

The Historian R.W. Seton-Watson and His 1923 Visit to Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania*

Radu RACOVIȚAN**

Daniel CREȚU***

Abstract

The British historian and publicist, Robert William Seton-Watson (1879-1951), rendered important services to the cause of the nationalities of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ever since the first two decades of the 20th century, including during the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920).

During the 1920s, Seton visited the three states repeatedly: in April-June 1923 (including Austria); the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (and Austria) in May-June 1925, Romania and Czechoslovakia in June 1927 and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Romania and Czechoslovakia in June-August 1929. His visits were determined by the desire to learn at the very scene of events about the political happenings taking place in the three states in the first years after the war.

Seton continued to follow the evolution of events in the three successor states during the next years. The events in Skupština in June 1928, when a Serbian parliamentarian shot Radić dead and wounded two other Croatian parliamentarians, horrified Seton-Watson. As far as Romania is concerned, the winning of the elections, in 1928, by the National-Peasant Party brought great hopes for the future of this country, but they were dashed by the failure of the national-peasant governments, carried out against the background of the world economic crisis. Only Czechoslovakia maintained a democratic regime, being, however, also undermined by internal contradictions between Czechs and Slovaks and by the centrifugal tendencies of the Sudeten Germans.

Keywords: *R.W. Seton-Watson, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Romanians*

The British historian and publicist, Robert William Seton-Watson (1879-1951), rendered important services to the cause of the nationalities of the former Austro-

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** “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Department of History, Heritage and Protestant Theology, B-dul Victoriei nr. 5-7, Sibiu, Roumania (radu.racovitan@ulbsibiu.ro).

*** “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Department of History, Heritage and Protestant Theology, B-dul Victoriei nr. 5-7, Sibiu, Roumania (victor.cretu@ulbsibiu.ro).

Hungarian Monarchy ever since the first two decades of the 20th century, including during the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920). For the generation of the Great Unification, his name and pseudonym, Scotus Viator (The Scottish Traveller), were identified with one of the most esteemed foreign supporters of the cause of achieving the national unity of the Romanian people. As such, after the First World War, he enjoyed countless proofs of appreciation from political leaders of the Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats and Romanians.

After the first conflagration, R.W. Seton-Watson devoted himself mainly to academic activities. In 1922, the Masaryk University Chair of Central European History was established at the University of London, financed by a grant from the Czechoslovak government; Seton was its first full professor. The terms of the contract included a clause specifying the professor's ability to travel to Central Europe. The chair was attached to the School of Slavonic Studies, separated in 1920 from King's College. Together with Bernard Pares, the school's first director and teacher of Russian, Seton founded the "Slavonic Review"; the first issue appearing in 1922. He also made a significant contribution to the establishment of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London and was an active member of the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (founded 1920). He was elected a member of the British Academy in 1929. Apart from his academic activity, he continued to publish in the press and periodicals.

Seton maintained connection with his former colleagues at the Foreign Office, as well as friendships with various national leaders of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, mainly with: Thomas G. Masaryk¹, Eduard Beneš² and Milan Hodža³ - Czechoslovakia, Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida Voevod - Romania, Svetozar

¹ Thomas G. Masaryk (1850-1937) – n. Göding (Hodonin, Moravia). Statesman. Professor of philosophy in Leipzig (1878), Vienna (1879), Prague (1882). Member of the Austrian Parliament. Founder of the Czech People's Party. President of the Czechoslovak National Council, 1915-1918. The first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1935. Cornelia Bodea, Hugh Seton-Watson, *R.W. Seton-Watson și românii (1906-1920)* [*R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*], vol. I (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988), 505.

² Eduard Beneš (1884-1948) – n. Kozlany (Bohemia). Professor at the Commercial Academy and the Czech University in Prague. Representative of the independence movement carried out in exile, in Paris, 1915-1918. Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1935. President of the Republic 1935-1938. Leader, in exile, of the movement to regain the independence of Czechoslovakia, 1940-1945. President, for the second time, of the Republic, 1945-1948. Bodea, Seton-Watson, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, vol. I, 501.

³ Milan Hodža (1878-1944). Doctor in Law. Slovak political leader and publicist. Deputy in the Hungarian Parliament, 1905-1910. Secretary of the Club of Deputies of Non-Hungarian Nationalities. Leader of the Slovak National Party. He was part of the group around the chancellery of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. He supported close collaboration with the Czechs and the creation of the Czechoslovak state. After 1918, the head of the Agrarian Party; several times minister, prime minister 1935-1938. After 1938, he went into exile in the USA. Bodea, Seton-Watson, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, vol. I, 473.

Pribićević⁴ and Stepan Radić⁵ - Yugoslavia.

During the 1920s, Seton visited the three states repeatedly⁶: in April-June 1923 (including Austria); the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (and Austria) in May-June 1925, Romania and Czechoslovakia in June 1927 and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Romania and Czechoslovakia in June-August 1929. His first visit, the one in 1923, was determined by the desire to learn at the very scene of events about the political happenings taking place in the three states in the first years after the war. In mid-April, Seton arrived in Zagreb.

Mention should be made of the fact that, in the first interwar decade, the British historian showed a special interest in the internal and external problems faced by the new Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. He was delighted with the creation of a Yugoslav state and would constantly support the cause of Yugoslav unity, both against the separatists of the new state and against the propaganda of the hostile neighbouring states, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. But Seton was disappointed by the internal evolution of Yugoslavia. The main problem was the apparently irreconcilable dispute between Serbs and Croats, manifested as a conflict between centralism and federalism, a conflict that made even the adoption of a constitution an extremely complicated matter.

The Constituent Assembly convened in December 1920 was divided into two large groups: one that supported the unitary state, represented mainly by the Radical Party, led by Nikola Pašić⁷, and the Democratic Party, led by Svetozar Pribićević, and another that advocated a federal formula, promoted in particular by the Peasant

⁴ Svetozar Pribićević (1875-1936). Born in Croatia, he was the leader of the Serbs within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After 1918, leader of the Democratic Party, he became an ardent supporter of the doctrine of extreme centralization, so that, from 1927, he became a follower of federalism. Opponent of the dictatorship established by King Alexander I of Yugoslavia, he will die in exile.

⁵ Stepan Radić (1871-1928). Together with his brother, Ante, he organized the Croatian Peasant Party (1904). After 1918, he campaigned for the preservation of Croatian national identity. Coming into conflict with the Belgrade regime, it was closed in 1919-1920. After the voting of the Constitution on June 28, 1921, which gave the kingdom a unitary, national and centralized state character, Radić and the party he led repeatedly refused to participate in the work of the Skupština (the unicameral legislative body of Yugoslavia). In July 1923–August 1924, he sought support outside Yugoslavia for a Croatian republic, without success. Returning to the country, he was imprisoned again until July 1925. Accepting the centralizing constitution of 1921, he was a member of the government from 1925, but in 1927 he returned to the opposition. In this year, he formed an alliance with the party of Svetozar Pribićević, which claimed the federalist reorganization of Yugoslavia. On June 20, 1928, while participating in the debates of the Skupshtina, he was fatally shot by a Serbian parliamentarian. Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2010.

⁶ In the interwar years, the English historian did not undertake a single trip to Hungary, disapproving of its revisionist attitude.

⁷ Nikola Pašić (1845-1926). Serbian politician and diplomat, he was repeatedly prime minister of Serbia (1891-1892, 1904-1905, 1906-1908, 1909-1911, 1912-1918) and of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918, 1921-1924, 1924-1926). He was one of the founders, in 1918, of the kingdom that would later be called (since 1929) Yugoslavia.

Party of Croatia, led by Stepan Radić⁸. In the end, Pašić, Pribičević and other supporters of centralization managed to impose a centralizing constitution, also due to the fact that the works of the Constituent Assembly in 1920 were boycotted by the Croatian Peasant Party. Through this attitude, Radić and the party he led left freedom of action to the followers of the centralist thesis. The Vidovdan Constitution, voted on June 28, 1921, stipulated that the triune kingdom would have a unicameral legislative body, the Skupshtina, elected by universal, direct and equal male suffrage. The official language was Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian, a politically convenient notion, but a linguistic nonsense. The state was unitary but divided into 33 centralized departments; dualism and federalism were rejected⁹.

After the adoption of the Constitution, the government led by Nikola Pašić (January 1, 1921-July 2, 1924) inaugurated a centralist leadership, the Serbs imposing themselves as a dominant nation, which created serious problems in all domains, but especially in the political one. Radić and his party continued to evince strong opposition, enjoying broad support from the Croatian population. Political instability led to the establishment of new legislative elections on March 18, 1923. The election results further complicated the issue of state consolidation. Adherents of the federative formula formed a Bloc, under the presidency of Radić, which included Croatian, Dalmatian, Slovenian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian deputies. In the Parliament they held 153 seats, being a political force that the government coalition had to take into account¹⁰. Pašić appeared conciliatory, but Radić refused him¹¹.

Seton was not "pro-Croatian"; he constantly defended the Croats, for the simple fact that they were the most affected by the policies promoted by the people who controlled the government in Belgrade. He always argued that the majority of the Serbian population was also a victim of this policy. His point of view was not Croatian, but Yugoslav. He did not believe, however, in the existence of a single "Yugoslav" nation; rather, he believed that the new Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian kingdom was a three-nation state, which had to live together as equal nations, just as the English and Scots did, whom he hoped the Irish would join. The example of the failure of the coexistence of the English and the Irish, which became evident in 1921, was always present in his consciousness as a warning of the danger the aforementioned kingdom had to circumvent¹².

Seton's arrival in Zagreb in April 1923 coincided with negotiations between Pašić and the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić, in view of

⁸ *Structuri politice în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est [Political Structures in Central and South-Eastern Europe]* (coord. Ioan Scurtu), vol. I (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2003), 28.

⁹ R.J. Crampton, *Europa Răsăriteană în secolul al XX-lea ...și după, [Eastern Europe in the 20th Century ... and beyond]* (București: Curtea Veche, 2002), 160-161.

¹⁰ *Political Structures in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, vol. I, 65.

¹¹ Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the 20th century ... and beyond*, 160.

¹² xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. I, 36.

reaching a political compromise. On April 15, 1923, Seton wrote to his wife, May, stating that "the political situation was extremely unfavourable." During the negotiations, Radić had declared to Pašić's emissaries that the government's reform intentions remained only at the stage of declarations and granted a deadline of 14 days for the initiation of reforms. He also demanded that the government develop some serious proposals on the basis of which negotiations should be carried out. At the same time, however, at the impressive demonstration organized by Radić on the morning of April 15, attended by 60,000 peasants, the Croatian leader was uncivil towards the king and the prime minister and tactless towards the Serbs. Therefore, Seton concluded, it was hard to believe that a compromise would be reached. On the other hand, the opposition was completely divided, and the question was whether Radić would reach an agreement with other political groups in Serbia¹³.

From Zagreb, Seton moved on to Belgrade. On April 19, he had a meeting with King Alexander. The cabinet had resigned two days prior, and the king was engaged in political negotiations with various leaders, in view of forming the government. Seton appreciated the fact that the king seemed completely determined not to allow a solution of force. The historian criticized in moderate terms the political regime in Yugoslavia, also condemning Radić for his actions. After the meeting, Seton's conclusion was that the king was anxious to reach an understanding, and that he was interested in all the details of the political crisis¹⁴.

From Belgrade, Seton returned to Zagreb where he met Ante Trumbić¹⁵ and Zanella, president of the city of Fiume. Trumbić who, like Josip Smolaka¹⁶, had lost his seat in Parliament, had begun to consider that Radić was right, and that political salvation could only come from a peasant movement¹⁷.

On April 25, Seton wrote to his wife, informing her that, although the political situation remained completely unstable, it had become less dangerous because the authorities had realized that the use of force could lead to undesirable results. It appeared that concessions would be made to Radić, with whom Seton had four meetings in Zagreb¹⁸.

¹³ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. II, 102.

¹⁴ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. II, 103-105.

¹⁵ Ante Trumbić (1864-1938). Croat from Dalmatia. Active fighter for Croatian and Yugoslav causes. Mayor of Split (Spalato), 1905. Member of the Dalmatian Diet, 1895-1914. Member of the Austrian Parliament, 1897. Founder and President of the Yugoslav Committee in London, 1915-1918. Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia, 1918-1920. Strong supporter of the Croatian national opposition in Belgrade, in the last 15 years of his life. Bodea, *Seton-Watson, R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, vol. I, 502.

¹⁶ Josip Smolaka, 1869-1956. Croat from Dalmatia, one of the leaders of the Croatian-Serbian coalition of 1903 and a leader in the Yugoslav movement in the Habsburg Empire. Member of the Austrian Parliament, 1910-1918. After 1918, diplomat. During the foreign occupation of the Second World War, he became involved in the national liberation movement led by Tito. Bodea, *Seton-Watson, R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, vol. I, 469.

¹⁷ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. II, 107.

¹⁸ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. II, 107.

In the aftermath the visit, Seton reached the conclusion that the one responsible for the deterioration of the political situation in Yugoslavia was Nikola Pašić, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, and the clique he surrounded himself with. Pašić, the English historian believed, introduced a regime of corruption, favouritism, falsification of elections, brutal administration, and economic exploitation, while running the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, alongside his favourites, as their own business. Seton, however, blamed Svetozar Pribičević and Stepan Radić for the deterioration of Serbo-Croatian relations and placed his hopes in King Alexander, whom he expected to play a constructive role and get involved in resolving internal conflicts, although he was aware of his inclinations towards an authoritarian regime¹⁹.

On May 2, after spending several days in Vienna, Seton arrived in Bratislava, Slovakia. The British historian carefully followed the evolution of relations between Czechs and Slovaks after the establishment of the Czechoslovak state. The new Czechoslovak state had to solve numerous problems generated especially by the economic differences between the Czech Republic (more developed, with a strong industry) and Slovakia (predominantly agrarian), as well as by the existence of national minorities²⁰.

There were reasons for frustration among the Slovaks determined by political, economic, religious causes. Czechs dominated public service positions in Slovakia, as a result of the lack of qualified individuals among the Slovak population. Due to the considerable German and Hungarian minorities, the government in Prague did not introduce the promised political autonomy. Slovak nationalists split into two groups. The National Party, led by Vavro Šrobar²¹ and Hodža, rejected the idea of Slovakia's autonomy, speaking only for wider administrative decentralization. The uncompromising autonomists formed, under the leadership of Father Andrej Hlinka²², the Slovak People's Party. Another source of discontent was of a religious nature. The Catholic priests, very influential among the Slovak population, felt offended by the Czech anticlericalism. The Slovak economy was exposed to competition from the Czech side²³.

¹⁹ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. I, 36.

²⁰ *Political Structures in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, vol. I, 58.

²¹ Vavro Šrobar, 1867-1950. Slovak politician, member of the Hlas group. Minister for Slovakia with plenipotentiary powers 1918-1919. He held various ministerial posts during the first Czechoslovak Republic. In the Second World War he was in the resistance movement. President of the Slovak People's Council in 1944. Minister of Finance in 1945. *Apud* Bodea, *Seton-Watson, R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, vol. I, 459.

²² Andrej Hlinka (1864-1938) - Slovak Catholic priest, leader of the Slovak People's Party. A leader in the national movement against the Hungarian dualist regime, he was the leader of the Slovak autonomist opposition, within the Czechoslovak government in the 20s - 30s.

²³ For further details, see Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the wars* (Colorado, USA: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, Westview Press, Inc., 1982), 175-177; Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the 20th Century ... and beyond*, 86, 87.

In the autumn of 1922, at the congress of Žilina, the representatives of the Slovak People's Party formulated a program that claimed autonomy and a memorandum was drawn up which stated that the leaders in Prague were denying the Slovak nation the right to freedom and national existence²⁴.

On December 14, 1922, the "Manchester Guardian" newspaper published a letter belonging to Vajtěch Tuka, editor of the organ of the Slovak People's Party ("Slovák"). In the letter, Tuka stated that the new Czechoslovak government, led by Dr. A. Švehla²⁵, comprised exclusively Czech members and was supported exclusively by Czech political parties. But even more serious was the fact that he accused the new government of persecutions against national minorities. Finally, referring to the Žilina memorandum, Tuka declared that the Slovak deputies had issued a resolution calling on the Western democracies to intervene in Prague on their behalf, so that the desperate Slovak people would not resort to extreme measures²⁶.

Seton-Watson refuted these claims in an article published on 30 December in the "Nation & the Athenaeum" newspaper, thus engaging in a dispute with Hlinka²⁷. The latter denied the fact that Tuka had addressed any letter to the "Manchester Guardian" newspaper, supported the authenticity of the provisions of the Žilina memorandum, claimed that Seton had been misinformed about the conditions in

²⁴ Jan Rychlík, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. I, p. 32; the text of the memorandum is included in vol. II, pp. 319 -332.

²⁵ Antonín Švehla (1873 – 1933) was the leader of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party and the founder of the pětko group. This group was established in September 1920 as a result of the social and political crisis that Czechoslovakia went through in the years 1918-1921. It was an extra-parliamentary body, formed by the leaders of the five main parties (Švehla from the Agrarians, Alois Rašín from the National Democrats, Rudolf Bechyně from the Social Democrats, Jiří Stříbrný from the National Socialists and Jan Šrámek, the leader of the Czech People's Party). Since none of the numerous political parties was able, following the elections held in April 1920, to form the majority government alone, the parties had to unite in a coalition. Pětko had the mission of ensuring the functioning of the coalition of political parties through regular meetings between the five leaders, who offered advice and guidance to the prime minister. In October 1922, after a technocratic government led by Jan Černý (September 1920 – September 1921) and the transitional cabinet led by Edvard Beneš (September 1921 – October 1922), the political scene stabilized and the pětko appointed Švehla as prime minister. xxx, *Istoria țărilor Coroanei cehe, [History of the countries of the Czech Crown]* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007), 425-432; Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the 20th Century ... and beyond*, 82-85.

²⁶ Jan Rychlík, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. II, 334.

²⁷ He pointed out that the new government included among its members three well-known Slovaks: Dr. Milan Hodža (former member of the Hungarian parliament and nephew of Milan Miloslav Hodža), Dr. Ivan Markovic (leader of the Slovak Socialists) and Dr. Kállay (liked by Seton as one of the most outstanding post-war Slovak administrative officials) and that he had the support of all Slovak parties except the Clerical People's Party led by Hlinka. Jan Rychlík, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. II, 335, 336.

Slovakia by the Prague centralist press and invited him to Slovakia to convince himself of the legitimacy of the Slovak People's Party's grievances²⁸. Ultimately, all parties involved in this dispute came to the conclusion that the letter believed to be Tuka's was a forgery, the result of Hungarian revisionist activity in England²⁹.

Initially, Seton did not want to get involved in the disputes between Czechs and Slovaks and firmly refused to mediate between his friends. He could not, however, ignore calls from various quarters to carry out a personal investigation of the conditions in Slovakia.

In Bratislava, Seton met the Slovak journalist and sociologist Anton Štefánek, and the Minister for Slovakia, Jozef Kállay. On May 8, the latter took him by car to Trnava, where Seton met at the town hall with local leaders from various parties, who had been summoned by the mayor of the town. After a few preliminary words, the mayor invited them to present their grievances. "The result was funny" - confesses Seton, as the representatives of the clericals, socialists, nationalists, and Zionists openly criticized each other. Over the next two weeks, Seton visited a number of Slovak towns, including Turčiansky Svätý Martin, Ružomberok (here he stayed three days in Hlinka's house), Žilina, Banská Bystrica and Košice, arriving in the last town on 24 May. Then, the English historian went to Zvolen, to Svätý Kríž and to Lučenec, a locality on the border with Hungary. Here he had a discussion with Dr. Ludovít Bazovský, "the leader of a Slovak autonomist Fronde" and spent three hours in the company of "the most intransigent Hungarians" in the locality³⁰.

During his visit, Seton was able to note the rapid progress made in the field of education, the high level of administration, the truly representative character of the parliamentary system and the broad rights enjoyed by minorities in Czechoslovakia. He became convinced that, despite existing discontents among the Slovak population, Czechs and Slovaks would overcome difficult times and learn to live together.

From Slovakia, Seton undertook, between June 1 and 9, a short trip to Cluj, to revisit his Romanian friends.

In the 1920s, along with on-scene findings, made during his visits, the correspondence with V.V. Tilea was Seton-Watson's main direct source of information concerning the internal political situation in Romania, completed by discussions with Romanians who visited London or were part of the staff of the Romanian Legation (for example, Nicolae Titulescu, Ciotori, Boerescu), or by reading European newspapers. The fact that most of the information was provided by the Transylvanian political leaders somewhat affected his objectivity in

²⁸ Jan Rychlik, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. II, 345-353.

²⁹ Jan Rychlik, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. II, 364.

³⁰ Jan Rychlik, Thomas D. Marzik, Miroslav Bielik, *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906-1951*, vol. I, 32, 33.

assessing the internal Romanian political situation, but he constantly tried to be impartial³¹.

Regarding Romania, during the first interwar years, Seton believed that there were, partially, similarities between the situation in Romania and the one in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The political life in interwar Romania was dominated by two parties - the liberals and the national-peasants' party. The National Liberal Party inherited the confidence of the dynasty and the powerful political apparatus of the kingdom; as a result, liberals dominated political life in the first post-war decade³².

They attempted to establish direct administrative control over the new provinces and, although in theory they were committed to supporting the parliamentary system, in practice they preferred to conduct elections traditionally and to rule in an authoritarian manner, through a financial and industrial oligarchy of reduced proportions³³.

Immediately after the union, the Romanian National Party of Transylvania and the Peasant Party from the Old Kingdom enjoyed wide support. The leaders of these parties were committed to supporting the idea of full participation of all citizens in political life and consultation through fair elections³⁴. However, during the first decade following the unification, they were permanently excluded from the government by the alliance formed between the Brătianu family, the king's courtiers and financial circles linked by liberal interests. In order to face the liberal predominance, the two parties will merge in 1926, forming the National-Peasant Party, the second largest ruling party (after the National Liberal Party).

The first parliamentary elections after the establishment of Greater Romania were a failure for the National Liberal Party, but, after the short rule of the Parliamentary Bloc³⁵ (1 December 1919-13 March 1920) and that of the People's Party, led by General Alexandru Averescu (March 13, 1920-December 13, 1921), who came to power with the support of the liberals, Ion I.C. Brătianu decided that it was a good time for his return.

Following the manoeuvres of the liberals, Averescu resigned in December

³¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, "A private Anglo-Romanian political correspondence (R.W. Seton-Watson and V.V. Tilea 1919-1929)," *Annuary of the "A.D. Xenopol" Institute for History and Archeology*, XXII/1 (1985), 119, 120.

³² Peter F. Sugar (coord.), *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea*, [Eastern European nationalism in the 20th century] (București: Curtea Veche, 2002), 236.

³³ Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României*, [The History of Romania] (București: Corint, 2002), 345, 346.

³⁴ Sugar, *Eastern European nationalism in the 20th Century*, 236.

³⁵ The Parliamentary Bloc was constituted by the Romanian National Party, the Peasant Party from the Old Kingdom, the Peasant Party from Bessarabia, the Nationalist-Democratic Party, the Democratic Party of the Union from Bucovina and the independent group of Dr. N. Lupu. On this basis, a coalition government was formed, led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod.

1921³⁶ and, in the aftermath the short-lived government led by Take Ionescu (December 17, 1921 – January 17, 1922), the government chaired by Ion I. C. Brătianu (January 19, 1922 – March 27, 1926) organized, in March 1922, elections for the National Constituent Assembly.

Making use of traditional means, which went as far as using law enforcement to obstruct opposition candidates' contact with voters or disperse their electoral gatherings, the National Liberal Party obtained 222 of the 369 mandates. Obtaining such a majority, which ensured the possibility of adopting a new fundamental law, the opposition parties vehemently contested the election results and asked the king to annul them. In the face of the sovereign's refusal, the Peasant Party and the National Party declared that they do not recognize the legitimacy of the Parliament "elected by means of theft and fraud"³⁷.

Although the result of the 1922 elections was validated, -the opposition demanding the dissolution of the Parliament and the organization of "free" elections-, in order to prove that it enjoyed the trust of the sovereign, the government of Ion I.C. Brătianu organized the coronation festivities of King Ferdinand in Alba Iulia, held on October 15, 1922. In spite of being special guests of the sovereign, Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the Romanian National Party, and Ion Mihalache, the leader of the Peasant Party, refused to participate in the celebrations, considering that they were reduced "to the role of simple party demonstrations"³⁸.

R. W. Seton-Watson analysed all these events in an article published on October 17, 1922, in the "Times" newspaper, entitled *Romania's Politics*. In his article, the British historian assessed the methods of electoral corruption and terror used by the liberal party in the March elections as similar to those used by the Hungarian government against Transylvanian Romanians and other non-Hungarian nationalities before the First World War. At the same time, however, Seton also criticized the absence of Transylvanian leaders and peasants from the coronation festivities, since, on the one hand, such an attitude could easily alienate the Dynasty from the most progressive elements of Romanian political life, and, on the other hand, it could contribute to weakening the prestige of the Crown and the political leaders among the peasantry of the newly annexed territories. Finally, the historian expressed his hope that the dynasty would intervene to restore internal harmony, to harmonize the different psychologies of old and new Romania, this being the true meaning of the coronation in Transylvania³⁹.

³⁶ Ion Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României moderne 1922-1926* [From Modern Romania's History 1922-1926] (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981), 17-25.

³⁷ Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX (1918-1948)* [History of the Romanians during the 20th Century (1918-1948)] (București: Paideia, 1999), 145-147; Mihail Rusenescu, Ioan Saizu, *Viața politică în România 1922-1928* [Political Life in Romania 1922-1928] (București: Editura Politică, 1979), 140-154.

³⁸ *Patria*, September 12, 1922; Dumitru Suci, *Monarhia și făurirea României Mari 1866-1918* [The Monarchy and the Making of Greater Romania 1866-1918] (București: Albatros, 1997), 269-299.

³⁹ *Patria*, October 27, 1922.

After the moment of coronation, the liberals decided to move on to the realization of the central point in their program: the adoption of a constitution. After tense parliamentary debates, during which the nationalists and peasants, constituted in the United Opposition, sought to prevent the proceedings of the Parliament, which led to the exclusion of several deputies and senators from the opposition, for different terms, and to the deployment of the army against the public meetings of the Opposition, the new Constitution was adopted in March 1923. The leaders of the National Party and the Peasant Party declared that the fundamental law adopted by the liberals was "null and void"⁴⁰.

The controversies that broke out between the liberals and the opposition on the subject of the Constitution led Seton-Watson to publish an article in the "Times" newspaper on December 6, 1922, entitled *Romania at the Crossroads. A perilous situation*. In his article, the British historian expressed his concern about the Brătianu cabinet's attempts to force the passage through a Parliament, the legality of which was solemnly denied by the entire opposition, of an extremely litigious Constitution. This character stemmed from the fact that the union of Romanians was based on a contract concluded between three factors: the Romanian government, also chaired by Brătianu, the Governing Council of Transylvania and the Crown, as well as the clear commitment that the future Constitution of Romania was to be based on the principles proclaimed by the National Assembly, which took place on December 1, 1918, in Alba Iulia⁴¹.

Gradually, Seton came to see Ion I.C. Brătianu, the leader of the National Liberal Party, in the same light as Pašić⁴². Convinced that the establishment of a true democracy could have been achieved only under the conditions of the coming to power of the National Party and the peasants, probably also influenced by the fact that most of his Romanian friends came from among the Transylvanian political leaders, Seton-Watson will criticize vehemently the liberal governments of the third decade. Worried about the disputes between the nationalist-peasants and the liberals, he expected, as in the case of Yugoslavia, the Romanian monarch, Ferdinand I (1914-1927), to play a major role in establishing an internal harmony.

The English historian arrived in Cluj in the afternoon of June 1. In the same year, during the meeting of May 26, the Romanian Academy elected him an

⁴⁰ Marin Nedelea, *Aspecte ale vieții politice din România în anii 1922-1926 [Aspects of Romanian Political Life during 1922-1926]* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987), 40-51; *Istoria Românilor*, vol VIII, *România Întregită (1918-1940) [History of the Romanians, vol. VIII, Romania Reunited (1918-1940)]*, coord. Ioan Scurtu (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 253; Scurtu, Buzatu, *History of the Romanians during the 20th Century (1918-1948)*, 151, 152.

⁴¹ *Patria*, December 19, 1922; *Adevărul*, December 13, 1922; Serviciul Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale (în continuare SANIC), fond *Direcția generală a Poliției* [Central National Historical Archives Service (henceforward SANIC), Fund *General Directorate of the Police*], file 55/1920, f. 43.

⁴² Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe. R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary*, p. 421.

honorary member⁴³. In Cluj, Seton was hosted during his stay by Al. Vaida Voevod⁴⁴.

The next day, Seton was given a solemn reception in the University Hall by the faculty and the leadership of the university⁴⁵. On the same day, in honour of the English guest, a festival was organized at the National Theatre, by the Anglo-Romanian Society, and the Press Union offered a banquet.

During his stay in Cluj, Seton gave an interview to the newspaper "Keleti Ujság". When asked about the purpose of his trip to Romania, he stated that he intended to take an interest in matters concerning minorities, in order to convince himself on the very scene of events, as a member of the English League for the Protection of Minorities, whether the numerous memoranda submitted by the minorities in the successor states were justified or not, especially the Hungarian one⁴⁶.

Referring to the rights that minorities should enjoy, Seton believed that obtaining them was not conditioned by a revision of the peace treaties. The initiation by minorities of a propaganda in this sense would constitute a mistake. Even if the League of Nations did not meet the ideal requirements, Seton believed that it could also develop in the direction of constituting a real support for minorities⁴⁷.

Seton admitted that a series of complaints of the Hungarian minority were justified and that its national and cultural being was not sufficiently secured. In his opinion, a cause of this situation stemmed from the fact that the relations between Transylvanian Romanians and those from the Old Kingdom, between Slovaks and Czechs, etc., were not definitively clarified either. Another cause was the "specific state of mind" of Hungary at that time. Seton admitted that the successor states were far from having a democratic regime, but he noted an essential difference between their internal situation and that of Hungary. Thus, in contrast to Hungary, in Romania there really were the preconditions for the establishment of a truly democratic regime⁴⁸.

In conclusion, Seton expressed his conviction that the only solution for solving the issue of minorities was the effective functioning of the constitutional, parliamentary, and judicial institutions. But the main obstacle in clarifying the situation in Eastern Europe and improving the lot of national minorities in this area

⁴³ *Patria*, May 31, 1923; *Universul*, June 5, 1923; Academia Română, *Anale*. T. XLIII. Ședințele din 1922-1923. [*Annals*. t. XLIII. Meetings from 1922-1923], (București, 1923), 103, 104; Bodea, Seton-Watson, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians (1906-1920)*, 950, 951.

⁴⁴ *Patria*, June 2, 1923; *Universul*, June 3, 1923; SANIC, fund *Microfilms England*, roll 227, c.no. 191-196.

⁴⁵ SANIC, fund *Microfilms England*, roll 227, c.no. 203-205; *Patria*, June 3 and 5, 1923.

⁴⁶ SANIC, fund *Microfilms England*, roll 227, c.no. 208-213; *Patria*, June 3, 1923; *Universul*, June 5, 1923.

⁴⁷ *Patria*, June 3, 1923.

⁴⁸ *Patria*, June 3, 1923.

was Horthy's reactionary regime, which represented an obstacle to a peaceful cooperation between the Little Entente and Hungary. Everyone's goal should be the blurring of national rivalries and the spiritualization of borders⁴⁹.

On June 6, he was offered the honorary citizenship of the Transylvanian city⁵⁰. During the same day, Seton had a long meeting with Iuliu Maniu⁵¹.

Before leaving Romania, Seton gave a short interview to the "Patria" newspaper. He declared that part of the British public opinion showed sympathy for Romania and there was a belief that it could become a "paradise in miniature". Unfortunately, he said, the contrast between the prospects and the deplorable realities of the political situation at that time was obvious. The English historian recognized the extent of the concessions made by the Romanian political class in the Old Kingdom, but, unfortunately, those political groups that could have benefited from the effects of the reforms [Seton refers to nationalists and the peasants' party - n.n.] did not know how to consolidate their power and they proved a lack of political experience, which allowed the liberals to become the arbiters of the political scene. Seton saw only two alternatives in terms of the evolution of Romanian political life: the establishment of a true parliamentary regime, based on free elections and a correct interpretation of the Chamber's regulations, or a return to blatant absolutism. The last alternative was excluded, however, due to the general European conditions, the situation in Russia and, last but not least, due to the monarch's attachment to the Constitution⁵².

On June 9, Seton-Watson returned to Bratislava; he will spend a few more days in Slovakia and return to London, via Prague, on June 21. Before leaving Czechoslovakia, Seton published an article in "Prager Presse", referring to the comparative evolution of the successor states after the war. Of these - he stated - Czechoslovakia enjoys the greatest prestige abroad, this is due to the constructive political line adopted by President Masaryk and Beneš, the sound financial policy of Finance Minister Alois Rašín, the high level of the administration. Of the former belligerent states, Czechoslovakia was perhaps the only one, along with Belgium, that was walking by its own forces on the path of impetuous economic and social development. Seton, however, criticized the excessive centralism promoted by the Czechoslovak government. Still, he claimed that this was less harmful compared to the situation in Romania and Yugoslavia - where "honourable" political figures were isolated or in opposition and were unable to curb the corruption and anarchy that characterized political life. The situation was worse in Hungary, where the same reactionary elements who were responsible for the outbreak of the First War and who had learned nothing from the past were in power. Next, referring to the

⁴⁹ *Patria*, June 3, 1923.

⁵⁰ *Patria*, June 7, 1923; *Neamul Românesc*, June 7, 1923. See also SANIC, Fund *Microfilms England*, roll 227, c.no. 206-208.

⁵¹ *Patria*, June 8, 1923.

⁵² SANIC, Fund *Microfilms England*, roll 227, c.no. 214-217; *Patria*, June 10 and 12, 1923.

situation in Czechoslovakia, Seton states that he did not find the existence of a "Czechization" of Slovakia. It was true that the administrative posts in Slovakia were flooded with Czech officials, but - Seton believed - without these Czech officials, anarchy would have been established, and Slovakia would have returned to Hungarian hands. He saw the solution in favouring Slovaks in occupying lower positions in the administration, as well as appointing a corresponding number of Slovaks in the Czech lands in order to learn the exercise of administrative power as quickly as possible. Seton was in favour of granting a limited autonomy in Slovakia, or rather achieving a decentralization, i.e. broadening the powers of the Minister of Slovakia to be entrusted with education, agrarian reform, the relationship between the state, church and justice, disagreeing with maintaining a unitary legislation for the entire republic. The establishment of a Czecho-Slovak dualism would represent a danger for the existence of the republic in particular, and of Europe in general, and was, moreover, unenforceable, since the same concessions could not be granted to the Sudeten region. Finally, Seton appealed to the Slovaks in America to help calm down their brothers⁵³.

These ideas were detailed by the historian in a brochure entitled *The New Slovakia*, which appeared in early 1924 in Prague.

Seton continued to follow the evolution of events in the three successor states during the following years. The events in Skupština in June 1928, when a Serbian parliamentarian shot Radić dead and wounded two other Croatian parliamentarians, horrified Seton-Watson. King Alexander intervened to mediate reconciliation between Serbs and Croats; since the negotiations failed, he established a personal dictatorship in January 1929. This decision was considered a mistake by the English historian. He was, however, convinced that the king's motives were admirable and decided not to express his opinion for the time being and to follow the evolution of the political situation further. Gradually, he became convinced that the king had taken the wrong path, and the dictatorship made things worse, increasing the dissatisfaction of the Croats, but also of the Serbs. After the assassination of King Alexander (1934), the establishment of the regency (King Peter was a minor), in which the main personality was the king's cousin, Prince Paul, known as an Anglophile and a follower of reconciliation between Serbs and Croats, made Seton hopeful⁵⁴.

As far as Romania is concerned, the winning of the elections, in 1928, by the National-Peasant Party brought great hopes for the future of this country, but they were dashed by the failure of the national-peasant governments, carried out against the background of the world economic crisis.

⁵³ *Patria*, August 10, 1923.

⁵⁴ xxx, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. I, 37-39; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe. R. W. Seton-Watson and the last years of Austria-Hungary*, 421, 424-425.

Seton disapproved of the return to the throne of Carol, in 1930, considered by the English historian as an adventurer, but he was satisfied that in Romania the establishment of an authoritarian regime was avoided [until 1938 - n.n.], considering that, from 1929, it was surrounded by states with authoritarian regimes of different types. Only Czechoslovakia maintained a democratic regime, being, however, also undermined by internal contradictions between Czechs and Slovaks and by the centrifugal tendencies of the Sudeten Germans.