

## AT THE MARGIN OF THE EMPIRE. RAILWAY BUILDING IN TRANSYLVANIA UNTIL 1918

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***Abstract:** The construction of the Transylvanian railway – the first line only became operational in 1868 – was delayed by several factors. Firstly, political change in this province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Coming under the direct authority of the Austrians in 1849, it only gained control over the construction of the railway after the Compromise of 1867. And then there were conflicts about the choice of routes, between the towns, between the Transylvanian nations and between the Hungarians and the Austrians.*

*Once Hungary took charge, the construction of the railway network continued without an overall plan, depending on the pressure brought to bear by the various nations, by the owners of large estates, forests and mines. The choice of route was essentially dictated by the fixing of the junction points with Romania – the subject of a persisting disagreement with Bucharest – which continually changed as the years went by.*

*Due to the shortage of financial resources, from 1881 onwards the government had to leave the initiative to private companies. They only built local railways, which didn't contribute to the coherency of the network. It was only at the start of the 20th century that the government, becoming aware of the Russian threat, took control again to complete, finally, the circling of the Transylvanian plateau by the construction of the Székely Land ring line.*

*At the end of the First World War, the Transylvanian railway (2,596.5 kilometres) was fully incorporated into the Romanian railway.*

***Keywords:** Habsburg Monarchy, Railways construction, Transylvania, railways junction, Romania.*

The first railway in Transylvania was only built in 1868. Why was it so late, even though the Tisza Videki Vasút company had brought its rails to the gates of Transylvania as of 1858 (Nagy Varad / Oradea Mare to the north west, Arad to the south east), while Austria had started rail services in 1866 between Lemberg in Galicia and Iași, which gave it access to the Black Sea via Moldavia's network ?

And yet the Hungarians in Transylvania quickly saw the interest in endowing their province with railways, to enable its economic development.

However, the projects drawn up in the first half of the nineteenth century reflected contradictory aspirations. Transylvania's inhabitants wanted to enhance the value of their province's resources (iron, coal, agriculture, livestock). The large landowners, becoming aware of the value of their estates, increased the farmed land areas. They wanted to connect Transylvania with the Romanian principalities

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to open up outlets for their produce. The Hungarians wished to export their farm produce towards Transylvania while the Austrians wished to export their industrial production. The aim of the Austro-Hungarian empire was to „reach the Danube and the Black Sea and therefore the Orient by the most profitable lines crossing Transylvania”<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to these commercial objectives, there were military concerns. The parliament of Vienna had drawn up a list of priority axes, in particular an east-west corridor with two variants: 1) Vienna–Budapest–Nagy Várád/Oradea–Brassó/Braşov; 2) Vienna–Budapest–Arad–Nagy Szeben/Sibiu<sup>2</sup>. These two routes were traced out by the postal routes which crossed the province at the time: one connected Arad to Brassó through the Maros/Mureş valley, via Nagy Szeben; the other went via Szatmar Nemeti/Satu Mare, in the north west, reaching the principality of Walachia via Kolozsvár/Cluj–Gyula Fehérvár/Alba Iulia and the Câmpulung pass.

Another, lengthy debate concerned the question whether the railways would be built by the State or using private capital<sup>3</sup>. However, from the outset, two problems arose, which dominated the whole issue of building the railway lines in Transylvania:

– The choice of access to the province by the north west (Szatmar Nemeti and the Szamos/Someş valley, by the centre (Nagy Várád and the Körös valley) or by the south east (Arad and the Maros valley).

– The choice of the pass by which the junction would be made with the Romanian principalities: Walachia to the south or Moldavia to the east.

In 1836 the Parliament of Budapest adopted a law on the construction of the railways which provided for thirteen lines linking the capital to the most important towns (map No. 1). Two of these lines concerned Transylvania: the first from Nagy Várád to Brassó via Kolozsvár–Nagy Szeben–Fogaras/Făgăraş, through the southern valley of the Olt (article 6); the second from Arad to Nagy Szeben with braches towards Petrosény, Maros Vásárhely/Târgu Mureş and Sepsi Szent György (article 7); but article 25 specified that the first railway line to be built would be the Nagy Várád one. Numerous drafts were made, but they were foiled by the 1848 revolution which, although it brought out a new player, the Romanians, led in 1849 to the direct attachment of Transylvania to Austria. It was the end of the Hungarian dreams of a railway in Transylvania, as it was Vienna which would then decide on the construction of this province’s railways.

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<sup>1</sup> Radu Bellu, *Mica monografie a căilor ferate din România*, vol. I, *Regionala căi ferate Braşov*, Bucureşti, Edit. Filaret, 1995, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Iosif Marin Balog, Robert Nagy, *Regional Development and Modernization: the Significance of Connecting Transylvania to the Railways Network of the Habsburg Monarchy*, in vol., *Economia regională. Ipostaze rurale şi urbane*, (eds.) Iosif Marin Balog, Rudolf Graf, Ioan Lumperdean, PUC, Cluj Napoca, 2011, p. 297–312.

<sup>3</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, *Regionala de căi ferate Cluj-Napoca*, Bucureşti, Edit. Filaret, 1996, p. 17.

## I. TRANSYLVANIA UNDER THE THUMB OF THE AUSTRIANS

Having become the masters of Transylvania, the Vienna government started to see the issue of building a railway in this distant province in a new light, with the discovery of large mineral riches. „Recently”, wrote Reclus, „a mining town, Petroseny, has emerged like magic in the upper valley of Zsil/Jiu) and has started to challenge foreign coals for the Hungarian market”<sup>4</sup>. Henceforth, „the Austrian capital had the objective of transferring the centre of steelmaking from Gavojda [Banat] to Hunedoara”<sup>5</sup>.

In this perspective, the Vienna government announced a railway construction programme in 1850, covering the following two lines:

- Arad–Piski/Simeria–Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia–Nagy Szeben/Sibiu–Voröstorony/Turnu Roşu pass – towards Romania.
- Nagyvárád–Kolozsvár–Brassó–Buzău pass towards Romania.

However, the route of these planned lines caused controversy in Transylvania between the towns, between the nations and even between Austria and Hungary.

### A. A contested route

#### 1. Between the Transylvanian towns (map No. 2)

Each one wanted to be the first to be linked to the Hungarian network. „None of the 1850 routes approached all of Transylvania’s towns”, wrote Balog, noting that „Transylvania did not have a real capital, neither Cluj, nor Sibiu, nor Braşov. After 1850, Nagy Szeben had become the most important administrative centre, housing the governor’s residence”<sup>6</sup>.

Displeased, the inhabitants of Nagy Szeben demanded arbitration in 1858, citing the failure to comply with article 25 of the law of 1836 which provided that the Nagy Várád–Kolozsvár–Nagy Szeben line would be built first.

Brassó, which endowed itself with a chamber of commerce in 1851, argued the need to be linked with the railway network of Hungary, having become the main economic centre.

Kolozsvár, which had come to understand the importance of being located on the corridor connecting Transylvania to the Danube, proposed that the railway line from Nagy Várád head towards Paşcani in the principality of Moldavia, where it would tie in to the Lemberg–Iaşi line (Maros Vásárhely–Deda–Tölgyes pass), with a branch serving the Székely Land (Maros Vásárhely–Parajd–Csik Szereda).

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<sup>4</sup> Elisée Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes*, Tome III. *Europe Centrale (Suisse, Austro-Hongrie, Allemagne)*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1878, p. 363.

<sup>5</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Iosif Marin Balog, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Maros Vásárhely, although located on the route for this planned international line, wished to be connected to the Székely Land and proposed a ring line which would run up the Maros valley until reaching Györgyszentmiklós then, descending the Olt valley, would pass by Brassó and arrive at Arad via Nagy Szeben and the lower course of the Maros.

Kolozsvár and Maros Vásárhely further pointed out that the route planned via the valley of Küküllő/Târnava had two disadvantages: between Kolozsvár and Brassó it only went through small towns, Medgyes and Segesvár, ignoring those in Székely Land; it required the railway line to make a pointless bend by Tövis for the sole purpose of connecting at Gyulafehérvár with the line that the Austrians had decided to build from Arad.

## 2. Between the Transylvanian nations.

The Hungarian aristocracy defended the routing via Küküllő valley, so that the railway would serve the main estates that they held in Transylvania. The Saxons argued for the railway to go through their territory, connect Nagy Szeben and Brassó via the Olt valley and enter Romania, to head towards the Danube and Black Sea, via the Turnu Roşu pass that was guarded by Nagy Szeben<sup>7</sup>. The Székely supported the route via the northern ring, serving their locations. The Romanians supported the route via the centre, avoiding the Saxon and Székely regions. In 1862, George Bariţiu, one of their representatives, proposed the route Nagy Várad–Kolozsvár–Brassó–Buzău pass–Ploieşti–Bucharest–Danube<sup>8</sup>.

In 1864, the Sibiu Diet sent a project to the court in Vienna which, noting that Transylvania was the only region in the Empire that did not yet benefit from railways, pleaded for the two routes (via Arad and Nagy Várad, which it considered to be indispensable, while noting that the variant of Nagy Várad–Kolozsvár–Küküllő valley–Brassó corresponded to the greatest number of Transylvanian interests<sup>9</sup>. A memorandum by Dimitrie Moldovan, a Romanian Aulic Councillor, supported Oradea–Braşov, emphasising that this project „would make the better integration of Transylvania possible, and a more effective control over Transylvania by the Vienna government [...]. For as long as Transylvania is short of means of transport, its inhabitants will continue to feel as far from Vienna as from the shores of the Atlantic”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 71

<sup>8</sup> Demtriu Urmă, *Primele 16 linii ferate din România (1856–1870)*, „Revista transporturilor și telecomunicațiilor”, n° 1, 1977, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Iosif Marin Balog, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

### 3. Between the Austrians and the Hungarians.

Vienna was not prepared to favour the interests of Hungarian nobility in Transylvania. That is why the imperial government imposed the Arad–Nagy Szeben route. The opposition between Austrians and Hungarians as to the route lasted for fifteen years. „Everyone agreed on building the railway lines, but there were divisions when it came down to determining the routes”<sup>11</sup>.

#### **B. The construction of the Arad – Gyulafehérvár railway line**

After numerous setbacks (defection of the Tisza Videki Vasút company, bids by five companies which failed to gather the necessary capital), in 1864 the government turned towards construction by the State. On 19 February 1865, it granted the Brassó mines and steelworks company the concession for Arad – Gyulafehérvár, with a branch line towards Petrozsény. As a consequence, then, the government only approved the construction of the line from Arad to Gyulafehérvár, abandoning the link to Nagy Szeben and Brassó.

A company, Első Erdélyi Vasút (EEV, first Transylvanian railway) was created. Arad–Gyulafehérvár (211.058 km) was put into service on 22 December 1868, as was the branch from Piski/Simeria to Petrozsény (79.182 km) on 28 August 1870. Those who built this branch did not exclude the possibility of extending this line towards Romania over the Surduc pass, in order to export coal. „From these eternal conflicts emerged the victorious Saxons, to whom imperial Austria first granted the construction of Arad–Gyulafehérvár, the first railway line to penetrate Transylvania”<sup>12</sup>. However, „it did not reach Braşov or Sibiu, but stopped at Alba Iulia”<sup>13</sup>.

The deterioration of the economic situation and „the lack of State resources delayed the possibility of undertaking the construction of Nagy Várad–Kolozsvár”<sup>14</sup>. It was to Hungary, once its autonomy recognised within the Empire by the compromise of February 17, 1867 – one of the consequences of the defeat of Austria by Prussia – that would fall the building of this railway line and the continuation of building the Transylvanian network.

## **II. AFTER THE 1867 COMPROMISE, HUNGARY IN CHARGE**

Six months after the compromise, the Budapest Parliament adopted a law, presented by the Trade Minister, Miko Imre, entitled „network of railways in

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<sup>11</sup> Demetriu Urmă, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Demetriu Urmă *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 17.

Hungary”, which provided for the construction of twenty-five lines, of which two would be of interest to Transylvania: (map No. 3)

– The first one (article 2 of the law): Nagy Várad–Kolozsvár–Tövis–Brassó Buzău pass–Romania, with three branches: 1) from Székely Kocsárd/Războieni to Maros Vásárhely, 2) from Kis Kapus/Copșa Mică to Nagy Szeben, 3) from Tövis to Gyulafehérvár (to join the Arad–Gyulafehérvár line that was currently under construction).

– The second one (article 23) from Brassó to Györgyszentmiklós/Gheorgheni, serving the Székely Land.

However, the Hungarian government was not in a position to finance these two lines, with the cost of building just the single line from Nagy Várad to Brassó being estimated at a hundred million forints. It then declared, changing its position, that „these two lines are of economic importance” [and not strategic importance] and that they could be attributed under concession to private capital, without any financial involvement by the Hungarian State<sup>15</sup>.

The need to build a railway line from Nagyvárad to Brassó that was as direct as possible appeared to be indispensable when the Hungarian authorities became aware that the line from Arad, and originally planned to reach Brassó, would not be built. This necessity of a strategic nature explains the sidelining of Nagy Szeben, which would only be served by a branch from Kis Kapus. It created dissatisfaction; but „all the protests and interventions were in vain, and the inhabitants of Sibiu had to make do”<sup>16</sup>.

### A. The line to Brassó

On 2 July 1867, an auction was launched for the construction of the Nagyvárad–Kolozsvár/Cluj line. In 1868, the Budapest Parliament adopted Law XLV which granted the concession for Nagyvárad–Brassó and its branches to the Magyar Keleti Vasút company (eastern railway) which would be created in 1869 with a share capital of 75 million forints, supplied by a financial group of various countries.

Its construction began in the spring of 1869. However, due to technical difficulties in the Stana tunnel, the contractual deadline, set for 31 December 1869, had to be pushed back several times. The line, 151.624 kilometres long, was inaugurated, nine months late, on 7 September 1870 „without the slightest ceremony”, wrote the „Transylvanian Gazette” on 9 September 1870).

The second section put into service was not formed by the extension from Kolozsvár towards Brassó, but, due to the difficulties met with the construction of the Kolozsvár–Székely Kocsárd (Războieni) section, by the Gyulafehérvár–

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 23.

Székely Kocsárd–Maros Vásárhely railway line, which extended the line built by EEV in 1868 up to Gyulafehérvár. It was put into service on 20 November 1871 (111.325 kilometres). Paradoxically, Maros Vásárhely was therefore first reached from Arad and not from Nagyvárad as initially planned.

After 1870, the company MKV continued to build the railway from Kolozsvár to Brassó. „However due to serious financial problems, it was unable to pay the interest on loans obtained from the bank and was close to bankruptcy and the stoppage of work”<sup>17</sup>.

1872 saw the entry into service of Tövis–Medgyes on 12 July (59.458 kilometres), Medgyes–Segesvár on 18 July (39.299 kilometres), and on 11 October the branch serving Nagy Szeben from Kis Kapus (45.120 kilometres). Brassó/Braşov was reached on 1 June 1873 (129.447 kilometres). Another paradox was that Brassó was to start with only premier accessible from Arad, while awaiting the entry into service on 14 August 1873 of the last section linking Kolozsvár to Székely Kocsárd (68.705 kilometres), the construction of which had been delayed by rough terrain and the drilling of four tunnels.

To save the situation, the State bought the company's shares, replacing them with State bonds bearing 5% interest. On 1 February 1876, the MKV company was placed under the control of the State railways, and it was dissolved on 15 January 1878.

By including the short line (25.200 kilometres) brought into service between Brassó and the Romanian border, which will be considered again below question with reference to the links between Transylvania and Romania, the MÁV network in 1885 had 765.3 kilometres of lines: 189.6 from the nationalisation of the EEV company in 1884; 527.1 from the nationalisation of the MKV company in 1876; just 48.6 had been built by the State. The rate of construction of this network, become the State's, had not exceeded 45 kilometres per year.

The State would only build, and only as of 1897, i.e. after an eleven-year interruption, some 267.7 kilometres of railway line, meaning 19 per year. The MÁV limited themselves to completing the Székely Land ring line, the construction of which was tied, once again, to the problem of the links between Transylvania and Romania.

## **B. The junctions between Transylvania and Romania**

Indeed, the determination of the place where junctions would be established between Transylvania and Romania was not only the subject of much controversy, but once again had a profound influence on the routing of the Transylvania railway network.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 19.

## 1. Opposing views between Hungary and Romania

The construction programme decided upon by Vienna in 1850 provided that the planned line from Arad to Nagy Szeben would head towards the Danube via the Vöröstorony/Turnu Roşu pass and the Olt valley. This choice had been confirmed by the aforementioned 1858 report by the Austrian engineer, Karol von Ghega, called upon by the inhabitants of Sibiu, whose town risked being excluded from the routes being discussed. This choice was supported by the Saxons present in the region located to the north and east of this mountain pass.

However, the route was not considered favourably by the Austro-Hungarian administration, whose interest was in „attaining the Danube and the Black Sea by the most profitable routes”<sup>18</sup>. Inspector Schnirgh had recommended the construction of the line from Arad to Brassó, but „on condition that the link with Romania goes via Intorsura Buzăului” (Buzău pass), meaning that it would end up in Moldavia closest to the ports of Galaţi and Brăila.

This choice was supported by the Hungarians, who wanted the line linking with Romania to cross the greatest part of Transylvanian territory. Unfavourable to the junction via the Olt valley, which in their view would have exclusively favoured the interests of the Saxons, they recommended (and this was the position that had been argued by George Bariţiu in 1862) the link from Brassó to Bucharest to go via the Buzău pass and Ploieşti<sup>19</sup>.

In 1871, an agreement concluded between Hungary and Romania had planned for three junctions between the two countries<sup>20</sup>. The first between Temesvár and Craiova, the junction being located alongside the Danube between Orsova and Vârciorova; the second between Petrozsény and Târgu Jiu via the Vulcan pass (508 metres); the third, on which the Hungarians had particularly insisted, between Brassó and Galaţi via the Oituz pass (866 metres). The choice of this route was due to the fact that it presented the advantage for the Hungarians of serving part of Székely Land before entering Romania.

However, Romania was not satisfied by the choice of the Oituz pass which, although it allowed the Hungarians to reach the ports on the Danube and the Black Sea by a direct route through the south of Moldavia, short-circuited Bucharest. Romania preferred a link via the Predeal pass (1,040 metres), which appeared all the more logical since the railway line from Kolozsvár was about to reach Brassó, located some twenty kilometres from the Romanian border. The Romanian press having revealed that it was under pressure from Hungary that the Romanian minister for public works, Dimitrie Ghica, had signed this agreement, the Romanian government then demanded the renegotiation of the agreement. As Urma points out, „It was only after the refusal in 1872 by the Romanian

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Demetriu Urmă, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 91.

government of the proposal by the Hungarian government that people finally spoke of the link via Predeal”<sup>21</sup>.

A new agreement was then concluded between Hungary and Romania, in Bucharest on 31 May 1874. It took note of the fact that a first link between the Empire and Romania had been established between Bucovine and Moldavia<sup>22</sup> and provided for two new junctions:

– One of them between Orsova and Vârciorova in Olténia, connecting to the line that Romania was building through Olténia (Bucharest–Ploiești–Pitești–Craiova–Vârciorova).

– The other via the Predeal pass, from Ploiești, making it possible to attain Bucharest on the one side, Galați on the other. However, the Hungarian government insisted on including a clause in the agreement specifying that it would only create the junction with Orșova once Romania had built the line via the Predeal pass.

The two governments, stated article 6 of the convention, „acknowledge in principle the utility of the three other junctions in their railways by the points Vulcan, Turnu Roșu (Rothenturm) and Oituz or Gyimes/Palanca), without setting any term for their construction, reserving the possibility of having them be the subject of subsequent arrangements, when the two parties deem this to be opportune”.

## 2. The links via Predeal and Orșova

In 1876, the Budapest Parliament adopted a law authorising the construction of the Brasso-Predeal line using State funds. This line, 25.200 km long with a difficult profile (25‰) made up the difference in altitude between Brasso (565 metres) and the Predeal pass (1,057 metres). Between 1876 and 1878, Hungary continued building of the railway line from Temesvár to Orșova, completed on 20 May 1878. For its part, Romania had already reached the border on the Danube by Vârciorova on 5 January 1875. However, as the construction of the Ploiești-Predeal line had suffering delays, Hungary refused to complete the junction between Orsova and Vârciorova before the railway line was finished.

The first link between Vienna/Budapest and Bucharest via Temesvár-Orșova was put in place on 9 May 1878. However, travellers had to get off the Hungarian train and make the leg from Orșova to Vârciorova by horse-drawn carriage, before continuing on a Romanian train.

Once the Romanian section of the Predeal pass was nearing completion, the Hungarians put the Orșova-Vârciorova section into service on 1 May 1879, permitting the first direct Vienna–Bucharest train to run on 9 May. The Brasso–

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<sup>21</sup> Dem. Urma, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> By the Lemberg-Czernowitz-Jassy company in 1866, the border being located between Itzkany and Burdujeni.

Ploești line had been brought into service on 1 December 1879, establishing the first link between Transylvania and Romania.

The first truly international train was put into circulation by Compagnie des Wagons-Lits on 5 June 1883, under the name of *Express d'Orient*, from Paris to Bucharest and to Giurgiu. It wasn't routed through Predeal but via Orșova, this choice being justified by the fact that, although the two itineraries were equal in length<sup>23</sup>, the profile was easier going via Orșova as it avoided the Predeal pass.

This railway didn't settle the problem of the link between Europe and Constantinople, since it required voyagers to cross the Danube by boat between Giurgiu and Ruse, to use the Ruse-Varna railway in Bulgaria, and to end their trip by boat on the Black Sea from Varna to Constantinople. The trip at the time took 83 hours and 30 minutes.

### 3. The need for new links between Transylvania and Romania

A dozen years after their entry into service, the links via Predeal and Banat turned out to be insufficient to absorb the growing traffic between the Dual Monarchy and Romania, notably exports from Romania (grains, cattle, agricultural produce). This was especially the case since the capacity of the Predeal railway was limited by its difficult profile. (map No. 4)

#### a) The link with Moldavia

Hungary hadn't given up on direct access to the Danube ports of Galați and Brăila and, from there onwards, to the Black Sea. The link via Predeal had been imposed on it by Romania and by the circumstances. Indeed, at that time the railway from Kolozsvár had not gone further than Brassó and no railway had yet been built or even considered in the direction of the Oituz pass.

The link via Predeal had the disadvantage of leaving Romania in charge of the prices, since Hungary only controlled 25 kilometres of the 322 km Brassó–Galați leg, while a link via the Oituz pass (314 km) would have enabled Hungary to control approximately 120 km, i.e. 38% of the length. But Hungary, which did not have the resources to build this link using State funds, encouraged private initiative.

#### 1. *The failure of the private initiatives*

Several private initiatives had failed:

– The extension towards the Gyimes pass, forming the border with Romanian Moldavia, from the Héjasfalva railway (located on the main line) at Székelyudvárhely (35.627 km, 15 March 1888). Romania had for its part

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<sup>23</sup> 900 km via Brassó, 878 km via Orșova.

undertaken the construction of a railway towards this pass, starting from Adjud<sup>24</sup>. This project would have created the most direct link towards Moldavia, avoiding the detour via Brassó (a gain of 100 kilometres). However, the difficult profile of this line (slopes of 18‰) and the scale of work to be carried out exceeded local resources. The project therefore failed.

– The construction of a regional network around Brassó, with a triple objective: highlight the value of this comitat, which was at the time undergoing the most substantial industrial development in Transylvania; open up the isolated comitat of Háromszék, one of the hearts of the Szekely establishment<sup>25</sup>; begin the planned link with Moldavia via the Oituz pass. A local company (Brassó Háromszéki HEV/Braşov Trei Scaune) put the Brassó-Sepsi Szent György–Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc line into service on 30 November 1891 (76.248 km). However, a shortage of capital meant that this company could not continue the line to the Oituz pass, as had been laid down in the railway construction programme law of 1867 (article 2).

## *2. The takeover of the project by the State*

While the line was being built towards Oituz, the choice of this pass to create a second link with Moldavia was the subject of a reassessment influenced by three factors.

Firstly, awareness that the line serving the comitat of Háromszék was a dead end, while a line serving the comitat of Csik could be extended to Maros Vásárhely to form the Székely ring line (Székely Körvasút) which would run along the Romanian border.

Secondly, the growing fear of the ambitions of Russia, which had „left the Congress of Berlin humiliated and discontent”, had led Austro-Hungary to concentrate its attention on this country and to reorient its foreign policy and railway policy in this sense. The lack of a rail link with Romanian Moldavia, an invasion corridor for the Russian army heading towards the Balkans, thus appeared to be a strategic weakness.

Finally, Romania's preference for a junction via the Trotuş valley (Gyimes), because it enabled it to export salt from the Târgu Ocna deposits to Austro-Hungary. The Hungarian trade minister then unilaterally decided on 13 August 1890 on the construction of a link with Romania via the Gyimes pass, therefore abandoning the route via the Oituz pass.

In addition, joint pressure from Saxon interests and from Romania forced the Hungarian government to reconsider the junction via the pass of Vöröstorony/Turnu Roşu.

Romania made its agreement on a link via Gyimes conditional on the simultaneous creation of a junction via the Turnu Roşu pass or via the Vulcan pass, as provided for by the 1874 agreement. In a hurry to conclude matters, Hungary

<sup>24</sup> Adjud–Târgu Ocna, brought into service on 22 June 1884

<sup>25</sup> Háromszék = Trei Scaune = Three Chairs, the administrative district of the Székely.

then at the beginning of 1891 asked Romania to open negotiations for the creation of new border lines. An agreement, concluded on 14 March 1891, provided for the construction of two new links, the first via the Turnu Roşu pass, the second via the Gyimes pass. Forced to accept the link via Turnu Roşu, Hungary obliged Romania to build these two links within a period of six years. This agreement was ratified in 1891 by the Hungarian Parliament, which adopted a law on 5 May 1895 providing for the State's financing of a line connecting Sepsi Szent György and Maros Vásárhely (Székely ring) with a branch from Madéfalva (Siculeni) to the Romanian border (Gyimes). This ring line climbed the Olt valley to Györgyszentmiklós while serving Székely Land (Csik Szereda/Miercurea Ciuc), crossed the watershed separating the Olt from the Maros, and joined the railway line going up the Maros valley which had not managed to get further than Szász Régen/Reghin, attained in 1886. It had the strategic interest of creating a second link between the east and west of Transylvania, doubling the sole line that existed at that time, which passed to the south via Brassó. This ring line took up the project which had in earlier times been proposed by the town of Maros Vásárhely.

Since strategic reasons took precedence, the parliament decided to build the line towards the Romanian border in priority, therefore postponing for later the construction of the remainder of the Székely ring, the principle of which had been confirmed.

This Sepsi Szent György–Csik Szereda/Miercurea Ciuc line entered into service on 5 April 1897 (63.418 km). The second section, Madéfalva/Ciceu–Gyimes, Romanian border, was brought into service on 18 October 1897 (50.593 km),

However, it was necessary to wait until 6 April 1899, date of completion by the Romanian railways of the last section of the line from Adjud, starting point on the great Moldavian artery, for the second link between Transylvania and Romania to enter into service.

#### b) The link towards the Romanian Olténie

While the Romanian section of the Predeal pass was close to being completed, the Hungarians put the Orsova-Vârciorova section into service on 1 May 1879, enabling the first direct Vienna–Bucharest train to run on 9 May. The Brassó-Ploieşti line was put into service on 1 December 1879, establishing the first link between Transylvania and Romania.

##### 1. *The Hungarians hindering progress*

At the time of signature of the 1891 agreement, the Romanian railways (CFR) had already built 86.9 km of the line from Piatra Olt, located on the Bucharest – Orsova line, heading towards the Turnu Roşu pass, forming the border with Transylvania, out of a total of 148.8 km, i.e. 58%. They had 62 km left to build. On the Transylvanian side, the line which had reached Nagy Szeben in 1872 had to be extended by another 37 km.

Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) could have built this short section themselves. They didn't want to, firstly because Hungary wasn't in favour of this link, which would advantage the Saxons, preferring to concentrate its efforts on regions with Hungarian and Székely populations. Secondly, because numerous private initiatives had already proposed to create this junction.

Realising that they could not expect anything from the State, the leaders of the comitat of Szeben and Fogaras built the local network:

- from Alvincz to Nagy Szeben/Sibiu, opening in 1897.

- from Nagy Szeben to Fogaras in 1887. Its extension in 1908 to Brassó presented the triple advantage of creating a second east-west link doubling the Kolozsvár–Brassó main line, the construction of the Székely ring having been deferred, constituting a strategic link that could be useful for the transportation of troops in the event of conflict with Russia, and creating a patrol path for the surveillance of the border with Romanian Walachia.

## 2. *The junction via Vöröstorony/Turnu Roşu*

As CFR was not complying with the six-year time limit, laid down on 6 October 1897, the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lahovary, was forced to go to Vienna on 6 October 1895 to negotiate the extension of the 1891 agreement. He emphasised that the studies for the line, which had reached Râmnicu Vâlcea in 1887, were complete and that the construction of the line was moving forward. The construction project for the Hungarian section was then approved by the Hungarian Parliament on 13 March 1896, for a length of 15.451 km, and it was put into service on 17 November 1897. However, it was necessary to wait another four years until 1 August 1901 for this last Romanian section to be inaugurated, even though Romania was in such a hurry to open this international link.

### c) The links with Banat

To attain the steelmaking centre of Recicza in Banat, the coal mined in the Jiu valley (Lupeni) had to travel 414 kilometres by making a long detour via Piski/Simeria, Arad, Temesvár and Vejte. The idea therefore grew of creating a direct link via the Iron Gates pass, located between Hatszeg/Subcetate and Karánsebes, which, approximately 190 kilometres long, would make it possible to divide the distance by nearly half (a gain of 220 kilometres). However, this project suffered numerous tribulations.

First of all, the Hungarian government didn't want to involve public funds in its construction „perhaps because the route crossed regions of compact Romanian population”<sup>26</sup>.

The Karánsebes–Hatszeg line (76 km) was put into service in 1908, establishing a second link between Transylvania and Banat.

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<sup>26</sup> Radu Bellu, *op. cit.*, vol. III, *Regionala Timișoara*, București, Edit. Filaret, 1997, p. 222.

### C. Relayed by private companies (map No. 5)

From 1881 onwards, the construction of the Transylvanian network was essentially done by private companies, and between 1897 and 1919 the State railways, MÁV, only contributed to the building of the Székely ring and its branch towards the Gyimes pass.

Between 1881 and 1918, twenty private companies built 1526 kilometres<sup>27</sup>. Fifteen were operated by the MAV (1176.7 km, i.e. 79% of the length); five there operated independently (316.9 km, i.e. 21%); of these twenty companies, six operated narrow-gauge lines (464.4 km, i.e. 31% of the total).

### D. The Székely ring (Székely Körvasút)

The completion of the Székely ring line, provided for by article 23 of the programme law of 1867, was delayed by the priority given to the line leading to Romania via the Gyimes pass. To the south, 103.2 km was built. To the north, a first section was built from Maros Vásárhely to Szász Régen.

136 kilometres had therefore been built in 1897. That left 146 km still to be built. Twelve years were needed to complete the missing section. In 1904, by Law No. 14, Parliament decided to build the line from Szász Régen to Déda, for a length of 25.938 km; it was put into service on 16 November 1905. The second section, from Madéfalva/Ciceu to Györgyszentmiklós (46.867 km) was put into service on 5 December 1907. Another two years (28 October 1909) were necessary to complete the central section from György Szent Miklós to Déda (73.172 km).

This line, which is known as the Székely ring (Székely Körvasút), lengthened the trip by 77 km from Kolozsvár to Brassó, with the disadvantage of a more difficult profile than the line going via Tövis and Segesvár. However, it had the advantage of constituting a second link between the east and west of Transylvania, and shortening by 130 km the trip from Kolozsvár to the Romanian border, compared to the route via Brassó.

## III. THE INCORPORATION OF TRANSYLVANIA INTO ROMANIA

At the end of the war, the Transylvanian network had 2,596.5 km of railway lines: 1,065.4 km had been built by the State railways (MAV) or had been nationalised (41%), 1,493.6 km had been built by private companies (57.5%) and 37.5 km had been built by the Austro-Hungarian army (1.5%). This network included 464.5 km of narrow-gauge lines, all belonging to private companies and representing 17.9% of the total length of the network.

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<sup>27</sup> 1,496.6 km after the nationalisation in 1906 of the 32.4 km of the Maros Vásárhely–Szász Régen line.

This network was built without any overall plan, even after Hungary took control, according to the various pressures applied by the various nations and owners of forests or mines.

To limit the cost of the line heading to Brassó, the junction point between the lines coming from Arad and from Kolozsvár had been fixed at Tövis. This choice forced traffic from Kolozsvár to make a detour to the confluence of the Maros and the Küküllő/Târnava Mare, while a more direct route from Székely Kocsárd to Medgyes or to Segesvár would have made it possible to gain dozens of kilometres.

Local geography made this detour inevitable. Indeed, the north-east to south-west orientation of all rivers in the middle of the Transylvanian plateau would have made it necessary, for the purposes of tracing a direct diagonal from Kolozsvár to Brassó, to build a line crossing each one of these valleys, one after the other.

The State, which was supposed to build the so-called strategic lines, did not play its role. Thus, after having built the main line, it left private companies to take the initiative. It only took control again to build the link with Romania via Gyimes (1897) and only got involved, despite Russia having been perceived as a threat since 1890, at the end of the first decade of the 20th century to complete the Székely ring (1909), which was both a third east-west link and a shortcut to the Romanian border. If it had been built earlier, this ring line, together with the southern line, could have created a railway which, encircling the entire Transylvanian plateau, would have given the Transylvanian network the coherency which it lacked till 1909. Indeed, until its completion, north-eastern Transylvania was only served by lines leading to dead ends, requiring the east-west traffic to go via the Tövis node and the sole line leading to Brassó.

While the Transylvanian network was properly connected to Hungary (three links with Transtisza, two with Banat) and Romania (3 links), the State neglected to build a link towards Máramaros (Subcarpathian Ruthenia), which was connected with Galicia, and opposed the construction of a link towards Bucovina, which would have enabled the Hungarian army to resist better the advances of Russian troops in Galicia and Bucovina during the first world war.

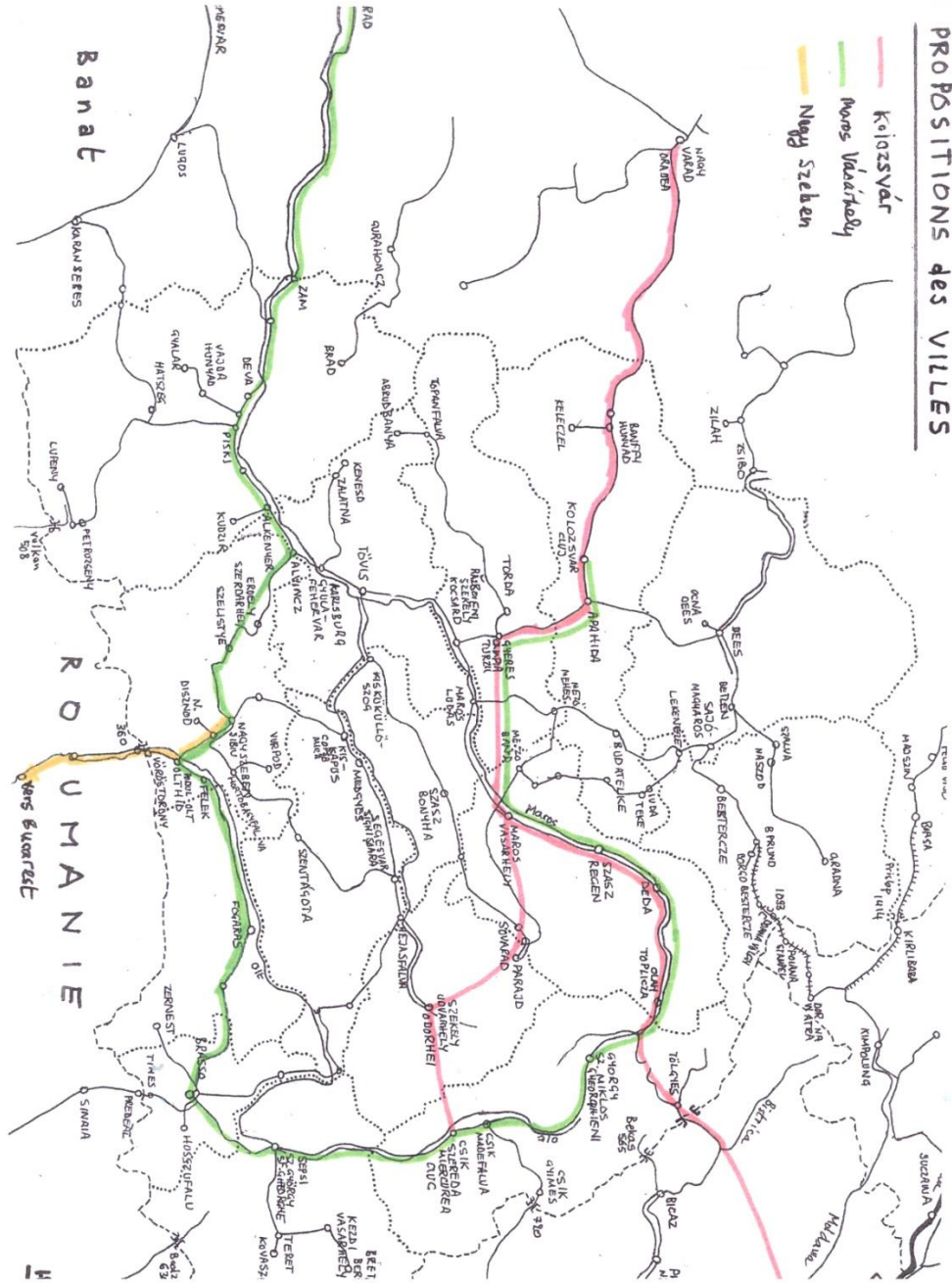
Romanian historians are not entirely wrong when they point out that areas populated by Romanians were neglected in favour of Hungarian and Székely populated areas. This is true „for the Apuseni Mountains [which] were completely neglected”<sup>28</sup> „being penetrated only by four industrial dead-end railways, offering the spectacle of a colonial country. In reality, discrimination against the Romanians was more temporal than spatial, as the Romanian regions were the last to be reached. The Saxons were no less penalised, if one recalls the difficulties they encountered to link Nagy Szeben to Brassó via the Olt valley, which was only done in 1908, and to obtain a link with Romania via the Turnu Roşu pass (1901).

The Transylvanian railway network was fully incorporated into the Romanian rail network at the end of the First World War.

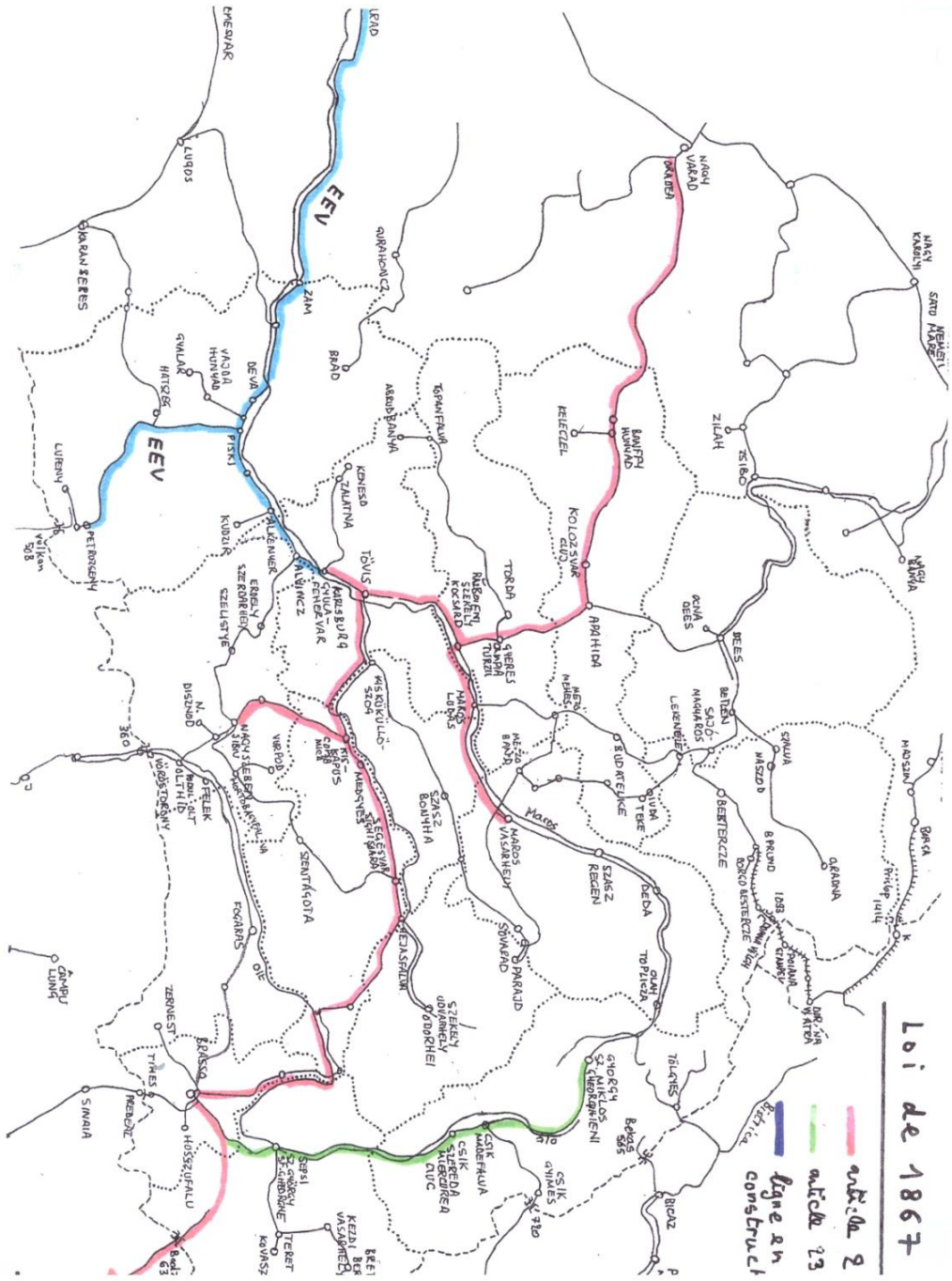
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<sup>28</sup> Université roumaine de Cluj, la Transylvanie. 1946, p. 248.

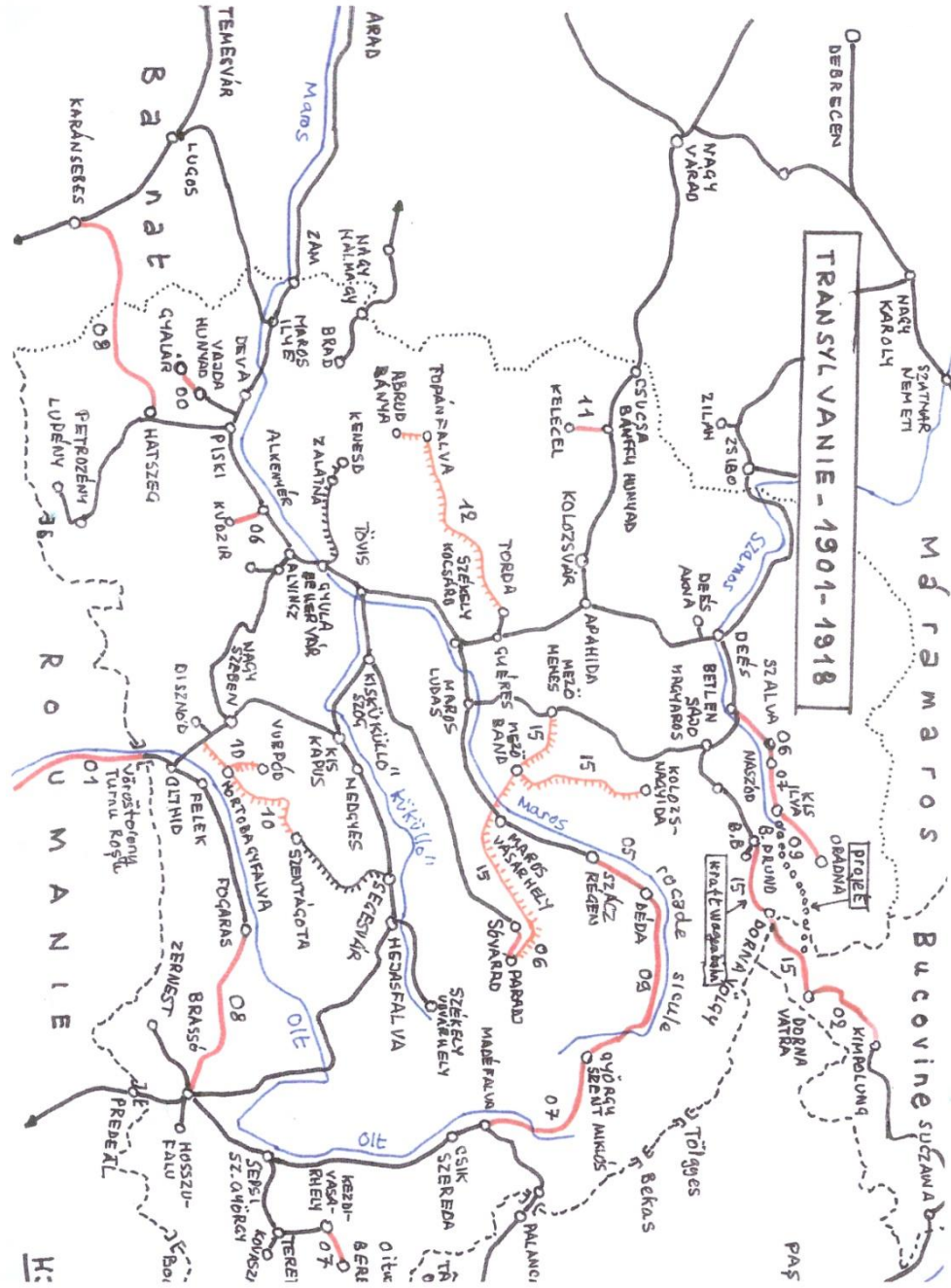




Map. 2.



Map. 3.



Map. 4.

