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DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

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STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN FIUME DURING THE PERIOD OF DUALIST MONARCHY

[Scope, Tools and Limitations of the Practice of Hungarian State
Power in the Light of Fiume]

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Salience of the topic and historiographical background

On 30 April 1910, at the theatre hall of the city, Riccardo Zanella (1875-1959) – the Member of Parliament representing Fiume – gave a presentation about the work he had done for the city during his term as representative, which began in 1905 (and also in 1906). In his speech, besides general issues of economy, commerce and society, Zanella, who was the leader of the *Autonóm Párt* [Party for the Autonomy], touched upon the relationship between the state and Fiume. In this context, Zanella mentioned his cooperation with Sándor Nákó, the governor, in the areas of the use of Italian language, universal franchise and his misgivings about the border police. He also explained why he did not join the National Party of Work after the Constitution Party had dissolved. Zanella said that since both Károly Khuen-Héderváry and István Tisza opposed the efforts of nationalities, their policies were contrary to the interests of the port city.

Zanella was not alone in criticizing the politics that the central government followed vis-à-vis Fiume. Although from a different point of view, the editorial of one of the most influential dailies, *Pesti Hírlap*, came to similar conclusions. The paper of the politically active editor, Imre Légrády's (1868-1932) remarked that Zanella's critical voice was a characteristic consequence of „the superficial and incapable politics of various governments that followed one another”. Using a somewhat cynical tone the article concluded that:” They let a hundred million sink in the pond of Quarnero (the Golfo del Carnero, a deep bay that lies between Fiume and Krk) – the vitality of our commerce depends on this single port. The political, economic and social conditions of this small rocky area is more important than the situation in ten counties taken together. Whenever we hear an honest voice from Fiume it becomes clear that governments, their representatives and authorities take the duty of governing press, trade and independence of Fiume – all forms of life in this precious little town as if it was a carnival procession and a festive party.”¹

How far can we consider these words justified? Did representatives of the central government take Fiume's position lightly as if they were on holiday?

The salience of this question becomes clear if we place it in the context of the nature of practicing state power in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Kingdom of Hungary within it. Despite the importance of this problem, there has not been any inquiry into the goals, practices and the tools that the Hungarian governments had and applied in Fiume. In fact,

¹ Egy pikáns beszámoló. *Pesti Hírlap*. 1910. május 5.

Hungarian historians have not produced a monographic account of Fiume. Although Ilona Fried's cultural history titled *Emlékek városa – Fiume* [City of memories – Fiume], which appeared in 2001 shaped the image of the city, researchers have specialized on subfields. The existing works are mostly cultural and economic histories and studies that discuss the status of Fiume as so-called *corpus separatum* in the context of Hungarian-Croatian relations. In these books and papers, questions, such as the relationship between Fiume and the Hungarian state and the working of the government in Fiume have been marginally touched upon at best. The work of arranging and cataloguing documents related to the period that archivists of the Somogy County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives began under Sándor Bősze is a welcome development.

This lacuna is even more surprising if we consider that personalities like Lajos Thallóczy, the member and president of the Hungarian History Society, Árpád Károlyi, the renowned archivist and historian in Vienna and Aladár Fest, professor of history at the high school of Fiume were among the first ones to raise the idea that such a history should be written. Their initiative fell on fertile ground only to a limited extent.

This is the case even if the Fiume section of Samu Borovszky's multi-volume work on the counties and cities of Hungary was completed by 1900. Although Borovszky's work includes much information and data that are indispensable for future research, it remains a local history and does not go beyond 1896. It is a descriptive work that "tells facts" while avoiding the "big questions". This was not a satisfactory approach even for contemporary historians who either wished to advance the cause of nation-building or wanted to understand relationships. Besides the dominant „positivist” approach to history, difficulties of accessing and understanding multi-lingual sources, personal inclinations of researchers and political causes all contributed to the lack of monographic studies of the problem.

The situation is somewhat better in the Italian and Yugoslavian/Croatian literature. In Italy, Yugoslavia and Croatia the question of where Fiume belonged has appeared more frequently due to historical and linguistic reasons. This was particularly so in the post-World War I and post-World War II years. Largely due to the recognition and commemoration of the Foibe massacres since 2004, the Fiume-question is part of the current discourse within Italian and Croatian historiography. This also means that many of the works are biased towards their national communities and approach the whole set of problems from the national point of view.

At the same time, there are a number of monographs and studies that match high academic standards. Among Italian historians working on the history of Fiume during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy we shall primarily mention Giovanni Stelli and Raoul Pupo, while

among Yugoslavian/Croatians the works of Ljubinka Toševa Karpowicz, Irvin Lukežić and Igor Žic stand out. Besides these results, it is important to consider William Klinger's book called *Fiume: Un'altra Italia* that appeared posthumously in 2018. This work is an important bridge because the author was a Rijeka-born person with dual citizenship, and also because in terms of research questions and the methods chosen to answer these, it applied an approach that is characteristic of and required by academic writing in English. We may track this trend in the works of Vanni d'Alessio and Ivan Jeličić, too.

Due to the centenary of World War I, and because Rijeka was one of the "cultural capitals of Europe" in 2020, the history of Fiume was subject to considerable international attention. This resulted in new monographs and studies. It is likely that Dominique Reill's work, *The Fiume Crisis: Surviving in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire* will have the major impact among these. Reill consciously diverted the focus from Gabriele D'Annunzio and the post-World War I diplomatic battles and, instead, studied the longevity of imperial structures, the city's ambivalent relationship to the Kingdom of Hungary, and the ability of Fiuman elites to adopt to new situations.

Objectives of the Dissertation

Since the overall title, *Social Conflicts and political development in Fiume during the period of Dualist Monarchy* is rather broad, I specified it by adding a subtitle. In this work, I did not tackle the political or local history of Fiume. I focussed on the efforts of the Hungarian state to modernize and centralize and take the port city as a case study. Thus, Fiume served as a pool of information and source material. My research questions centred around the problem of state power, promotion of interests and their limitations. I was interested in finding out what were the issues that central government faced and how did it attempt to overcome the problems, even if some of these were their own creation.

One of the fundamental obstacles was the Dualist system itself. In terms of administration, Fiume was subordinate to the Hungarian government but was also part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Thus, the Hungarian government could not ignore the imperial level interests in terms of economy and politics. Importantly, the Monarch ordered a so-called Provisory Decree of Fiume according to which rival Croatian and Hungarian political elites had to reach an agreement with each other and with the representatives of the inhabitants. Thus, unity of the empire became before all other concerns. This pressure led to reproachment

between Hungarian and Fiuman interests with the question of autonomy at the centre. This was so even if mainstream nation-building would have pushed for a contrary development.

For understanding this paradox, we need to clarify what it meant of the Hungarian Kingdom that it had gained an exit to the sea in the form of an "ex territori" land and that during the relatively calm period of the Dualist rule it gradually settled down there. For this reason, in my dissertation, besides providing a sketch of geographic characteristics and its position within the Habsburg Empire, I also presented the social space in which modernization and urbanization took place and in which local society transformed. That is why I followed through the changes of demographic and economic characteristics of the port city regardless of whether these concerned the ethnic, linguistic or occupational patterns.

I also laid emphasis on revealing the kinds of roles that the Hungarian state wished to attribute to Fiume and how it tried to win over the Fiuman elite or, at least, to push them towards cooperation. As part of this set of problems, I was interested in the ability of the Hungarian state to shape society, the tools they relied on as well as the efficiency of these. I extended my analysis to everyday practices of power such as education, associational life and symbolic politics. These were the scenes where the state tried to transform relations, norms and to educate the local to be loyal and useful citizens of the state as well as to represent its own superiority.

I studied if it was in the interest of the state to preserve the autonomy of the port city and if so, how state officials imagined it. To put it differently, why was Fiume able to retain its autonomous municipal government until 1924 (even if only to a limited extent) while other territories lost their privileges as a result of centralization. I investigated the legislative aspects through which state interests could make their way to Fiume. I also presented the institutions of the state, their development, and the way they related to one another as well as the attempts of different Hungarian governments to change the public administration in Fiume.

I also needed to consider the interests of Croatia and Fiume. Therefore, I presented the expectations, experiences and interdependence of the Croatian and Fiuman elite, with more emphasis on the latter. I analysed the possible motivations of the Fiuman elite for siding with the Hungarian government throughout the period. I also looked at moments when local and state level interests clashed in order to see both the types of resistance that Fiume offered in these instances and the possible resolutions of the issues.

Conflicts did not only unfold around specific principles or material interests. At times, they manifested as different interpretations of notions. I accounted for the differences that were behind the variance of terminology. This way, I could follow the discourses based on the differences in participants' interpretations instead of limiting my understanding to the specific

contexts. I applied this approach to see what the provisory order, autonomy and communal statue might have meant for the different participants, identified the most important sources of conflict and the groups that had active role in shaping the social and political discourse. Therefore, I highlighted personalities who had competencies to influence decision making at the national and local level: governors and deputy governors, the podestà (mayor), and members of the Hungarian parliament. Although I focused on their public activities and political roles, I also studied their social background and the milestones of their careers and their social network. Since this is not a dissertation in social history, I did not go into details of the economic position of the elite groups or the problem of constructing identities.

In summary, my objective was to study the following problems: 1. the methods that the Hungarian government used to practice its power, continue nation-building and modernization and its attempts to transform public administration and society in Fiume. 2. As a related aspect, the cooperation between state and local elites, the sites, forms and dynamics of their conflicts; 3. ideas and competences to mobilize of those that took part in the discourse about power; 4. the consequences of the changing relationship between state and local elites. My most important goal was to replace simplistic approaches, which focus on the centre-periphery dichotomy or ethnic contestation, with a more complex research methodology.

Methodology, methods and sources

As I explained above, the topic of my dissertation – the scope and limitation of practicing state power in Fiume – is inseparable from the problems of modernization, centralisation and nation building. These processes carry contradictions in themselves. Therefore, I applied a multi-dimensional and multi-layered method of analysis. The thesis of the so-called spatial turn constituted one of the pillars. According to this approach, the space is both an analytical category and factor of power. In order to have a more complete understanding and more complex picture, I applied my research questions to three different scales (imperial, national and local level) and at times went to the individual level. Some of the events had their impact on Fiume as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Questions of legal history, institutional history, political history, economic history and social history appear in the chapters. In some of them, more than one aspect surfaces in a chapter. I used Aladár Feist's career paths and ideas to strengthen the coherence across sections. By doing so, my intention was not to provide a partial biography of Feist. Rather, I wished to present the experiences and ideas that a person who had spent decades in Fiume and managed

to integrate to the local society relatively well. He was the head of the state high school and was an influential as local historian besides being generally active in politics and society. By applying this mixed method, I attempted to take a multifocal approach so that we do not only see a momentary situation but also appreciate the changes.

For the same reason, instead of organizing the chapters chronologically, I focused on the processes and the above mentioned larger historical questions. That is why I examined the typical problems of statehood: goal-oriented approach, modernizing and centralizing efforts related to nation building, the problem of autonomies and the local contradictions of the rise of nationalism. Beyond studying this from political and institutional history perspective, I also included points of view relevant from urban history and social history and applied these at various scales. Moreover, I applied some of the notions that the school of New Imperial History and Entangled History, Foucault's theory of state power and the theory of power that Max Weber developed. However, I used these theories and notions critically in the light of the source material. I did not subscribe to any of the schools of thought. Instead, I treated theoretical approaches and terminologies as mere possibilities. This is an important to keep in mind especially since the case studies I present are not representative of the whole society or even for social groups in the statistical sense of the word. Rather, they are valid tools for raising certain issues.

For selecting feasible case studies, it was indispensable to apply multi-disciplinary points of view. Thus, for each chapter, a case study of excerpt from a source serves as introduction. By analysing these, I describe the main questions and problems that the given chapter discusses.

It took seven years to collect the source material for the dissertation. I have looked at several fonds of the Central Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. Indeed, this is an ongoing research that extends to, for example, to the registered and filed papers of the Office of the Prime Minister (MNL OL K 26), papers of the Council of Ministers (MNL OL K 27), semi-official papers of the Prime Minister (MNL OL K 467), papers of the Ministry for Commerce (MNL OL K 255) and papers of the Ministry for Finance (MNL OL K 255), Ministry for Religious Affairs and Education (MNL OL K 501, MNL OL K 503), a General papers of the Ministry for the Interior (MNL OL K 150), the presidential (MNL OL K 149) and reserved (MNL OL K 148) papers of the same ministry, in the papers of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MNL OL K 168) and in the papers of the bank called Pesti Magyar Kereskedelmi Bank (MNL OL Z 41).

I also surveyed the archival material related to the families of individuals that played important role in the public life of Fiume. In order to reconstruct career paths, I included almanacs and minutes of the parliament, the Archives of Military History and the manuscript section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At the Széchényi National Library, I studied the yearbooks of schools of Fiume and issues of Hungarian and Italian dailies that are not available in Rijeka.

During my graduate studies, I began to explore the State Archives of Rijeka and the Hungarian material of the Library of the University of Rijeka, systematically. At the archives in Rijeka, I searched the general and presidential section of the fond of the Governorate (DAR JU 5) as well as the papers of the Maritime Authority. (DAR JU 9). The papers of the magistrate are rich in documents about the elections and submissions in various subjects. (DAR JU 2). The fond of local families was important, too (DAR RO). At the libraries of Rijeka, I read memoirs and contemporary Italian, Croatian and Hungarian press, studies and monographs.

In 2016, during my years as a PhD student, I spent one semester with the Erasmus+ programme in Padova where I had the opportunity to search for relevant sources in the university library as well as in the Museo storico della Terza Armata. In Padova, I mainly read and learnt about Italian irredentism, Gabriele d'Annunzio's "adventure in Fiume", about conditions in the Eastern Adriatic (especially in Istria and in Dalmatia) and about World War I. I used this knowledge in the last main chapter. I also visited the historical archives of the Società di Studi Fiumani in Rome where I found useful documents in fonds related to certain persons.

It is important three points about the sources. First, the majority of them approach questions from the point of view of the state (top-down). On the other hand, there are both quantitative and qualitative data in it. Besides official letters and documents I also made use of directories, school reports, budget report as well as memoirs, diaries and the contemporary press. Due to the diverse nature of these sources, I relied on certain elements of discourse analysis, narratology and prosopography besides more traditional historical analysis of written texts. Third, the sources are unevenly distributed across years and themes. At times, one encounters abrupt discontinuity in them.

I found especially useful the works of some Hungarian historians and László Péter, László Katus, György Kövér, Zsombor Bódy, András Cieger, Gábor Gyáni, and Beáta Kulcsár, while among works written in languages other than Hungarian, I extensively used the works of Rogers Brubaker, Dominique Reill, Irvin Lukežić, William Klinger, Ljubinka Karpowicz and Ivan Jeličić.

Results of the Dissertation

I attempted to shed light on the way the Hungarian state practiced its power in Fiume. This problem is salient for four reasons: 1. Due to its geographical location it featured distinctive geographic, ethnographic, linguistic and social patterns that differed significantly from conditions in mainland Hungary. 2. As a so-called *corpus separatum*, it had a particular legal situation and exceptionally wide autonomy; 3. there was not final decision about where Fiume belonged to and its autonomous status was not regulated by law in the period discussed here. 4. Due to its importance in economy and international relations, it had a special role in Hungarian political thought.

I was interested in the challenges that these particular conditions meant for the central government and the measures that the local presence of state power prompted. Moreover, I wanted to see how local elites assessed and responded to the spectacular advance of central power. I had two main hypotheses. First, the conflicts between the city and the state had begun before the 1890s. Second, conflicts and alliances did not only emerge along ethnic or ethno-linguistic cleavages. Taking this point further, I posited that the localism of the elite of Fiume did not clash with their loyalty to the state until the autumn of 1918. I assumed that it was not a coincidence that the autonomy of Fiume was not codified: this was a conscious decision taken in order to be able to resolve more salient issues and avoid the escalation of Croatian-Hungarian relations. In this context lack of regulation was a *modus vivendi* and even opportunity.

I approached other basic elements of the political discourse such as Holy Crown, *corpus separatum*, *veto consultativo*, “special conditions in Fiume” or “*patria*” in a way that considered differing contexts and groups. It became clear that these notions meant different things for the Italian, Croatian and Hungarian speaking groups even if used in a straightforward manner. This is a novel approach that overwrites some of the older wisdom about Fiume. In the next few paragraphs, I summarize my findings.

Even as I tried to avoid legal determinism, I came the conclusion that conflicts of interests between state and local elite were encoded in the Hungarian-Austrian Compromise of 1867. By the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Hungarian state inevitably had to consider some of the imperial and common interests. In the context of such relations, the interests of settlements that are at a low level of the hierarchy of public administration become subordinate to nation and imperial goals even if the locality enjoys an exceptionally broad autonomy.

These bring attention to two circumstances. First, Fiume's position cannot be studied in itself but only as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Due its geographical position, its role as a port city and the role it played in the flow of information it could not free itself from the impact of Hungarian and imperial politics towards the Balkans region. Second, the Hungarian liberal elite pushed for legal homogeneity as well as for the modernisation of public administration during which they sought to mainstream a nationalist agenda. Thus, homogenizing through integration was part of the programme of "reincorporating" Fiume into the Hungarian state carried. Realization of this programme meant that although the central government considered "special conditions" in Fiume according to its own logic, this rationality did not fall in line with the needs of local interest groups.

It follows from the above that conflicts did not have their root in Dezső Bánffy's term as prime minister. Rather, these issues had emerged two decades earlier. Notwithstanding, the Hungarian government was willing to make short-term concessions to local elites in view of its longer-term goals. It did everything possible to promote and win over the Italian speaking elite, which was a minority, in order to counter Croatian political efforts. This was one of the considerations for which it agreed to grant autonomy, approved of the local network of educational institutions, the use of Italian and gave up its plan to introduce the so-called *virilist* system of municipal representation.

At the same time, I found that Fiume held onto its position within the Kingdom of Hungary out of economic concerns and because it hoped to retain a relatively large autonomy if it chose to stay. Thus, the community was not interested in cutting ties until late October 1918. The port required a strong but distant hinterland. The Kingdom of Hungary was the best option in this regard between 1776/1779 and 1918. This is the case even if it is common knowledge that some extremist separatist Italian groups appeared in the 1890s and there was an irredentist association formed in 1905 called La Giovine Fiume. I posit that there are many conflicts that had roots outside of the sphere of ethnic contestation. Linguistic and ethnic boundaries were more flexible and permeable than earlier literature had assumed it. Interethnic alliances, networks of friendships and marriages were not exceptional. Moreover, although there were ethnic conflicts, these were often the outcome of the efforts of Hungarian, Italian and Croatian press to reinterpret conflicting interests of clashes as national conflicts.

Global processes played an important role in the escalation of these conflicts during the time of the Bánffy Government. These global dimensions included the decline of sailing ships and lengthy economic recession. In this period, the large-scale investments and the incorporation of companies gave preference to the interests of groups that had state backing

over inhabitants of the coastal area. To be sure, the confidence and Chauvin attitude of the prime minister played a role, too. However, it is important that regarding the restructuring of public administration in Fiume, he tried to put concepts in practice that had emerged in the 1870s.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that the primary goal of the central government was not to expand the competence of the governor. Rather, it wished to disseminate state institutions in Fiume and strengthen the Hungarian character of the port city. One of the motives behinds these efforts was to make it easier to govern the city by adjusting it to the national institutions. Second, the central government wished to take nation building to the coastal area, too. Third, it wished to showcase its vitality and power towards foreign countries. In times of crisis, however, instead of this set of efforts, it was easier to invest the governor with exceptional powers since this required little time and allowed fast and simple responses than what decisions taken by political bodies, or the execution of ministerial decrees would have provided.

One of the major conclusions of my research is that decrees and new laws did not overwrite customary law in a short period of time, if they did at all. Paradigms and structures survived for long and it took many years and dramatic events to replace them. The most spectacular example of this is the gradual demise of the authority of the Hungarian government and governors. This process of devaluation was one of the reasons for the crisis of legitimacy of Hungarian state in autumn 1918 in Fiume. Although centralization and modernization led to Fiume losing some of its competences, the statute of 1872 remained unchanged. Thus, local elites managed to retain elements of imperial structures and the main elements of their autonomy until 1924, the date when Italy annexed the city.

I also pointed out that informal channels and processes of control had their role in the expansion of state power. Thus, apart from institutions such as the Coastal Governorate of Fiume and Hungary-Croatia and the Maritime Authority, the interference of the government with local and national elections, symbolic politics, educational policy and media strategy as well its attitude towards local associations were of importance. One shall not miss the participating individual. If an individual was representing the state, was a moving site of power. Thus, his willingness to cooperate, demeanour and social network could become decisive. This is particularly true of governors, their deputies, as well as of members of the parliament but we cannot ignore the mayors (*podestà*) defending local interests and the support of resistance of their formal and informal elites electing them.

I added appendices including tables, figures and archontology that help to convey the results of my study of the development of offices and prosopography investigations. I also

added a series of cartoons that are to represent the relationship between Fiume and the Hungarian state. Admittedly, the latter is rather dialectic and essentializing.

Although this research has already produced results, I see my work as preliminary investigation for a more systematic study of larger historical problems that also mattered on the international scene.

Relevant publications

1. „*A magyar kormány Fiume-politikája a XIX-XX. század fordulóján*”. *Natio semper reformanda est. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Gergely András tiszteletére*. L’Harmattan, Budapest, 2016. 330–342.
2. *Bombatámadások a fiumei kormányzás ellen (1913–1914)*. Századok. 2018/2. szám. 401–417.
3. *Alcuni dettagli circa i cambiamenti di regime a Fiume tra 1918 ed il 1920 nel diario di Lajos Egan*. CEDOS N. 9. Kellermann Editore, Vittorio Veneto, 2018. 49–58.
4. *Áldozat vagy sem? A fiumei autonómia kérdése F. G. Corossacz polgármestersége alatt (1914–1915)*. Urbs 2017/12. 257–280.
5. *A kiegyezés hatása Fiume társadalmi és politikai fejlődésére*. Levéltári Közlemények. XXC. évf. 2017. 261–275.
6. *Egan Lajos naplója – Impériumváltások Fiumében a kormányzóhelyettes szemével (1918–1920)*. Szerkesztette, sajtó alá rendezte, a bevezető tanulmányokat és a jegyzeteket írta Ordasi Ágnes. Budapest, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2019.
7. „*Hazaszeretetből*” jeles? – *A fiumei tanárok érvényesülési stratégiái és lehetőségei az impériumváltások éveiben*. Pro Minoritate 2019. Nyár. 51–92.
8. *Térfoglalás. A fiumei (?) Delta megszerzésének stratégiái*. Urbs 14. 2020. 47–68.
9. “*Scale o Serpenti?*”. *Le condizioni dei rappresentanti del potere dello stato ungherese dopo la Grande Guerra*. Qualestoria. 2020. Nr. 2. Edizioni Università di Trieste. 95–112.
10. *Egy fiumei városatya útja a magyar nemességbe?*. Lymbus. 2020. 699–726.
11. *Akik elmentek – és akik maradtak – A Fiumei kormányzás beosztottjai*. Levéltári Közlemények. 143–147.
12. *Raditi u službi države?*: In: *Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa povodom 100 godina od osnutka Slobodne Države Rijeka*. Udruga Slobodna Država Rijeka i Muzej grada Rijeke (2021). 163–169.