights of the Romanian nation were recognised.

Therefore, in 1910 the Romanians received an invitation from the government to participate in a mediation (negotiations via Ioan Mihu and then Geza Duca between the Kuhén-Hedervary and Kálmán Tisza government and the leaders of Romanians failed) – that “modus vivendi” which the government hoped to establish in their relation with the Romanians, coming up against the claims of the Romanians for being guaranteed free political and ethnic development of their nation, even by the creation of institutions of public right³. A petition of 23 points was compiled and handed in to the Hungarian Prime-Minister on 23 September 1910. The

¹ *Alegeri maghiare (Hungarian Elections)*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.90 (25 aug/7sept), p.1, a review of Seton-Watson’s book

² Mircea Popa, *Björnstjerne Björnson – apărătorul cauzei românești (Björnstjerne Björnson – Defender of the Romanian Cause)*, in: *Convergențe europene (European Convergences)*, Oradea, Cogito, 1995, p.217.

³ Vasile Netea, *Spre unitatea națională (Towards National Unity)*, București, Ed. Șt. și Enciclopedică, 1979, p.498.

Romanians' claims were not taken into account in the atrocious, chauvinist atmosphere mainly maintained by the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap*, all the more so as these claims contained the sine qua non condition of political leaders which asked for the recognition of the RNP as the political organism of those more than 3.5 millions Romanians. The atmosphere on both sides became hot and unbearable; the accusations, reciprocal hatred and the breaking of law infested even more the atmosphere in parliament and journalism.

The rebuff of the government - sending several Romanian journalists to court, accusing them of "press offences" and sentencing them to many years of prison or heavy fines - showed that the country reached an impasse and the "peoples' prison" in Budapest functioned perfectly.

Establishing still closer links with Romania aimed at supporting the wishes of union of the Romanian population in Transylvania. It was a legitimate wish that every oppressed people was obliged to nourish and protect through the press. However, Austro-Hungarian censorship functioned promptly, obstructing the open expression of popular grievances. Extremely high taxes had to be paid for the maintenance of a periodical (the annual tax was 10,000 crowns) and press offences were quite frequent. Therefore Transylvanian journalists were real martyrs in that period and there were few who had not been to prison for their articles and position. The Tribunal in Cluj could hardly cope with sentencings because press offences were considered political crimes. Political convicts were sent to special prisons. Later, in order to break the fighting front of nationalities, they were tried together with common criminals to discredit them in the eyes of their co-nationalists.

A detailed statement of these tribulations – of which we have mentioned just a few – was presented in a Manifesto of the Romanian press in Hungary to the French press¹, published in *Tribuna* in 1909. It was shown that in two years the number of

¹ *Manifestul presei românești din Ungaria către presa franceză (The Manifesto of the Romanian Press in Hungary Towards the French Press)*, in: *Tribuna*, XIII, 1909, nr.172, p.1.

political offenders tried for alleged “political offences of press” amounted to 226 and punishments totalled 181 years, 2 months and 6 days of imprisonment while trial costs amounted to 300,000 crowns.

The observation that this was a “police state”¹ does not only belong to Romanians but foreigners too. Although the population of the historical Transylvania represented 14% of the whole population of Hungary, only a reduced percentage (3.3%) had a right to vote and practically, on account of the village gendarmes’ policy of intimidation much fewer people actually went to vote. This is the reason why such a small number of the oppressed nationalities entered the Budapest Parliament which in 1910 was formed of 393 Hungarians, 13 Germans, 5 Romanians, 2 Slovaks and no Serbians or Ruthenians. Tired of the dictate policy of Budapest and the elevation of chauvinism to the rank of law, Romanians and other oppressed nations turned their eyes towards Vienna, suggesting a return to the Imperium under Austrian hegemony rather than Hungarian hegemony. Almost at the same time, the Romanian A.C. Popovici and the Slovak Milan Hodža published projects of federalization in which all the nations in the Austrian Empire would gain relative autonomy and would have their own parliaments within a modern federal Austrian state that would ensure prosperity for all, somewhat in the manner of American federal states. Unfortunately, neither the project of A.C. Popovici², nor that of Milan Hodža were taken seriously. They were criticised from within the national bourgeoisie³ but also by Hungarian historians who considered it a real danger. One thing is sure: the unsolved national question as well as the unproductive

¹ Ion Bozdog, *Statul polițist, material documentar dintr-o arhivă secretă brașoveană* (*The Police State, Document from a Secret Archive in Brașov*), Brașov, 1943

² Z. Ornea, *Viața lui C. Stere* (*The Life of C. Stere*), II, București, 1991, p.164-165.

³ Il. Chendi, *În jurul unei polemici* (*On a Debate*), in: *Țara noastră*, II, 1908, nr.19, p.155; *Noi și politica externă a României* (*We and the Foreign Policy of Romania*), in: *Țara noastră*, II, 1908, nr.30, p.243.

policy of the leadership of the RNP dominated by the old, passivist wing supporting the policy of the small steps made the new generation of national fighters more and more dissatisfied. This generation appeared on the political scene after 1900; they were led by Octavian Goga and were grouped around the *Tribuna* published in Arad, a periodical characterised by the increasingly critical voices of young journalists. Alongside Goga there were the dissatisfied voices of Ioan Lupaş, Sever Bocu, Oct. C. Tăslăuanu, Ghiţă Pop, C. Bucşan, I. Montani, Il. Chendi, S. Puşcariu and V. Lucaciu which produced unrest among the old, so that V. Goldiş had the task of creating a counter-balance to this movement through the newspaper *Românul*, published in Arad in order to diminish the prestige of the *Tribuna*, to reduce its popularity and annihilate it finally, to regulate the “hardened young”¹. Why exactly Goldiş? Because he was trusted by everybody at that moment, his position being somewhere in the middle, between the two conflicting groups. He was appreciated by the young, too, because he was not an adherent of negotiations with members of the Hungarian government at that time. The following words from a letter to I. Mişu clearly express his position: “I will not accept transactions with the governments of the country or any other party without the recognition of the NRP as a constitutional party and the admission of the political validity of the Romanian nation in conformity with its numerical, economic and cultural significance in the Hungarian state.”²

The oppressed nations in the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy received unexpected assistance in this tense atmosphere from Oszkár Jászi, a Hungarian democratic thinker. He was born in 1875, had a thorough sociological knowledge and became famous through the articles and studies published in his periodical, the *Huszadik Század (Twentieth Century)*. In this he dealt mainly with the analysis of the agrarian phenomenon in Hungary, drawing attention to feudal anachronisms in inheriting and using the land,

¹ Mircea Popa, *Ilarie Chendi*, Bucureşti, Minerva, 1973, p.64.

² Vasile Goldiş, *Scrieri social-politice (Social-Political Writings)*, Timişoara, Facla, 1976, p.16.

the discrepancy between the nobility, gentry and agrarian proletariat, feudal remains which did not allow Hungary to become an industrial-capitalist country. His thought for reform – a series of suggestions and solutions for coming out of the crisis – was akin to that of Austro-Marxists and Austrian socialists, especially Otto Bauer, and met with the sympathy of progressive Hungarian circles through his systematic and daring criticism. The culminating point was in 1912 when the brave sociologist raised the “issue of nationalities” insistently asking the government to solve this problem which repeatedly brought Austria-Hungary to the “court” of European public opinion. In a series of articles published in the newspaper *Huszadik Század* he openly criticised the authorities for the defective way in which they solved the national question and asked for a pragmatic solution in the name of progress and international prestige. These categorical formulations were previously presented before the Hungarian Sociological Society where he consistently asked for the rights of nationalities. These points of view were summarised in a work which appeared in the same year and was entitled *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés (The Formation of Nation-States and the Nationality Question)* which created great stir among governors and aroused the enthusiasm of oppressed nationalities because this book had been a serious support of their fight for rights. Fragments of this book published in *Huszadik Század* aroused the interest of Romanian political circles who promptly reacted to the event. In 1910 Jászi wrote an article entitled Hungary, the Nationalities and the Abroad in the forementioned newspaper and this called the attention of the newspaper *Tribuna* from Arad which favourably commented this “judicious” article and published it on its pages. The Romanian reviewer said that “Jászi wrote a severe and well-grounded criticism of the the former government’s brutal terror regime which victimised nationalities.”¹ Let us see some examples of this criticism. “It is only a naivety to think”, said Jászi, “that a part of this country, the part inhabited by nationalities could be

¹ *Un ungar despre stările din Ungaria (A Hungarian's View on the Situation in Hungary)*, in: *Telegraful român*, X, 1910, nr.4, (24 January-6 February), p.13.

held in political and cultural oppression without affecting, not to say benefiting, the other part. The subjugation of the periphery of nationalities hinders also the Hungarian root of this country, its liberty and its material welfare. It is high time that this fundamental truth should be known not only abroad but also by the Hungarian democracy. Because, without the recognition of this truth Hungary cannot become a constitutional state nor a national state.”¹ He treats with irony the name of “islet of liberties” attached to Hungary, a term used by some politicians and shows what “calm” waves washed its shores when everywhere there were abuses such as the nonexistence of the freedom of speech. The lawyer Cassiu Maniu was tried and sentenced to one-year imprisonment and a fine of 1000 crowns “because he revealed the state of corruption in the country in a letter addressed to Björnson during the agitations provoked by the Polonyi vs. Lengyel case.” However, Jászi did not stop here with the presentation of examples and mentioned the Hossu-Longin case and then the situation of the poet Octavian Goga who was tried and imprisoned in Vác: “Even more alarming is the case of the eminent and respected Romanian poet Octavian Goga. He was the owner of the weekly *Țara noastră* (*Our Country*) which appeared in Sibiu until its suspension. There was an inquiry into nine articles published in the periodical and the editor-in-chief Marcu was held responsible. However, the editor died in the meantime and Octavian Goga, without being called to court or being warned that there is or there will be an investigation, was arrested in Budapest at the Lukács Baths (under the pretext of a trip abroad) and he was led back to Cluj”². “This infamous traitor”, goes on Jászi ironically, “translated *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) by Madách into Romanian with unparalleled success.”³

Jászi did not stop here with his fight against the abuses of the governmental cliques. He announced solemnly that the perio-

¹ *Ibidem*

² *Ibidem*

³ *Ibidem*

dical Huszadik Század will continue this work fearlessly, regardless of the scourges of narrow and bought nationalism.”

The brave and unprejudiced attitude of the editor of Huszadik Század raised much sympathy on the part of Romanians, as was to be expected. They suddenly realised that they were not alone and that, besides the respected poet Ady who also openly protested against the arresting of Octavian Goga, the progressive layer of the Hungarian intelligentsia did not identify themselves with the aims of an oligarchic domination of clear feudal origin and did not accept to be used by them as the wooden horse of Troy. The delimitations from the isolated and rigid position of the political leaders of the Hungarian nation became more accentuated and they expressed a radicalisation of the Hungarian society at the end of the century, a stratification and re-polarisation in function of the interests and different ideological attitudes. Lajos Mocsáry, Hungarian politician at the end of the 19th century belongs to a political line completely different from the chauvinist-nationalist politics of Kálmán Tisza. The Romanian politician Vasile Stroescu referred to this line when he spoke in July 1912 about the ideological breach accomplished by Oszkár Jászi whom he considered a “descendant” of Mocsáry and his program of conciliation with the nationalities drawn up by a “clearsighted, great statesman”. “Hungary”, wrote Stroescu, “faces today the dilemma of remaining in the grip of agrarian feudalism, under the domination of the national oligarchy, as an economic colony of Austria or creating real democracy to step towards industrial capitalism” because, he went on, “it is impossible to exploit one half of the country and let the other half advance in perfect liberty towards industrialism”¹. “The actual government prefers the economic policy of material and spiritual poverty” without giving free way to capitalist development and following a policy of tyranny where “languages have no rights”.

¹ Vasile Stroescu, *Chestia de naționalitate și Marea Austrie (The Issue of Nationalities and Great Austria)*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.76 (17-30 July), p.309-310. See also *Chestiunea naționalităților în Austro-Ungaria (The Issue of Nationalities in Austria-Hungary)*, in: *Românul*, II, 1912, nr.95 (29 April-14 May), p.12

In order to get acquainted with the ideas of Jászi in his book *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés*, Romanian political circles began to translate the book, published fragments in the press and there was an increasing number of commentaries on it. The first Romanian journal which published fragments from it was the *Telegraful român*: it selected the most poignant chapters of the work under the title *Gravaminele naționalităților* (*The Attributes of Nationalities*). The Romanian public became acquainted with the progressive and uncompromising position of the author who did not spare the Hungarian national susceptibility but analysed it with a remarkable objectivity observing the shortcomings of a regime which was among the last ones in Europe in terms of its constitution. In terms of economy he observed that the government was not much preoccupied with ensuring a minimum of agro-technical improvement: “It is true that there are no state institutions where the Romanian smallholder could learn agronomy”¹; the state did not encourage the educational system of nationalities, leaving it to the different confessions and administration was mainly national: “people everywhere consider administration to be their robber and enemy”²; the policy of abuse became state policy because “Hungarian nobles, blinded by nationalist hatred, considered peasants of other nationalities to be lower than the Hungarian peasant”; some Hungarian “cultural” societies openly led a chauvinist and extremist policy: “I am afraid to tell, says Jászi, but I will probably not be stoned if I say that EMKE (the society of magyarization in Cluj) with its present activity and in the present circumstances, does more harm than good (...) Loud demonstrations, noisy meetings with a lamenting tone, some well-paid sinecures and patriotic stipends – this is all that is born from the activity of these societies in our country and abroad. But in the homeland of illiteracy, lack of landed property and tuberculosis it

¹ *Gravaminele naționalităților stabilite din partea d-lui Jászi Oszkár*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.48 (3-16 May), p.193, see also nr.47 (1-14 May), p.189-190

² *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.53 (19 May-1 June), p.1-2.

is an unpardonable sin to throw away millions for striking a blow nationalist fellow-countrymen, winning the friendship of certain renegades with lots of money or learning by force some patriotic songs and poems instead of saving the endangered Hungarian peasantry.”¹ The conclusion is merciless: “The policy of magyarization is absurd”² and there is the recognition that “the mother tongue and the defence of autonomy is the cultural minimum of existence for every nation.”

Naturally, the work of Jászi also triggered other reactions in the Romanian public opinion. The lawyer Cassiu Maniu’s review of this work, published in the newspaper *Românul* (*The Romanian*) in Arad was one of the first stands taken. He analysed with deep insight and discernment the sense of Jászi’s criticism, his useful suggestions and he greeted the new perspective on the national question. This latter was considered the cornerstone of the official policy of the Austrian-Hungarian state and had to be solved on the 20th century level of evolution of human rights and had not to be left to the mercy of a conservative chauvinist clique. Compared to their retrograde position Jászi came with a modern, precisely outlined theoretical conception which brought fresh air to the arena of political fights and could be the foundation for debates, new negotiations and strategic alliances. “O. Jászi is an objective thinker”, holds Cassiu Maniu, “who does not lead astray from the laws of discovering the truth established by the greatest searchers of truth and comes to valuable results in the definition of nationality, the nation and the criteria of homogeneous national states. The author eagerly searches for and tries to define the notion of national state; he does not content himself with simply exposing the condition of homogeneous national states such as France or Italy but he enumerates all the states which have the tendency of national unification such as England, Spain, the United States, etc. He defines the substance of a homogeneous

¹ *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.55, (26 May-8 June) p.1.

² *Ibidem*

national state as well as the essential features of a homogeneous national state.”¹

Further on, C. Maniu enumerates those eight characteristics of a nation defined by Jászi in his book. These are the unity of territory, language, economic and psychic life, the same law and order, unified army, means of production and public information and, even more important, the condition that “every citizen is equal before the law” and they benefit of “equal rights”². This latter condition was not fulfilled in the oligarchic Hungarian state nor was the “unity of language”. According to Jászi, all attempts of the governors to establish the homogeneous Hungarian national state in parts with Romanian or Slovakian majority population was a complete failure just like forced magyarization which deprived the nationalities of their fundamental rights and compelled them to gravitate towards other zones of national polarisation. Oszkár Jászi showed the opposing national interests of Romanians and Hungarians: “...Romanians and Slovaks in our country have two cultural points of support, identical and completely developed: the Prague and Bucharest. Any progress in the continuously developing Czech and Romanian culture (from the Kingdom) strengthens immediately and directly the cultural power of co-nationalities in Hungary. The forced magyarization of

¹ *Dr Oszkár Jászi despre formarea statelor naționale și chestiunea naționalităților (Dr Oszkár Jászi on the Formation of National States and the Issue of Nationalities)*, review by Cassiu Maniu, in: *Românul*, II, 1912, nr.106 (16-29 May), p.9. The review begins in nr.97. The remarks of the reviewer are favourable from the beginning: “At last there is a Hungarian book written with respect for truth. A worthwhile read, because it is free from the microbes of prejudice, opportunism and egoist interest which corrupt the real issues of political thought (...) Reading this book you have the feeling that it was not written by a man but by the force of life itself of the nationalities in Austria-Hungary, such lively outline do its wonderful presentations convey to their being, the causes of their conflicts, their hopeless fight with political institutions as well as the powers which ensure their existence and future development.”

² *Ibidem*

Romanians and Slovaks would be impossible even if they would not have kindred peoples in Europe.”¹

The conclusion reached by Oszkár Jászi in his study is most salutary and consists of the open assertion of the idea that every chauvinist and narrowly nationalist politics is useless, inefficient, vain and void in modern times. His views are detailed in a series of articles published in *Telegraful român* under the title *Stat național și chestie de naționalitate* (National State and Nationality) where Jászi asserted: “Nationalist policy had a contrary effect everywhere, instead of the effect strived for. Violent nationalist policy is a failure simply because the system of force is completely helpless because of obvious reasons. Everywhere where there are masses of people living on territories that belong them for long, agricultural peoples in united groups for example, violent politics exerted to any extent cannot be successful. It cannot attain the desired result, because even the most excellent language teaching is useless if the circumstances of life do not support this language learning at school.”² The politics of de-nationalisation is therefore “unreasonable”, unfair and doomed to failure because “Any school, administration and justice, be it shaped after the most modern pattern, is imperfect, bad and unacceptable if it does not use the language of the people!”³

The consequences of circulating such views in the Hungarian as well as the Romanian press were incommensurable if we take into account the critical circumstances in which they were uttered and their encouraging effect on the movements of national liberation of the oppressed nations in the imperium. Jászi’s categorical formulations gave an impetus to the national struggles stimulating their vindicative nature and the uncompromising nature of positions and points of view. The dialogue of certain Romanian leading politicians with the Hungarian sociologist also directly added to this - a fact that has not been revealed until now.

¹ *Gravaminele naționalităților stabilite din partea d-lui Jászi Oszkár*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.53, p.1

² *Stat național și chestie de naționalitate*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.96, p.396.

³ *Ibidem*, nr. 93 (8-21 September), p.389-407.

This allowed the sociologist to revert to some of the ideas circulated in order to complete and nuance them. The Hungarian thinker took part in the direct debate of the Romanian questions through two open letters addressed to the editors of *Telegraful român* in Sibiu. The first one, entitled *Gândirea liberă și chestia naționalistă. Scrisoare către Redactorul (Free Thinking and the Nationalist Issue. Letter to the Editor)* was published in nr.80/1912 of the periodical and the Hungarian thinker thanked in it for the view expressed by the periodical about his book in the issue of 6 July showing that “The wound of this issue of nationality has become so sore in our country that it can hardly be approached any longer” and he adds: “It is not surprising because this issue has been viewed from the point of view of the power whereas the fruits of such a policy could not be other than cheating and bitterness”¹ whereas “nationalist public opinion wants to know not only the declarations of Hungarian politicians but also their motives in writing them”.² He expressed his joy that “the author of the forementioned article [in *Telegraful român*] approached so appropriately the psychological need that led me to the new conception of the issue of nationality. My aim and way is indeed the aspiration towards the ideal of democracy with the application of free thinking. Democracy asks for the possibility of free development based on all popular energies. This new politics must sooner or later cover the widest circles of the Hungarian citizens and workers”, showing that “restoring peace with the nationalities” is urgent and this latter can only depend on the really democratic powers of the country” and that evil in this matter comes from “the system of agrarian feudalism”.³

Oszkár Jászi’s letter to the editors received an answer only in the next issue, nr.81 (31 July/13 August). It is worth observing the opinion of the editors regarding the fact that “class domination today must stop, making space for the manifestation of the free

¹*Gândirea liberă și chestia naționalistă. Scrisoare către Redactorul*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.80 (10 August), p. 325.

² *Ibidem*

³ *Ibidem*

will of the whole population of the country”¹. They too thought “like Mr Jászi that only a democratisation of the country and of all its institutions will be able to open the way towards understanding in the relationship with non-Hungarian nationalities.” However, there is a difference between the opinion of the editors and that of the Hungarian sociologist: Jászi believed too much in capitalism, that is, the new phase of capitalism which would lead, one could think, in itself to a decrease or even disappearance of national antagonisms while the editor of the periodical from Sibiu was not very convinced that the situation will be remedied by itself. Therefore he asks for further explanations: “We would be glad if at the opportune moment Mr Jászi who is most competent in this issue and who we hope, will not resent our sincerity, would give us reassuring explanations.”²

The Hungarian sociologist did not keep them waiting for long and his answer was published in nr.97/ 18 September – 1 October 1912 under the title *Capitalism, Church, School and the Issue of Nationality*, a free and original presentation of Oszkár Jászi’s ideas about an issue that he had not exhausted yet. However, this presentation of ideas was shadowed by a regrettable incident: the *Budapesti Hírlap* from which he knew about the wishes of those from the *Telegraful român* spread the rumour that those from the *Telegraful român* categorically rejected the idea of alliance with democratic circles which was evidently untrue, a “mean misconstruction” of their intentions. Jászi was completely convinced of this after reading the newspaper from Sibiu, all the more so as he was aware of the perfidious and Jesuit method of procedure of the *Budapesti Hírlap* while he appreciated the “correct and resolute stand” of the *Telegraful român*, namely, “that you honestly express your bewilderment at the actual or imaginary highbrowness of the policy of radical Hungarian democracy” and declared himself “grateful for the *Telegraful român* for its

¹ *Scrisoarea domnului Jászi (Mr Jászi’s Letter)*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.81(31 July-13 August), p.1.

² *Ibidem*

loyalty”.¹ He was convinced that the policy of betrayal and “the attempts to cheat” must be replaced with a transparent politics of mutual trust: “Only if we pour fresh wine in our glasses and make our political ideals and means clear in all respects, can we hope that the different nationalities in our country will stay besides us and become allies not enemies.”²

As concerns the question raised by the *Telegraful român* about the relation between capitalism and the state of nationalities, Jászi makes certain corrections showing that the type of capitalism dominant in Hungary is a dangerous one, because it is “usuriously allied with the impoverished nobility”, being morally and politically one of the most destructive and demoralising powers in Hungary” based on the “misery of our people held in poverty and darkness by the feudal administration and those who own great landed property”³. He speaks about his position towards the church and speaks up for a free religious life: “our anti-clericalism is not directed against the religious life of the church but against its capitalism and feudalism”. He recognises that “any extension of state power is directed against the autonomy of nationalities, also when state public schools involve the compulsory singing of the anthem, the forced learning of Hungarian language and the suppression of national consciousness. Under these circumstances it is only natural that the plan of stratification of public elementary schools was odious for everybody faithful to his own nationality”. Thus he pleads for good, honest and modern schools everywhere, so that the whole population of the country can rise through culture. The language of the state “must not be forced to the detriment of other knowledge, more important for the people”, said he. “High schools and schools with instruction in the language of nationalities should be established.”⁴

¹ Dr Jászi Oszkár, *Capitalismul, biserica și școala și chestia de naționalitate (Capitalism, Church, School and the Issue of Nationality)*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr. 97 (18 September-1 October), p.401-402

² *Ibidem*

³ *Ibidem*

⁴ *Ibidem*

The reforms suggested by Jászi were substantial reforms. He had a different view of the functioning of the state and wanted to introduce other principles which would have transformed “present utopias” into future reality. The condition was: “Only if the nationalities were represented in the parliament according to their culture, if the comitats, the institutions serving the enrichment of the nobility became autonomous organisms of the people, if a democratic, antifeudal and anti-chauvinist Hungarian political party were formed, if we had a perfect freedom of assembly and liberty of press, could we hope for more and ask our fellow-countrymen to stretch their hands to build the wonderful palace of people’s ruling which would mean economic, moral and cultural purity, would be anti-chauvinist and freed from the influence of the state and confession.”¹

We think that the result of such contacts and exchanges of ideas were beneficial for both parties. Romanian leading politicians could reach the conviction that they are not alone in their fight for social emancipation, political and national rights and liberties, and that some members of the Hungarian leading circles think differently and conceive the future of their country in another way. There was an immediate reaction to this attitude on a political level towards the end of the year 1912. The *Telegraful român* released the item of news entitled *Politică nouă de naționalitate* (*A New Policy of Nationality*) which favourably commented upon an article in the newspaper *Az Újság* which showed a certain change in attitude as it rejected chauvinism and spoke about the inauguration of a new policy of nationality which could only make the editors happy that “such a correct and healthy way of thinking and judgement began to settle in the hearts and minds of Hungarians”.² On the other hand, we can come across such opinions among Romanian politicians, too. In a letter dated 1912 and addressed to a fellow thinker Vasile Goldiș notes the following: “The answer given to Mr Jászi is admirable. You made

¹ *Ibidem*

² *Politică nouă de naționalitate*, in: *Telegraful român*, LX, 1912, nr.119 (10-23 November), p.489.

me happy with this article because it is also a splendid answer to *Gazeta Transilvaniei* which accused us in a recent article of not setting up a candidate”¹ It is also him who, directly influenced by these ideas, edits and publishes in the same year, in 1912, the work *A nemzetiségi kérdéstről* or *Despre problema naționalităților*² (*On the Nationality Question*) in Hungarian, in which he deals with the same problems as Oszkár Jászi, launching a real storm of debates on the “issue of nationalities”. Anyway, the problems posed by the two thinkers overlap in many points which proves the existence of a common set of ideas which can be easily traced back to the works and concept of Otto Bauer. Their revival and systematic emphasis confirms the impression that the moment has come for this ample clash of ideas and that many problems that had not found their solution in the previous epoch have deepened the crisis even more by the accumulation of pending issues and by the worsening of the economic and social life-conditions of oppressed nationalities.

The discussion of the national issue was for Jászi a good opportunity to present his knowledge and ideas in this field. His book is one of the highest points in the Hungarian democratic-bourgeois concept on the nation, the radical wing of Hungarian sociology. Hungarian statesmen avoiding his suggestions soon had to confront great difficulties in this respect.

Within the changed circumstances of the First World War the democratic intellectuals of oppressed nationalities launched an unflagging offensive aiming at the total breaking away from the imperium, the creation of free and independent states as was the case with the Romanian national state on 1 December 1918. In the concourse of events created by the war when the system of alliances and the armed victories led to a new configuration of territories, the Romanian people and Transylvania felt that they must contribute to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the crea-

¹ Vasile Goldiș, *Corespondență (1885-1934). Scrisori trimise (Letters – 1885-1934. Sent Letters)*, vol. I, Cluj, Dacia, 1992

² See Vasile Goldiș, *Scrieri social-politice (Social-Political Writings)*, ed. by M. Popa and Gh. Șora, Timișoara, Facla, 1976, p.126 and the following

tion of its own national state. It was then that the conservative Hungarian politicians saw that Oszkár Jászi was right, and sent him as a representative of the Károlyi government in 1918 to treat with the Romanian leaders about the total rights and liberties for the Romanian population in Transylvania within the Hungarian state¹. However, it was too late, because the Romanian national ideal was on its way of accomplishment and therefore his mission failed. Even in these circumstances, as soon as the white terror was installed in Hungary and Horthy took command of the state, Jászi was compelled to leave the country and go into exile. He was not tolerated by a leader and a government which considered him guilty for wishing to solve the issue of nationalities in the Hungarian state once and for all, in a correct manner, in the spirit of modern European legislation. His access to Hungary was forbidden during the whole interwar period. However, he came to Romania in 1922 where newspapers presented him as the promoter of the Romanian-Hungarian approach quoting excerpts from his biography and scientific activity, also reproducing his recent declarations published in the newspaper *Bécsi Magyar Újság*, such as: "Until Hungary does not choose the way of real democracy and does not definitively break with the system of feudal great landed property, the political situation will be stressed because the Hungarian feudal lords will not cease to delude the Hungarian people with the narcotic idea of revenge and irredentism instead of introducing the universal vote, accomplishing the agrarian reform and adhering to a democratic policy."²

An article published by Al. Hodoş in Octavian Goga's periodical *Ţara noastră* in Cluj demonstrates how Hungarian news-papers viewed him: they considered him a traitor and a renegade only because he wished the reconciliation with

¹ *Tratativale cu ministrul Jászi*, in: *Românul*, V, 1918, nr.5, p.1-2; See also Şt. Pascu, *Marea adunare naţională de la Alba Iulia (The Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia)*, Cluj, Dacia, 1968, p.356, and Béla Cselényi, *Jászi Oszkár (1875-1957)*, in: *Tribuna*, XI, 1968, nr.68, p.5.

² *Jászi Oszkár și apropierea (Jászi Oszkár and Rapprochement)*, in: *Aurora*, I, 1928, nr.1, p.6; *Oszkár Jászi*, in: *Patria*, IV, 1923, nr. 155, p.114; *Oszkár Jászi în Ardeal (Oszkár Jászi in Transylvania)*, in: *Ţara noastră*, 1923, nr.21, p. 676-678.

Romanians. He paid with his exile for his “courage of speaking honestly and loyally about the policy that his country should have followed in the new circumstances.”¹ Ernest Armeanca draws a favourable portrait of him in *România nouă*: “Jászi was one of the few Hungarians who dared to speak differently about the Romanians and the ‘nationalities’ than in the usual blasphemous tone and denigration, in spite of the general feeling of intolerance. He was one of the few Hungarians who desperately tried to stop the overwhelming wave of chauvinism and instead define, in a changed atmosphere, a wise policy of understanding between Hungarians and the nationalities.”²

The destiny of Oszkár Jászi (1875-1956) was not a very happy one. He emigrated to the US and worked as a Professor of Sociology at Oberlin College from 1926, always hoping for the reconciliation between Romanians and Hungarians. He died far away from his country in 1956.

Being among the Hungarian anti-Horthy émigré in Vienna he had close relations with progressive Romanian journalists such as Grigore Gafencu, Costaforu, Constantin Mille, Virgil Madgearu, Eugen Filotti and Mircea Djuvara, most of them editors and contributors to *Revista vremii*, a periodical contacted by Jászi when he was in Romania. After returning to Vienna he wrote three articles in the newspaper of Hungarian émigrés, presenting his opinion about the situation in Romania. He also sent some articles to the periodical in Bucharest which were published under the title *Impresiuni din România* (Impressions from Romania) in the September 1923 issue. Oszkár Jászi wrote: “I would like to tell you first how much I sympathise with and am interested in the intellectuals in Romania. Nowhere in the neighbouring countries have I found such a great number of fine, lively, perhaps too sceptical and ironical intellectuals pervaded by a spirit of democracy and a real humanitarianism, interested in all the problems of

¹ A.H., *Oszkár Jászi în Ardeal. Cum îl privesc ziarele maghiare*, in: *Țara noastră*, 1923, nr.21, p. 676-678.

² Ernst Armeanca, *Oszkár Jászi*, in: *România nouă*, II, 1934, nr.134 (26 June), p.2.

our tormented epoch. I admire the critical perspicacy of Mr Duca, the harsh and ardent verve of Mr Constantin Mille, the radiant moral power of Mr Costaforu, the historical logic of Mr Maniu, the lyrical intuition of Mr Goga, the impetuous and noble enthusiasm of Dr Lupu, the vast European culture of Professor Gusti, the subtle generalities of Mr Rădulescu-Motru and the lucid, liberal conservatism of Mr Marghiloman. I mostly like the critical but still tolerant spirit, the distinguished eclecticism and the loyal fight between remarkable schools which characterises your editorial staff.”¹

He also made some remarks regarding the process of unification which was disturbed by the intense irredentist propaganda “spread in a mad and criminal way by Horthy’s agents” and, on the other hand, by the deep bitterness in the heart of Romanians in Transylvania during the haughty reign of Hungarian feudalism called by him “wretched”. Therefore nationalist-chauvinist feelings were possible on both sides; these had to be carefully but ruthlessly eradicated. The bridge of unification could also be built by the activity of Hungarian immigrants from Transylvania - who warned the public about “the great dangers of Horthysm and the actual crisis of the present Hungary and gave rise to a strong trend of public opinion, in favour of the approach between Romanians and Hungarians” – such as the leader of the Seklers, Árpád Pál. Jászi saw the consolidation of Romanian democracy guaranteed by the effects of the agrarian reform which was an act of great social progress: “My hope is in your great agrarian reform which Romania can be proud of. Because, with all the injustice of this capital reform - I do not refer to the optant counts in Transylvania who are spoiled by the Society of Nations but the numerous medium landowners and small-holders and their part in the corruption which is inevitable when the structure of a society is so shattered. I think that this reform which will eliminate the great feudal property for ever will have wonderful results in the near future. This great evolution, a real pacific revolution will be

¹ Oscar Iaszi, *Impresiuni din România*, in: *Revista vremii*, III, 1923, nr.13 (23 September), p.1-2

the most firm guarantee of the establishment of the Danube confederacy” that he suggests for the future. These words were a sincere evaluation of the new relationship between the different layers of the population in Transylvania, the efforts of integration of the Hungarian minority in the Romanian national state and the harmonisation of the relations. This was the noble cause that Oszkár Jászi had also fought for.