

**National University of Public Service
Doctoral School of Public Administration**



Thesis Booklet of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Szabadi Ernő - Loránd
**The public administration of Szeklerland and the Szekler question
in Romania between the World Wars**

Comparison of Szeklerland and Dobruja

Supervisor: Dr. habil. Bodó Barna

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Table of Contents

1. Topic of the thesis	2
2. Definition of the scientific problem.....	3
3. Research hypotheses	4
4. Research questions and research objectives	5
5. Research methodology	6
6. The structure of the thesis	8
7. Limitations of the research.....	10
8. Conclusions	11
9. Scientific findings and the possibilities of their use.....	12
10. Recommendations	14
11. Publication subscription	16
12. Professional-scientific biography	17

1) Topic of the thesis

Expounding the topicality of a thesis with historical implications may prove to be somewhat contradictory, but knowing that the basic principles of Romania's current minority policy are nearly the same as the strategies of almost a century ago, it sheds light on the issue in a different perspective. Although this topic has already been researched by several people, it should be emphasized that the evolution of Szeklerland's public administration was primarily approached from a historical, political, and legal point of view, and public administration as a science in itself was relegated to the background.

After the First World War, one of the prominent goals of Romania became the assimilation of different minority cultures and ethnicities other than Romanian. In this regard, it tried to exert pressure on the communities in question in various areas and through different procedures (e.g. those who declared themselves to be of Romanian nationality were given priority in the redistribution of existing land holdings; the legal framework for the use of the language by minorities was limited; several administrative-territorial reorganizations were enforced). Although almost a hundred years have passed since the events just mentioned, practical restrictions on the use of the language of minorities still apply, various drafts are drawn up regarding the reorganization of public administration system, and financial benefits are given to those who move to a settlement far from their birthplace.

The debate surrounding the regionalization of the country lives on in the public consciousness as one of the main issues of modern-day Romania. The dissertation also contributes to this current issue, as the thesis examines the Romanian province system in effect between 1938 and 1940 as a gap-filling chapter, which was basically little dealt with by specialists. Getting to know the researched period in detail can be important in order for the relevant past events to draw attention to possible narratives and ideas about regionalization.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the communities registered as minorities in Romania are still trying to make their voices heard, as far as the various restrictive regulations and restrictions are concerned. The dissertation provides space for including the press material of the researched period, through which the point of view of the victims of the regulations related to the public administration reorganization of the time is conveyed. Concerning this, the opinions regarding the events between the two world wars and the current events can be

compared. At the same time, it is important to note that the goal of Romania was the complete assimilation, while the basic goal of democracy is integration.

2) Definition of the scientific problem

Regarding the public administration of Szeklerland, within the framework of the researched period, studies have already been published, so the presentation of this issue and time frame is not primarily the aim of the thesis. The mentioned topic forms the framework of the thesis, although within it there are many aspects that need to be supplemented, thereby formulating new scientific problems. Although, out of the five seats of Szeklerland, a separate study was conducted for four of the seats on the public administration system between the two world wars, we do not yet have a synthesized study in this regard, and the case of Aranyos seat awaits explicit detailing. This problem area includes the existence of the processing of legislation and other official documents, to which the thesis intends to add the aspects of contemporary press publications, shedding light on the issue in question, thus also giving voice to the public opinion related to public administration events. From a scientific point of view, the modelling of the public administration system of the researched period is considered progress. Although this aspect does not provide new information about the given area, it organizes the already existing ones to a large extent.

A question to be raised is that some details of the amendments affecting the public administration between 1918-1925 were not processed, during which it would be decided whether the central Romanian power only aimed at assimilating the Hungarian or the Transylvanian Romanian communities also. We have a good reason to assume that this strategy applies to the entire Transylvanian community, because during the preliminary research of the study we found several examples of the renaming of Romanian place names, which aspects are presented in more detail in the thesis.

Finally, with regard to the administrative unification between the two world wars, no comprehensive study was made regarding the comparison between different regions that were assigned to Romania. The aim of the thesis was to compare the situation of Szeklerland and Dobrudja in terms of how the same administrative regulations and amendments manifested themselves in the two distant regions.

3) Research hypotheses

The dissertation basically draws attention to the fact that the disappearance of the Szekler identity began well before the First World War and reached its peak after that. Since the various minority policy tendencies and strategies divided the community, we cannot speak of a cultural unity, not of a community with an independent public administration. At the same time, the thesis covers issues related to public administration systems and their changes within the framework of the given period.

I am convinced that the local name changes carried out by the central Romanian power were focused not only on erasing the identity of the Hungarian, but also of the Transylvanian Romanian community, and the manner in which it was carried out regarding the unification of public administration and its examination forms the backbone of the thesis. Therefore the dissertation basically intends to reflect on these complex problems by applying the following five hypotheses.

1. Hypothesis: *The Hungarian and central Romanian press publications in Szeklerland, which appeared between the two world wars, discuss the events, amendments, and regulations related to public administrative-territorial reorganizations from an opposite point of view, mostly supporting the point of view of one side.*

2. Hypothesis: *The Romanian public administration between the two world wars, regardless of whether it was primarily organized on the basis of centralist or decentralizing approaches, was above all subordinated to the idea of national unity and served the unifying ideas of the country. Political aspects completely overshadowed economic ones.*

3. Hypothesis: *The conscious changes in the name of the settlements carried out in the course of administrative-territorial reorganizations were an integral part of the erasure of the regional identity not only of the Transylvanian Hungarian and Szekler communities, but also of the Transylvanian Romanian community.*

4. Hypothesis: *The process of administrative-territorial unification following the First World War, between Romania and the newly acquired territories, was enforced in a drastic step, as opposed to the step-by-step method.*

5. Hypothesis: *After the First World War, Romania wanted to implement the same assimilation strategies for the territories acquired at that time, as in the case of Dobruja between 1878 and 1914.*

As author, I will mainly reflect on these challenges and propose solutions.

4) Research questions and research objectives

The goals of the research can basically be focused around two aspects: around the main moments and events of the history of Szeklerland's public administration and its development, and around the media analysis of the time, proceeding along the lines of the previous aspect. Both aspects are based on the changes in the administrative system following the unification with Romania, and intend to examine the way these reforms came into effect and their various effects.

After mapping the public administration system, the aim of the thesis is to write a comprehensive work regarding the public administrative-territorial changes of Szeklerland between the World Wars, not least the modeling of the events through similarities and differences in this process. Regarding the mentioned period, a detailed examination of the administrative system of Aranyos seat, which has been in the background until now, is what the thesis tries to complement, and the addition of the expressed administrative processes of the other seats is also among the goals. Last but not least, a detailed analysis of the provincial system operating between 1938 and 1940 cannot be skipped.

The inclusion of press materials in the thesis is important in order to have a different point of view, and also because the previously prepared works primarily examined the period in question following the legislation. This point of view approaches the researched question from a new perspective, including the diverse world of personal opinions and experiences, primarily through reflections on public administration events. I feel that the accelerated implementation of the process of administrative-territorial unification can be better illustrated by life stories than in the light of various laws, which, let's be honest, approach the issue quite objectively. This will give us more and closer examples of practical and theoretical differences regarding the administrative-territorial unification (e.g. minority rights

theoretically existed, but in practice this was exhausted in belonging to a freely chosen religious denomination).

So, the doctoral dissertation aimed to create a comprehensive administrative description of Szeklerland at the end of the thesis, supplementing the already existing materials with the perspective of the press, as well as the processing of different areas or eras.

5) Research methodology

Mainly the application of the historical research method is the focus of the study, which primarily includes research work in archives and libraries and the use of online databases regarding the given question. Regarding the search for archival and library sources, the thesis applies as a basic principle the procedure of starting from the closest available, most obvious, primary sources, and moving from there to secondary or geographically more distant sources.

General, specialized literature orientation is essential and definitely a task that precedes archival work, as the embedding of the given topic in the larger context of the historical process. Without professional literature orientation, many valuable aspects of archival sources may remain meaningless and unnoticed. The consultation with the researchers of the examined topic is also included in the framework of general orientation. The research work is introduced by the study of the specialized literature, and then, through its orientation base, the collection of material begins regarding the exploration of the more unknown areas (journals, daily newspapers, statistics, archival sources and other sources).

When it comes to library data collection, the first step is to take notes on the works read. During the preparation of the dissertation, the formula proposed by Umberto Eco is applied. Of course, this does not mean complete content note-taking, but only that the more important data relating to the research are written down. In order to prevent extra work, the problem area to which the data will be related should be indicated on the note cards. The goal is to create labels with a clear message, easy to review, uniform size, which can be easily grouped later. For the sake of simplification and transparency of further work, only one side of the paper should be used for taking notes. The subject of the researched question should be written on the top of the slip, indicating the exact source and time. In order to avoid accidental

data omissions in the process of processing notes, a sheet does not appear when touching several objects. In addition to this, it is important to note that data that apparently only remotely affect the topic of the research will be recorded. In the event that information concerning a central question can be found on several surfaces, its details are listed several times in order to avoid possible inaccuracy.

In the case of processing a material that has already been researched and published, the first step is to include the exact bibliography. During citation, the source to be cited can be named exactly even if it is no longer at hand. For the sake of operative work, if the bibliographic entry already exists, it is sufficient to show the source abbreviated on the label. The thought process of the information to be processed should be written out in outline, while the more important parts of the text should be written out verbatim. If possible, the collected material should not be sorted all at once, but during the collection period step by step. If we have a comment on specific questions, this must also be indicated on the slip.

The most important tools for navigating archives are archival aids (inventories, lists, repertoires, etc.). The purpose of these aids is to establish specific data about the archival material for its preservation and use. Reviewing the aids in question form a backbone of the research. The most important aid for archives is the basic inventory. The basic inventory includes the name of the fund's educational body, the year, subject, scope, arrangement description, archival system and research possibilities of the document series. It is essential to use it during research. The use of archival aids is made more effective by knowing the administrative organization and authority of the examined institution or office, its place and role in the network and mechanism of the public administration, but if necessary, the scientific staff of the archive also provide information.

The very first step in archival research is the request for a research permit, followed by a detailed analysis of archival literature. After the inspection of the basic inventories, repertoires and catalogues has been completed, and in the course of this we have found the important compositions and funds relevant to the research, we write down the designation of the documents and request them based on this. The request is made by filling out a request form. It is necessary to indicate the title of the material, its serial number, the batch number of the bundle and the exact identification of the document. The released material must be handled with care and caution, as in most cases it is a question of documents that are several

decades old (it is not a minor factor that it is important to preserve the order of the documents).

One of the most proven methods of archival research is tagging, the practical application of which has already been explained in the section on library data collection. One of the great advantages of the label lies in the rich and varied possibility of grouping. In the processing phase, its advantages are greater than any other method, because not only the facts, but also the problems are indicated on the slip, and the thoughts, conclusions, and ideas that arose while taking notes can also be traced.

It is an important task to organize and re-arrange the slips. This operation already begins during material collection. Sorting "on the fly" has two great advantages: it gives you the opportunity to fill in the gaps while the source is still in your hands, and it performs the first phase of scrapping, which relieves the final sorting of a lot of unnecessary burden. It is worth making a rough draft of some details already during the preliminary arrangement. The final arrangement takes place in possession of the entire material, which points out possible deficiencies and weak points of the material collection, as well as the tasks of the additional material collection. The fully organized material not only groups the notes according to subject areas, but also places them in order within them. After collecting the scientific data, the periodization, terminology, topics, genre form, chapter titles and the structure of the thesis itself as a form of use will provide more opportunities in the modelling process.

Secondly, the comparative method is also included within the framework of the research, which focuses mainly on examining the antecedents of the disputed era, and aims to compare the procedures used in the case of other regions within Romania. After studying the literature, significant differences emerged regarding the unification processes.

6) The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of eleven distinct parts and main chapters. In addition to the acknowledgments, the *Introduction* tries to outline in detail, but at the same time, the reasons for choosing the topic and the timeliness of the scientific research, the presentation of the research problem and the purpose of the research, the definition of the research methods, the research hypotheses, and the limitations of the research.

The *second chapter* of the thesis, together with its four sub-chapters, presents the development of Szeklerland's administrative-territorial area from its initial development to the administrative unification within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1876, or more precisely until the entry into force of its supplementary and amending decisions in 1886. The chapter covers the development of rudimentary public administration and border protection institutions during the Árpád era, the development of the Seat - sub seat system, the Szekler uprising of 1562, and the peculiarities of the outlying regions within the Habsburg Empire and then the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and finally the end of Szekler's autonomy.

The *third chapter* of the dissertation, together with its numerous sub-chapters, tries to list the unifying ideas and theories concerning Transylvania and within it Szeklerland and Romania (regionalist theories, the issue of centralization-decentralization, and ideas related to the "Great Unification"). Furthermore, it thoroughly details the events of the change of empire and the transitional period between 1920 and 1925, as well as the first, comprehensive administrative law in Romania that came into force in 1925 and its effect. Finally, the last sub-chapter lists the various practices related to place name arrangement in Szeklerland.

The *fourth chapter* of the study continues on the timeline of the history of Szeklerland's public administration, processing the period between 1926 and 1940. Within this, the events related to public administration within Romania are separated and presented in three subsections, for the period between 1926 and 1929, the period of the periodical committees between 1929 and 1938, and the years of the royal dictatorship between 1938 and 1940. The chapter tries to organize the revealed information on a top-down scale, which in this case starts from the decisions of the Romanian central administration and their effects, up to the practical manifestation of the provisions at the local level.

The *fifth chapter* of the thesis focuses on the history of the public administration of Dobruja, presenting its development from its beginnings until 1940. The chapter is divided into several subchapters, covering three major eras, the first of which lasts until the Ottoman occupation in 1420, the second presents the administrative-territorial reform and evolution of the region as part of the Ottoman Empire, while the third examines the region as part of Russia and Romania already mentioned issue.

The *sixth chapter* includes a comparison of Szeklerland and Dobrudja, and also aims to summarize the most important knowledge and aspects undertaken in the thesis. Although the centre point of the thesis is the period between the two world wars, the comparison covers

the listing and comparison of similarities and differences prior to this period in order to examine the potential retaining and protective factors affecting minority communities across a wider spectrum.

The *seventh chapter* of the study examines the possibility of accepting or rejecting the hypotheses formulated in advance, details the scientific results and their possible uses, and lists recommendations for future research directions.

The *eighth to twelfth chapters* contain the bibliography used, archival, legal and press sources, through which the list of works and documents referred to during the study can be checked. Furthermore, the last chapter consists of the appendices, which include the list of mayors and prefects of the Szekler counties between the two world wars, the tables regarding the change of place names of the settlements in the Szekler region, and the list of figures included in the thesis.

7) Limitations of the research

Three significant aspects can be highlighted as limitations occurring during the research of the doctoral dissertation. First of all, it can be defined in the broad framework of the scientific question and goal. Although, despite the fact that the designated period spans a not very wide-scale and well-defined period, and that it has also closed with its own specific processes, the amount of sources to be processed (archival, legal, press) is quite large. This wide-ranging document analysis and document processing can simultaneously contribute to the quality of the thesis, but at the same time, the shift in their ratio and the synthesis of an inadequate amount of information can also be one of the shortcomings of the study.

The second limitation of making the dissertation is the incomplete existence of archival source materials, which are considered primary, and the various barriers to access. Within the framework of the examined period, we can find many small and large eras, spanning one or two issues or even one or two years, in which there are no or very incomplete preserved documents. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that in the case of Romanian archives, state and university libraries, many official documents are currently under partial or full encryption, which can also hinder research work.

As a third factor, I have to name the restrictions aimed at treating the coronavirus, which unfortunately physically limit the room for movement and the possibility of entering various institutions. Since the research work related to Szeklerland was completed between 2017 and 2019, this does not apply to the chapters discussing it, but at the same time, I had to rely on secondary sources that have already been processed to a large extent regarding the knowledge about Dobrudja.

In the course of the thesis, I am not able to deal in detail with all the minority communities living in the researched regions and the effects of all the legislation affecting them, as the focus of the research is primarily on administrative-territorial reorganizations. Last but not least, I would like to note that the presentation of the events preceding the First World War is only done in a sketchy form, as it is outside the scope of the period defined in the research.

8) Conclusions

Although the Hungarian government did not exert negative pressure regarding the weakening of the Szekler identity, it should be mentioned that one of the outstanding points of the process that ended with the administrative reorganization after 1876 was the implementation of the abolition of Szekler self-determination. In this way, the construction of the unified public administration system contributed to the implementation of voluntary Hungarization and non-forced Hungarization. In this regard, the situation of Aranyos seat can be highlighted in the first place, which was united with a significantly larger area inhabited by other nationalities other than the Szekler. With regard to the period following the First World War, the research shows that, depending on the antecedent, the central Romanian power had a much easier job of implementing ideas related to administrative unification than in the case of the historical seats that remained mostly united.

Based on the aspects explained in the previous paragraph, we come to the conclusion that within the framework of the period between the two world wars, we cannot speak of an independent public administration system in Szeklerland, not even in the case that the positions of the local governments were largely held by Szekler's, or these positions only gradually were filled by officials of Romanian nationality. It should be emphasized that in the

case of the various historic Szekler seats, the phases of the development of the public administration system vary.

Within the framework of the period examined by the thesis, parts of different laws and regulations that were put into practice, affecting the public administration system, were enforced in different forms and to different extents, and had various effects on historic Szekler seats. As an outstanding example, I would mention the local name changes carried out within the 20th century administrative reorganization, by which the settlements lost their pre-century form to varying degrees in the areas in question. First of all, I am not referring to changes in Hungarian settlement names, but rather to the renaming of their Romanian equivalents. As a conclusion, the fact that it was an integral part of this process, not only with regard to the loss of the identity of the Hungarian, but also of the Transylvanian Romanian community, and laid the foundation for the initial, practical implementation of the theory of Daco-Romanian continuity.

Finally, in relation to the process of administrative-territorial unification, which forms the central point of the research, it can be stated that the more drastic method prevailed among the two possible methods described in the literature. Although in the beginning the Provisional Governing Council wanted to put into practice step by step the actions related to the various administrative-territorial reorganizations to a certain extent, in 1921 the central Romanian power dissolved this Council and, ignoring the local peculiarities, implemented drastic changes after only a few years in 1925.

9) Scientific findings and the possibilities of their use

1. Since within the framework of the researched period, the issues of the territorial development of Szeklerland were previously only divided into seats, not uniformly, and even in different styles, this study synthesizes and organizes the existing knowledge materials, and supplements them. The systematization primarily moves from the central regulations to the local ones, and also divides and analyses the events of the different eras in a uniform manner. Various knowledge materials on the history of the public administration of Csík, Három, Maros and Udvarhely seats published in *Areopolisz* (2016) have been supplemented with a smaller amount of knowledge materials.

2. Aranyos seat, the seventh Szekler seat, was included in the study. Although Szeklerland has been mentioned in various studies on the region for several centuries from the beginning of its development, after the administrative-territorial unification of Hungarian administration in 1876, its situation is not addressed. In the end result, as can be seen from the present study, during the aforementioned county planning, the entire area of Szeklerland loses its self-determination and the specific administrative system of seat - sub seat ceases. For some reason, unlike the other four seats, the fate of Aranyos seat has not yet been examined.

3. Although the amendments affecting the public administration of Szeklerland between 1918 and 1925 were presented in several cases in previously published studies, certain details of these were not processed. Since the research revealed that the central Romanian power, after banning the Hungarian and Saxon place names and geographical names in Szeklerland, also radically changed the previously valid Romanian place names, which paradigm raises new questions and indicates new research directions.

4. Regarding the territorial unification of public administration in Romania between the two world wars, no comprehensive comparative study has been prepared so far, focusing on the analysis of the different regions that were newly annexed to Romania. The evolution of the administrative processes in Szeklerland and Dobrudja detailed in the course of the study was compared in a separate chapter, examining the degree of assimilation of the mentioned regions by Romania, and the success of the relevant strategy put into practice.

5. As a final result of the study, the protective factors determined by comparing the situation of Dobruja and Szeklerland were identified, which contributed to the preservation of a certain degree of independence and slowed down the process of assimilation of the Szekler community into Romania.

6. Although there is information about the Romanian royal dictatorship regime operating between 1938 and 1940 and the provincial system established within it, it has not yet been examined in detail. Within the framework of this study, we paid more attention to this period as well.

7. The repository of official documents collected in the form of thousands of photographs during archival research can be highlighted as a scientific achievement. Essentially, it involves the preservation and digitization of many unique documents that are not available to the general public.

Based on the results of this study, the possibilities of use are primarily manifested in learning from the events of the past, in the prevention of destructive decisions, and in the consideration of future decisions. In order for the Szekler community not to crumble further, and to be able to strengthen and preserve its identity and culture, it would be important to examine the identified protective factors and the aspects behind them more widely, and then put them into practice at the community level for their development. Furthermore, it provides a wide-ranging insight into many different administrative territorial structures, each of which has its positives and negatives. It would be important to make these known to the wider community, so that they can coordinate their regional territorial needs and, perhaps more importantly, their unified way in the best possible way for them. All these aspects can contribute to the strengthening of the sense of identity of minority Hungarian communities and the formation of interest representation organizations. As a result, the digitized documents clearly become accessible to a wider community after the research, since we are talking about the many documents that are only released to people with a special research permit.

10) Recommendations

Based on the scientific findings of the research, we formulate the following recommendations:

1. Starting from the reconsideration of one of the hypotheses formulated in the study, a more detailed research could be carried out in relation to the in-depth analysis of the contemporary central Romanian and Szeklerland Hungarian press publications. It would be really interesting to test the assumption that the two different sources conveyed opinions about the events from opposite points of view, with partial differences or in an actually objective way.
2. One of the most exciting aspects of the study, in our opinion, is centred on the issues related to the arrangement of place names. In this regard, a separate study could

be carried out, including all the historical regions of Romania, more precisely, analysing the place-naming procedures taking place in these areas, as well as examining the basic principles of possible settlements. Finally, through a comparative procedure, it would be possible to check with certainty whether the Romanian-Romanian names replaced during the arrangement of place names also lead to the erasure of the regional Romanian identity, or whether this became a practice due to making the theory of Daco-Romanian continuity sustainable.

3. Of course, I read many studies, books, and articles until I managed to prepare the current version of the study. During this process, I was confronted with the fact that Romanian works dealing with the history of public administration in Romania are incomplete, confusing and less transparent. As a result, I came up with the idea that, similar to the present thesis, a historical analysis of public administration should be prepared for each major historical region of Romania, and then the separate works should be published in a single study volume.

4. Although the presentation of the system of the royal dictatorship operating between 1938 and 1940 was included in this thesis, the processing of the documentation found in this regard would require much more detailed work. The official gazette covering only one and a half years consists of hundreds of pages, and at the same time contains hundreds of unprocessed points of interest, which in itself can provide a separate research interface.

5. As a recommendation, we formulate the digitization of the official gazettes between the two world wars and their sharing online in order to make them available to a larger community. The conservation of the documents in question in this way is not an incidental aspect.

6. Compared to the previous aspect, we also recommend the digitization and online sharing of press publications between the two world wars, for the same reasons. The conservation of documents through the process is not an incidental aspect.

7. It would be particularly important to develop a strategy aimed at strengthening regional identity. Currently, even the Szekler community considers only three seats of the historical Szeklerland to be Szekler, despite the fact that the population of the historical Maros seat is still predominantly of Szekler origin.

Publication subscription

Szabadi Ernő – Loránd (2021): *History of public administration of Dobrudja as part of Russia, Romania and Bulgaria (1878-1940)*. Public administration and society. 2, 24-41

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Professional-scientific biography

Personal data

Name: Ernő – Loránd Szabadi

Citizenship: Romanian and Hungarian

Birthplace and birthdate: Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş / Neumarkt), 1991. July 12.

E-mail address: szabadi_erno@yahoo.com



Professional experience

2019-present: **Civil servant**, Social Assistance Directorate of Târgu Mureş (Târgu Mureş City Hall)

2014-2018: **Civil servant**, Târgu Mureş City Hall

2018-2022: **Assistant professor**, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania

University studies

2017/2023 (folyamatban): University of Public Service Ludovika, Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences

2018/2019: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Pedagogy Module I.

2013/2015: Babeş-Bolyai University, Consulting in the field of social services

2010/2013: Petru Maior University, Public administration science

2010/2013: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Public health services and policies

Professional organization membership

Member of the union of personnel in the Public Administration of Târgu Mureş

Language skills

Hungarian: mother tongue **English:** B2 **Romanian:** C1 **German:** A1