

THE LIFE AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF WESSELÉNYI MIKLÓS

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REZUMAT: Abordarea noastră tratează pe scurt viața și activitatea politică al lui Wesselényi Miklós jr., incluzând și o scurtă istorie a familiei a cărei genealogie este cunoscută începând cu 1584, anul înnobilării predecesorului cu prenumele Ferenc. Studiul trece în revistă principalele momente ale formării gândirii liberale, a baronului, precum și influența avută asupra lui Széchenyi István, devenind promotorul reformelor din Ungaria și Transilvania.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: Wesselényi Miklós jr., eliberarea iobagilor, liberalism, Transilvania, politică

ABSTRACT: It shortly treats the life and political activity of Wesselényi Miklós jr., also including a short history of his family whose name is first heard starting with the year 1584, the year of the ennoblement of the predecessor named Ferenc. This study shows the most important moments when liberal thought was formed; those of the baron and also Széchenyi's influence on him, thus becoming the promotor of Hungarian and Transilvanian reforms.

KEYWORD: Wesselényi Miklós jr., working people's freedom, liberalism, Transilvania, politics

1. THE WESSELÉNYI FAMILY

About the Wesselényi family we can find documents starting with the medieval period in the history of Transylvania, when in 1584, the King of Poland and prince of Transylvania –Stephanus Báthory – offers the fortress of Hodod and its belonging estates to him raising Wesselényi Ferenc to the nobiliary rank of baron as a reward for his devotion and his merits. After the proclaiming procedures and getting into the possession of the fortress of Hodod, in the dining room, in the presence of the ruling delegation named by Báthory, the event is being finalized with a (greatly) feast, where “there have been served appetizing roast meat, assorted with sparkling wine... – prepared and treated by cellarmen, in the long wine-cellars beneath the fortress,... from the royal grape vineyards... harvested years before by the girls and women of Hodod”¹.

Stephanus Báthory (1533–1586), voivode of Transylvania from 1571 to 1576- a date when he will be wearing the title of prince of Transylvania and king of Poland until 1586- this also being the year of his death. The act(paper) of donation is handwritten in Latin and issued in Vilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania), these containing the acts of bravery and devotion towards the Prince, through which Wesselényi Ferenc receives in his possession the fortress of Hodod together with the belonging villages and localities, among which Jibou. This is the place where two centuries later is to be born one of the most illustrious of this name: Wesselényi Miklós, the son.

The place of origin of the Wesselényi family is not a very clear, one among the circulated opinions we can find Turkish origins, Polish and Czech origins. Kardos Samu underlines among the listed

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1. Kaszta István, *Hadad a hadak útján* (Hodod în calea luptelor), Ed. Eurotip, 2008, p.184

variants two interesting things regarding the family's origins: Cserei Heléna (1750–1809) claimed – László Wesselényi-appreciated for his skill becomes the supreme equerry of the prince (probably that of János Zsigmond), and a wealthy man – Wesselényi Ferenc, in 1852, discover the name of the family engraved on a memorial plaque dedicated to the victims of atrocities committed by the Hussites in Prague.

The noble family of Wesselényi, since the early ennobling, fulfills a major role in the strategic, political, military, economic, social and cultural history of Transylvania and Hungary. Among the family's include captains, governors, palates, commits and President diets.

Although a family of barons, they initially resided in Hodod, the great grandfather of the Wesselényi Miklós jr. is still concerned with the renovations of the residence from Jibou. "I have seen here, embedded in the wall, two memorial plaques with inscriptions and coats of arms. According to the card with baroque ornamentation above the West entrance, this building was rebuilt from scratch in 1702 by Baron István Wesselényi, the county Prefect of Middle Solnoc – President of the Diet in 1716 – and by the Countess Kata Bánffy, Governor Bánffy György's daughter"². On December 11, 1750 Wesselényi Miklós is born in Jibou. He is the son of Wesselényi István and of Baroness *Daniel Polixénia*, grandson of *Wesselényi István* and of Countess Bánffy Kata later called "aurochs of Jibou" due to the fiery temper which characterized him. He is a character who will turn Jibou into a reputable place.

Miklós –," who became captain in 1772 – participated in the invasion of that part of Poland that was incorporated into the empire led by Maria Teresa and served in the garrison in Galiția"³. After marrying Heléna Cserey, the daughter of Cserey Farkas and that of Boros Klára, he will leave the army because of a ban more exactly that of being with wives to the military camps in 1778 withdrawing back to the family domain in Jibou where he will begin building the castle and its annexes. There he would spend time and party with guests from everywhere, from France, England, from Hungary who were interested in his skill with which he trained horses, having a famous stud at the time. His guests adored hunting parties that ended with appetizing game dinners. This lifestyle lasted until" he was imprisoned in Kufstein, in the spring of 1785, then released from prison, from 1789 until his death in October 25, 1809"⁴.

The imprisonment of the man called by his contemporaries "the aurochs of Jibou" was in part due to an incident but also due to a lengthy enmity between grof Haller and Miklós Wesselényi and also due to generally various reasons of ideological incompatibility, the way of the enlightened, reformed and lustful spirit of Wesselényi in contrast to the situation of Count Haller, who was in the grace of the Habsburgs and manifested in a different lifestyle having also a different personality.

The objective problem of incidence is because Count Haller caught two horse grooms trying to leave the Wesselényi property and to escape around the vecinity of Gârbău. Count Haller managed to catch them, sent one back to his master. While in custody, the other one escaped. Wesselényi being testy, prepares an army armed with firearms and various tools and shows up on October 16, 1781 at the castle of Count Haller with the army ready to assault. Some historians, in addition to the descriptions above, also describe an assault as a result of fighting and fierce swearing, with taking of prisoners. But Veress Dániel in his work bearing the name of Baron Miklós Wesselényi mentions only the fight under the castle gate of Gârbău, without an assault, just with threats after which they all withdrew to Jibou, this version being underlined by one of the contemporary descendants of the baron, the heir of the castle of Jibou, Andrew I. But upon which all historians agree is the fact that Count Haller having a very close relation with Vienna, files complaints against the Baron for the violence with which he treated things. Wesselényi is judged and held in detention for four years in Kufstein. Cserey Heléna is the person who takes over governance issues of the property for the period of her husband's incarceration. This task is not easy, given that her husband took care of all these, but the kindness and patience typical for the Baroness did not fail to bear its fruit.

2. Bíró József, *A zsiói kastély* (*Castelul din Jibou*), <http://bilet.go.ro/biokshu.htm>

3. *Ibidem*

4. *Ibidem*.

Kardos Samu describes that the most difficult task has been the maintenance of the herd, for which Helen was forced to turn to literature and, by the proper urging of the servants managed to comply with all procedures required by an appropriate approach and also fruitful in household work maintaining the properties incomes in a regular limit. The lady of the property was so caring that she didn't allow anybody to ride Philosoph, the riding horse, the Baron's Arab thoroughbred, keeping to a very strict order on the estate. Cserey Heléna tried in vain to get her husband free writing several pardon requests. Joseph II of Habsburg gets sick, and withdraws all applicable laws except for two and dies in 1790.

The Wesselényi family life was overshadowed by the failure to raise a child. Every child died at a very early age. But after the Baron's release, life in Jibou gets back into normality. In December 1796 the family enjoys God's blessing, Cserey Heléna giving birth to the little baron, who will bear his father's name, Wesselényi Miklós, being the only child who remains alive and who can provide the continuity of the family's name.

Although Jibou becomes an increasingly important scene, through outstanding personalities of the Wesselényi family, they will keep up to the last follower through his name the ennoblement „of Hodod”.

The little Baron Miklós Wesselényi of Hodod is the apple of his parent's eyes in the Castle Jibou, being always around his father. He will receive an education that would fulfill some expectations of his father's severe aristocratic pride, that develop in the child a power of will, physically hardened which would later enable an ascendancy within the sphere of elites.

2. THE EDUCATION AND THE INTELLECTUAL PREOCCUPATIONS OF BARON WESSELÉNYI MIKLÓS JR.

On December 30th, 1796 was born as the tenth child in the family of noble husbands Cserey Wesselényi Miklós and Helen, being the only child out of eleven who will get of full age. He is also the only descendant who can maintain the continuity of the name in the history of Transylvania.

The little *Wesselényi spent his childhood on the family property in Jibou*, under the harsh guardianship of his father and amidst the private teachers. The severe education offered by his father taught the child to “endure hunger, thirst, cold and dog days, respectively to have a physical strength, to know no fear, to be brave ...”⁵. In this spirit was the little *Wesselényi brought up, became the child worth wondering about by those who knew him, or of those who met the young boy of the Baron of Jibou. At a joint meeting in Zalău, in 1805, the child Wesselényi Miklós accompanies his father, who due to a misunderstanding with count Tholdalagi causes a fight with the present ones. He is almost thrown out of the window of the conference room, when the nine year old child steps into the defense of his father, drawing his sword out of its sheath and shouted: “he who dares to take another step towards my father, I will pierce pitilessly!...”*⁶. *The simple presence of the child at the meetings of the nobility of Transylvania is overtaken by the child's speech when in April 1806 count Tholdalagi leaves office, the so called “főispán” (the prime leader of a county administrative body). The position is taken over by the Baron Wesselényi Miklós. Here, the 10 year old child expresses his solidarity towards the multitude of good fellow citizens.*

As a child, being always next to his father, he is brought up in his father's spirit, who was already renowned as a military man, as a political man, as a horse breaker, as a tycoon and last but not least as an ambitious character.

The young *Wesselényi, while in Debretin, befriends the young count Széchenyi István with whom, between 1821–1822, travels around Europe, to study the way of life and level of development bringing home pedigree*

5. Veress Daniel, *Báró Wesselényi Miklós (Baronul Wesselényi Miklós)*, Ed. Mora Ferenc, 1983, p. 30.

6. Dr. Kardos Samu, *Báró Wesselényi Miklós élete és munkái I (Baronul Wesselényi Miklós, viața și activitatea acestuia vol.I)*, Budapest, Ed. Legradu Testvérek, 1905, p. 70

horses (pure breeds) and new technologies through which he manages to revive his productivity, increasing his properties' profits. In 1828, the two friends start writing some pamphlets to express their political and social vision through which they want changes of amplitude. *Wesselényi, in comparison to his friend, due to censorship, will manage only much later, with a considerable time difference, i.e. 1834, to publish his work.*

The political, cultural and social preoccupation of Baron Wesselényi, in addition to his practical and exemplary activities in these areas has paid off in terms of publishing as well as having a significant effect at the time and even to this day.

Works and publications signed by Miklós Wesselényi are the following:

- “A régi híres méneselek egyike (zsibói) megszűnésének okairól” (One of the oldest and most well-known studs – the causes of its dissolution) written in 1828 in Jibou and published in Pesta in 1829;
- “Balítéletekről”(About prejudices), finished in 1831 and published in 1833 in Bucharest (respectively Leipzig);
- “Erdély nemes lelkű leányaihoz”([An address] To The Girls With A Noble Soul From Transylvania) a publication about the famine of 1833;
- “Szózat a magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében” (Speech On The Hungarian And Slavic Ethnic Issues), Adresa Leipzig 1843 and translated into German in 1844;
- “Teendők a lótenyésztés körül” (Things To Be Done Around Horse Breeding), Cluj 1877;
- “Beszéd az 1834. országgyűlésen Kolozsvárott” (Speeches from 1834, the Diet in Cluj).

The author, Baron Wesselényi Miklós, in his first published work – “Teendők a lótenyésztés körül” (Things To Be Done Around Horse Breeding) approaches as a topic testimonies about horse breeding adapted to the level of Transylvania, investigating cases of un- profitability of this sector providing methodological options of improving the situation, having his own herd as a case study.

Another material dated from 1833 entitled “Erdély nemes lelkű leányaihoz” is an address to the ladies and young girls of the nobility – “You beautiful benefactors of those who suffer,... don't leave this unanswered request, comes from the heart for your heart!”⁷.

Baron Wesselényi Miklós of Jibou was marked by the famine of 1833, describing in his address to the ladies and the young noble girls the helpless and tragic situation in which the drought impoverished population was, tormented by hunger and with their bodies weakened by heat – “Before us is a tragic future, that our fellow human beings will die before us,... infants who can not be breastfed from their mothers' dry breast, how will you think when you will see the lifeless bodies, dried out to the bones, leaving infants orphans, they would be still alive if you helped them a little, by giving up on buying certain expensive items of clothing ...!”⁸. This special sensitivity towards other people, for Baron Wesselényi, suffering of any (and every)man, even from among the peasants, is a matter of which the noble society is also responsible of, which often lives carelessly and wasteful.

The political convictions of the Baron were liberal, a thing not at all well-seen in that period. These were always generating conflicts with the Royalist Party who had also sentenced him.

Liberalism nowadays is defined as being a “political ideology focused on the individual, considering that possessing rights against the government, among them being fairness in equality and respect, freedom of speech and action as well as the freedom of religious and ideological beliefs...”⁹. A definition through which one can identify the personality and way of thinking of Baron Wesselényi Miklós of Jibou just as well as it can be observed in the pamphlet “Balítéletekről”(“About Prejudices”), a work with a special history forbidden by censorship, as a manuscript taken to and from printing presses but nonetheless cared for by the author, published in its original shape, in spite of the efforts of censorship to modify it and to cut out most of its content. Through this they tried to give it another shape and other meanings for other conclusions.

7. Arhivele Naționale – Serviciul Județean Cluj, (A.N.-S.J.CJ), fondul nr. 250, dos. 456, f.1

8. *Ibidem*, f. 2

9. Simon Blackburn, Oxford dicționar de filosofie, traducere de Cătălin Iricinschi, Laura Sabin Kertesz, Liliana Torres și Mihaela Czobor, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1999, p. 228

The meaning of the term “Balítéletekről” (“About Prejudices”), which represents the title of the work as well, in the opinion of the author reflects upon an unhealthy way of thinking which doesn’t allow advancement or overcoming of a backward present, with a vicious morale of the contemporary society with the great reformer, the Baron from Jibou. In the author’s opinion, the facts, largely, depend upon the way of thinking and upon the way things are perceived.

The reformist programs from the pamphlet focus on education, through which people’s mentality can be changed, and through which they become better citizens.

The major problems described in the work, identifies itself with the unfavourable status of the serfs who instead of taking advantage of the facilitating legislation, are rather relentlessly hardened. The rights of the individuals are, due to prejudice, given by the status of which he/she is born into thereby generating noble despotism.

In the work “Szózat a magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében” (Speech On The Hungarian And Slavic Ethnic Issues), the writer continues with the reforming proposals through which he wants to draw attention upon the necessity of using other languages as well individually as officially, of those who were not born Hungarian and want to improve disparities in ethnic, material and cultural rights.

Today, Baron Wesselényi Miklós, lives on in the memory of the people living in the county of Sălaj as being the first nobleman of Transylvania, who was not only interested just in writings concerning the status of the serfs but also as being the first one to free them on his properties in Jibou.

3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF TRANSYLVANIA, A PREMISE TO REFORMIST AND LIBERAL CONCEPTS

The socio-economic context in which he was born and which shaped the young Baron, was almost always one fulfilled with his dissatisfaction of the serfs, with obligations of corvee.

“Young Wesselényi Miklós in the early 1820 began to handle the 24 serf villages inherited from his father”¹⁰. The constant problems of smooth running in productivity of the providing society of the serfs was first of all due to corvee, which in the confession of the Baron had no clear legislative structure, through which one could generate efficiency. The technique of the agrarian economy was an obsolete one, but it was comfortable for the nobility, who was a direct beneficiary of the serfs’ work. The nobility’s way less interested in innovations and investments.

The Baron’s friendship with Grof Széchenyi István, makes each owe to involve in a concern for the economic reform, through major social politics. Some ideas rely on in-depth study of the socio-economic situation in Transylvania and Hungary, and other ideas present the philosophy of social imaginaries, utopias who dream of the gradual transformation of the serfs on the one hand into one single nation and then into a citizen with full rights. Even though the serf were aspiring to a radical change, not agreeing with forced labour, with tithe, the serf can not give up his national identity of which it was conscious and was treating it canonically, even though “it is reluctant of free labour as much as possible. But because it still has to be done (the work), he sends the weakest from the house, the one his economy would have used at hauling water at most. If the governor isn’t pleased with him, according the law, then the whole house is ill...”¹¹.

During the trip through Europe, the reformist ideology of the two men, *Wesselényi and Széchenyi István*, is formed weaving the destinies and ways of thinking up to certain moments of private and political life. A common vision of the economic situation both in Transylvania and Hungary, of the two, due to the

10. Egyed Ákos, „Wesselényi Miklós és a jobbágyfelszabadítás Erdélyben 1848-ban” (Wesselényi Miklós și problema eliberării iobagilor din Transilvania în 1848), în publicația Erdélyi Múzeum, Secția de Litere, lingvistică, filozofie și istorie, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Societatea Muzeului Ardelean din Cluj-Napoca, vol. LVIII, 1996, p. 219

11. David Prodan, *Problema iobăgiei în Transilvania 1700–1848*, Ed. Științifică București, 1989, p. 336

lack of motivation of the serfs to perform forced labour. Széchenyi does not find a real nor a working solution regarding the agrarian economy, his welfare depending as well on the serf's forced labour

Investment in modernizing the agricultural technology and that of the nobiliary areas is complicated due to the lack of an institutional bank credit that would have confidence in the ability to repay the investment funds credited to the nobility, the areas were only acquired by inheritance, without the possibility to sell them or any part of these, in order to cover some of the loans or debts, thereby developing which however was not exactly the most benefic solution.

Carrying out the forced labour was slow, had to be guarded by an officer, the serfs did not force their animals on the field work for their master, keeping them rested for the next day when they were planning to do their own work. But weather conditions were often blocking the fulfillment of their own goals, so this way the quality of production being less superior on both sides, generated starvation among the serfs. According to the custom of the time, the master stimulated work through even less peaceful methods, being looked upon by the serfs as the supreme evil in their life adding a more instilled mentality inherited from past generations.

The friendship of the two tycoons, *Wesselényi from Transylvania and Széchenyi from Hungary* will mark a new period in the history of the Hungarian nobility, record of which is kept in the literature as «reformkor» (reform period) which begins with the reformist pamphlets works of the two, Széchenyi István publishing his work entitled "Hitel" (The Credit) in 1830, and in 1831 Baron Wesselényi Miklós finishes his work "Balítéletekről" ("About Prejudices"), two works which are very much alike, defending Széchenyi's pamphlet first, arguing that their ideas are too similar for the work to be published by him too. Széchenyi takes over certain ways of thinking from his friend from Jibou, strengthening his ambition to do something for his country to overcome the limited development from the obsolete concepts and applications.

Wesselényi was a more practical personality, trying to achieve immediate consideration, and if possible to approach a way of solving. The Baron undertakes to distribute the collected tithe – "the amount of about 16,500 quarts (about 18,750 litres) of Turkish grain wheat – in 1831 to prevent starvation among the serfs. (He thought that this amount should be enough for the serfs to ensure the food requirements for a period of six months, and the other half can be obtained even in terms of the weakest crop)"¹². Wesselényi's point of view towards the serfdom is a humane one, very close all the time, and skillfully administrating his estates, participating on numerous occasions in the fields' works, in a row with the people owing work, considering them rather tenants than serfs on his estates. "The undeniable wealth of the landlord are his possessions and the land, which he gives in use (lends) to the peasants in exchange for an annual rent consisting in work and other means of payment"¹³. The Baron draws attention upon the serfs' social condition, who make an income through their work for the landowner who in return gives away ten percent of his production, thus defending them against the tyranny of the noble pledge. The country is sustained by the work of the serf, no wheat existing without the work and the sweat of the hard-working arms of this faithful work force. But on countless occasions the serfs are taken by force and enrolled in the army, paying from that moment on with their blood, without possessing duties of citizenship or without being a landlord.

Kölcsey Ferencz creates the motto of the reformed movement which underlies the concept of the movement through «homeland and progress», as outlined in the work of reformist politicians, that formed the opposition of the government composed of conservatives who had obsolete and pro-monarchist concepts, generating obstacles of all kind in the way of change hindering the work of Wesselényi, which will later be considered the first in the eyes of the opposition.

12. Orosz István, „Wesselényi Miklós és a földesúr-jobbagy viszony” (Wesselényi Miklós și relația nobil-iobag), în vol. *Magyar agrárpolitikusok a XIX. És a XX. Században*, Ed. Napvilág, Budapest, 2010, p. 20

13. Dr.Kardos Samu, *op. cit.*, p. 365

Typical of the reformist period, the liberal concept will be expressed through Baron Miklós Wesselényi, who will become the leader of the reformist movement in Transylvania and an important personality on both political and economical level but also nationally in Hungary.

Reforms are considered as being necessary and urgent, in the development of economic welfare, and alignment with the developed countries of Europe, where the technological progress, selection and ennoblement of animal breeds practiced over time, has favored a progress with high standards, which might be reachable, but the premises of which have to be created first, since neither the nobility nor the serfs were not prepared for such changes. The Transylvanian Baron found that all the potential risks through which the reforming intention was losing ground against nobiliary despotism towards the peasants and towards the “sandal nobility” but neither did the peasantry represent a mass capable of reform. “I do not consider the peasantry either to be ripe for multiple and major developments, the majority being crude and ignorant, too much freedom and too much taking part in political life would be too much, just like a knife in a child’s hands, causing him to bleed. Therefore they have to be prepared first. That’s the reason why we start educating rural population – hungarisation of those of other languages...”¹⁴. Transylvania being a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural territory, as well and Hungary, has always been a blend due to the plague, due to some extensive politics, economical favours, the need of labor and due to the rampage of the Turks and Tartars. According to the legislation of 1723 parts XVIII and LXII on the management of lands in the hands of serfs, for protection, fund level of taxes, if left empty, to be colonized with new serfs forcing the land’s upkeep in the hands of the serfs”¹⁵. As a concrete example in this regard may be taken Galatia Bistriței, that was a Saxon town, but by 1600 was not inhabited at all, and later was populated by Romanians, and around 1830 Miklós Wesselényi will set up a school and a farm for sheep breeding.

The importance of sticking the serf population was regarded as an investment By the Baron. Being a polyglot he understood the importance of languages spoken or written languages for sustainable development from square one onwards, for which he campaigned throughout his entire life. If required he spoke French, English, German – the language through which they communicated first with Széchenyi István, who spoke

German much better at that time than Hungarian. Although he received an education in the spirit of Hungarian nobility, under the influence of a great friendship with Wesselényi he will improve his Hungarian language knowledge. Baron Miklós often spoke in Romanian with serfs who did not know Hungarian yet. He knew Latin well and we can assume that probably had had the ability to level regional slang and dialects of the Romanian speaking serfs, of the new ones established on his estates and got along very well with them.

Compensation can be solved in two ways:

a) *voluntarily, -by insight- the serf becomes the owner of land, and pays his landlord, the latter being deprived of the serf’s work force;*

b) *mandatory – regulated by law, the state giving credit for the serf, in order to be compensated.*

Wesselényi proposed a slow dissolution to reduce the risk of a system crash, through which the necessary preparation steps can be performed for the status of a citizen with civic rights, and new landowners, because the baron describes a reality that is dangerous due to a two-way majority:

1) numerical majority, the number of citizens with non-noble origin; 2) legal majority (noble) – number of Hungarian nobles and beyond.

“This beautiful right, the Hungarian nation gives it willingly, gives it as a gift, so in return has the right to condition it But only if it were true Hungarian, whether it would blend with the nation that it wants to become, and in the rights of which it wants to participate, and if through language and habits will become one. For such a great and magnificent reward the price is just the learning of a language and this is in the

14. Wesselényi Miklós, *Balítéletekről (Despre prejudecăți)*, Ed. Criterion, București, 1974, p. 91

15. Orosz István, *op. cit.*, p.17

reach of anyone”¹⁶. The conditioning proposed by Miklós Wesselényi demonstrates a special diplomacy to deal with things so sensitive, with arguments so well polished that the curriculum becomes an appealing one, but in real sense good for a radical change of the life of the serfs.

The life of the new owner must be prepared to exercise civil rights, belonging to the nation, one among those who can rule his destiny, having representatives in leadership, being nothing less than a member of the ruling nation.

Analyzing Wesselényi's proposal, in his view, it is quite correct, because through it disappears a lower class, parallel to his own destiny, unable to understand the law that confers him rights, being one of those who are part of the nation, becomes master of the national wealth, creating an ideal society, concentrated and very powerful. In the feudal system the nation is only the nobility and others regardless of ethnicity, represented only one social class whose existence largely depended on the nobility. The serfs are part of the nobiliary estate. "The estate of Baron Miklós Wesselényi of Jibou – in 1831 – was composed of 450 house owners who had servants, and 2,500 souls (of serfs)"¹⁷.

The political concern of the serfs on the domains of Wesselényi, was based on the nobleman's relation with the government. The serfs' attitude manifested differently when the Baron was among them, and otherwise for various reasons when he was away for a certain period of time.

It is interesting to see the attitude and the whispered rumors among the serfs in the absence or at the return of the landowner. According to the reports stored in his diary in theyar 1821, being away from home, staying in the house of his companion in Vienna, at Szécshenyi István's, Wesselényi, in addition to his mother's letter, receives a letter from the administrator Kelemen, on December 15, containing notices made with precision and clarity, and rumors circulated by serfs „that here I am imprisoned for things regarding land records, receiving a sentence of six years in prison”¹⁸.

Returning from his great journey, on November 21, 1822, on the way home from Mirşid, the Baron remarked joyfully „People who were greeting with kindness, their joy inciting my tears... From the peacefulness and cheering of the houses, inhabitants cropping up out of their huts, shouting with joy, waving their hats, greeted me. – Oh, what sweet consciousness, to feel that you are loved”¹⁹.

The serfs' attitude will be one of a constant change, influenced by the Habsburg's politics, who apparently wanted to ease the situation of the serfs, but effectively manipulated the masses of people against the nobility, creating a positive image which would save its' sovereignty over the dominated territories.

4. POLITICAL PREOCCUPATIONS

Baron Miklós Wesselényi inherited, from his father, the famous stud that is visited by Count István Széchenyi on 1st August 1821, which is delegated to buy horses for the Habsburg army, that was in a training camp in Debrecen. He knows German as he grew up in Vienna, thus the Baron finds a good friend in the person of Count István Széchenyi having similar ideologies and aspirations, buys five horses from the stud of the Baron of Jibou. This occasion is also the beginning of the journey to western Europe, to acquire practical knowledge about agricultural economy, industry, customs, methods and technologies while deepening on the political agenda.

The experience acquired in this journey determines the two, besides changing the optics for an ideal state, generating models of transformation applied inside their areas. Wesselényi is the first in this regard,

16. David Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 341

17. Dr. Petri Mór, *Szilágy vármegye monographijája* (Monografia Sălajului), publicat digital de Arcanum Adatbázis Kft. <http://mek.niif.hu>

18. Maller Sándor, *Szécshenyi István – Wesselényi Miklós Feleselő naplók* (Szécshenyi István – Wesselényi Miklós Jurnale gurative), Ed. Helikon, 2004, p. 96

19. Wesselényi Miklós, *Utinapló 1821–1822* (Jurnalul de călătorie 1821–1822), Ed. Ad Librum, Budapesta, 2008, p.190

and Széchenyi, by publishing a pamphlet entitled "Hitel", launches the diagnosis of the economic and social situation in Hungary.

Society reformist period was divided into economic criteria as follows:

1. nobility is divided into two categories:
 - rich nobles, forming a small part of society;
 - poor nobility (noble peasant) having market problems for sales of their agricultural products.
2. the peasantry able to capture the landless peasants work, achieving higher productivity, becoming a bidder on the market of agricultural products and that of traction animals;
3. craftsmen and intellectuals – as part of wealthier families, but having not many possibilities, because all functions and proceedings were controlled by the nobles.

Another classification of Transylvanian society can be made on this religious criterion: Greek-Catholics; Roman-Catholics; Reformed; Orthodox; Israelites.

"According to the register of 1847, the number of inhabitants numbered 909 souls in Jibou, 18 Roman Catholics, 43 Greek-Catholics, Evangelicals, Protestants 843"²⁰.

According to statistics of the census of 1850 in the territory of Transylvania, on Jibou the following confessional structures were recorded: "194 Greek-Catholics, 10 Roman-Catholics, 807 Protestants and 18 Israelites"²¹.

The Baron of Jibou in his next work, "Szózat Szlávi nemzetiség ügyében és a magyar" (Sermon for Hungarian and Slavic ethnic issues), Leipzig 1843, and translated into German in 1844, distinguishes the population of Transylvania on the criteria of languages, i.e. speakers of Croatian, Slovak, Vlach, German and Hungarian languages.

In their policies, Baron Miklós Wesselényi draws attention all the time on the uprising of 1784, which may be repeated due to the Habsburgic policy that was on the side of the serfs, staging as a cause the inability to overcome the serfs' situation, defending power both in Hungary and Transylvania, hindering the economic recovery and the landlord's relationship with the serfs.

The conflict of the serfs with the nobility would jeopardize the success of the economic and social alignments among the states in western Europe.

The political shade of the concept of creating a nation of the amalgam of peoples of Transylvania, was a modern one, which should not be understood as a destruction of the national identity, but by smoothing gradual abandonment through education, which is more acceptable than forcing religion. "The law of 1840, according to which the legislative inscriptions and writings are to be drafted in Hungarian ..." ²². Hungarian is the official language, learning it has a significant role in shaping society to overcome various situations and differentiation.

Historically, Wesselényi's pioneering role consists in assuming achievement of reformist programs, being the organizer and leader of the opposition in Transylvania in parallel with that of Széchenyi in Hungary ²³. Being on friendly terms, both influence each other, offer moral support, keeping up the flame of the liberal and reformist and, develop similar political ideologies.

The pamphlet "Balítéletekről" ("About prejudices"), raising through its content the rejection of censorship to allow publication in its original form, represents the initiation of political reform.

The court of Barons starts research since 1834, gathering testimonies, being accused of high treason, a charge which would entail the loss of the estate and eventually his head. Wesselényi's specification with

20. Traian Rotariu – coordonator, *Recensământul din 1850 Transilvania*, ediția a II-a, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004, p. 412

21. Dr. Petri Mór, op. cit.

22. Wesselényi Miklós, *Szózat a magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében* (Cuvântarea în cazul aspectelor etnice maghiare și slave), reeditat, Ed. Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1992, p. 68

23. Somai József, „Wesselényi Miklós, a gazdasági reformer” (Wesselényi Miklós, reformatorul proprietății), în *Az erdélyi magyar gazdasági gondolkodás múltjából (XIX.–XX. Század)*, Ed. Tipoholding, Cluj, p. 53

reference to the actual charge, in which he is reproached “for words left unsaid and never support the idea of liberation of the serfs by free bargaining”²⁴.

The Government saw in Wesselényi a threat, who through his oratorical talent, impressive physique, sharp mind, his good relations and economic thinking of was capable of endangering the instabilities and tensions generated by the government, by trying to maintain power.

Wesselényi defends himself stating that the person of the king can not be considered one and the same with the government, being differences between them, the accusation of high treason cannot be true as long as he made overshadowing remarks about aspects of government.

Gathering the testimonies through which they demonstrate the guilt of the Baron was made thorough confirmation by preconceived texts, according to which he (the Baron) had said some things, guiding to perjury.

„The unpopular task to judge the Baron, was not attractive to the prosecutors, because not only had they had to worry about public opinion, but also of central government if they failed to return without convenient testimonies of witnesses”²⁵. Because of this, three prosecutors refused to participate in the defamation of a politician, of which two were excused on health reasons, and one due to internal conflicts of the Conservatives did not want to get involved. But enjoying the opportunity, the peasant nobility, through execution of government preferences, became the most handy mass in the exchange for money or getting promoted in functions.

In the spring of 1838 in Hungary the large amount of ice and snow, the temporary presence of a warm front, generates torrents on the Danube, accompanied by abundant liquid precipitation, breaking the dam, finally flooding the streets of Pesta. “In this sad morning after seven o’clock, I started off on a boat... . Rowing on the central streets... transporting the victims of the calamity... And took off of the roofs of several houses many people in the boat”²⁶. The salvation of the people was all the more urgent as housing strength began to fail, crashing and banging hurdling up dust, which only echoed louder than the cries for help of the isolated people seeking refuge on rooftops. Wesselényi describes in his diary about the flood and the difficulty of traffic on the waters of the Danube, which was full of drifting ice and wooden materials, forming barriers for boaters.



Bas relief in the memory of the ferryman, made in 1895 by Holló Barnabas, located on the outside of the Franciscan church in Budapest, Kossuth Lajos street.

24. Wesselényi Miklós, *Szózat a magyar és szláv.....*, p. 15–16

25. Trócsányi Zsolt, *Wesselényi Miklós hűtlenségi pere* (Procesul de infidelitate a lui Wesselényi Miklós.), Ed. Helikon, p. 34.

26. Főnagy Zoltán, *Wesselényi Miklós*, Ed. Új Mandátum, Budapest 1999, p. 152

The Ferryman also notes in his diary that he saw neither a politician nor a noble in the action of saving those in need. But when the Dessewffy Aurel spotted a boat, very much hoping to enjoy a helping hand, but to his great disappointment he was looking for a place to shelter his horses, not interested in the fate of the people who were losing their family, children and lives in each moment of the tragedy.

After the flood, as the waters retreated, Dessewffy Aurel was appointed by the government to help the victims, prohibiting the participation of the ferryman in the action of rescue, on the grounds that his personality was growing so big as not to increase it furthermore.

On February 9, 1839 Wesselényi is sentenced to three years in prison, which he is serving in the military barracks prison of Buda, making small breaks on health grounds.

Those who condemned the boatsman did not enjoy popularity among the population, to one of them, they even broke the windows of his house.

After release, Baron Wesselényi has a poor health condition, after which his political activity is greatly reduced. In Volume I of the book "A magyar nemzetgyűlés Pesten 1848-ban" (Hungarian National Assembly in Pesta, 1848), Baron Miklós Wesselényi's Motion proposal is described in the twelfth meeting, on 25th of August 1848, making reference to the granting of rights for Vlachs, with the goal to calm the spirits and make them feel the fraternal sentiment they have for them.

The proposal is in the denial of the Vlach' name, and replace it with the name of the Romanian and the Hungarian nation is willing to share all the rights shared with them, to be equal in rights, even in religious terms, without distinguishing between the united church or not, but should nevertheless remain the official language being a Hungarian, a more developed and more elaborate. Hungarians using the Latin alphabet in writing, are showing alignment with western Europe and the Romanians use the Cyrillic alphabet, which was replaced only with the Latin than later in 1862. Wesselényi also proposes the acceptance of documents in the administrative duties, such as e.g. applications or other documents, but it must be written using the Latin alphabet and spelling. And to cultivate the Romanian language, it was studied in the primary public schools, those willing, in addition to Hungarian.

In 1848, on December 30, at the proposal of the Baron, in the Transylvanian Diet, Wesselényi's proposal on the unification of Transylvania with Hungary is accepted.

Wesselényi during the revolution of 1848, has an important diplomatic role, being a man who wanted to achieve goals through appropriate legislation, constitutional, without firearm to prevent a possible defeat, an idea of approach suggested by Kossuth Lajos, who also rejected it.

In April 1850, on the way back from Vienna, he becomes ill with pneumonia, which became fatal, his death occurred on the night of April 21st, 1850 in Pest.