

The topicality of the messages of the interwar Cluj rectors¹

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Abstract: The interwar period marks the first decades of existence of the Romanian University of Cluj. The present article aims to immerse in the history of the Transylvanian University with the help of a set of documents that has only been analysed tangentially so far, i.e., the inaugural speeches of the interwar Cluj rectors. These speeches, also referred to as reports, besides offering an authentic view on the difficulties of an emerging university, can also surprise with the topicality of their messages. Thus, contemporaneity is faced with a special image of the metamorphosis of the University of Cluj, from its creation as an institution of the Romanian state, to the end of a special historical period, which saw Romania crossing dictatorships and a war, which forced the University to go into refuge and which brought the most difficult institutional constraints.

Keywords: History of the University, Interwar Cluj rectors, "King Ferdinand I" University, Rector's Speech, Higher Education in Interwar Romania

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The internal context and the challenges that had to be overcome for the existence of a Romanian University in Transylvania after the proclamation of the Union with the Kingdom of Romania were topics that came to the attention of Romanian, Hungarian authors and not only. In the last ten decades historiography has been enriched over the years with some interesting publications. The institutional evolution of the University, particularities of the different faculties or lines of study, personalities, student life, political influences, student organizations and movements, etc. were approached. Volumes of synthesis, studies and articles, documents were published, all bearing the role of evoking the importance of the University of Cluj in the academic and social landscape of the city, and especially of the country.²

In this approach, our intention is not to resume topics that have already met with publication.³ However, we are considering a subject which has been tackled only tangentially in the various works dedicated to the University of Cluj in the interwar period, namely; the problems highlighted by the rectors in their speeches at the beginning of each academic year.⁴ In many publications dedicated to the University,

² We point out the most recent synthesis, published on the occasion of the celebrations of the centenary of the University of Cluj: POP, Ioan Aurel, SIMON, Simion, BOLOVAN, Ioan (Eds.). *Universitatea din Cluj în perioada interbelică*. Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, <https://biblioteca.ubbcluj.ro/produs/universitatea-din-cluj-in-perioada-interbelica-set-4-volume/>.

³ Ioan Breazu, Onisifor Ghibu, Sextil Pușcariu, Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ana-Maria Stan, Ovidiu Ghitta, Vasile Pușcaș, Marius Mureșan are just a few of the authors who addressed such subjects.

⁴ In Cluj, the rector was elected every year from a different faculty, from among the tenured professors, and the choice was made by the teaching staff of the faculties, together with the representatives of the professors and lecturers. The election of the rector usually took place in May, although the start of his activity was eight days before the beginning of the academic year so that he would be already solemnly installed once the courses began. The rectors of the University of Cluj during 1919-1940 were: 1919-1920, Sextil Pușcariu (Faculty of Letters and Philosophy); 1920-1921, Vasile Dimitriu (Faculty of Law); 1921-1922, Dimitrie Călugăreanu (Faculty of Sciences); Iacob Iacobici (Faculty of Medicine); 1923-1924, Nicolae Bănescu (Faculty of Letters and Philosophy); 1924-1925, Camil Negrea (Faculty of Law); 1925-1926, Gheorghe Spacu (Faculty of Sciences); 1926-1927, Ioan Minea (Faculty of Medicine); 1927-1928, Bogdan Duică (Faculty of Letters and Philosophy); 1928-1929, Emil Hațieganu

speeches of the personalities in charge of the institution were sometimes quoted or reproduced, partially or completely, the respective texts being very useful to the authors, in an attempt to familiarize the reader with the time period or a certain event. However, we do not know if a general analysis of the difficulties encountered and reported by those in charge of the institution exists. In this context, by identifying certain issues, we do not aim only to pass them on, but we want to raise the awareness of the efforts made by elite faculty staff in order to ensure the optimal functioning of the Romanian University of Cluj, in all its components. We furthermore wish to highlight the topicality of the situations and shortcomings reported decades ago, still present in the higher education of the contemporaneity.

In order to be able to accomplish what we set out to do the main source of documentation is contained by the lectures - the reports - accounts - the speeches⁵ given at the beginning of each academic year by the rectors of the Transylvanian institution. With one exception, the mentioned texts were published in the Yearbooks of the University of Cluj from the interwar period just the way they were uttered, without other modifications. It is a primary source of documentation, which is why we have given it due importance. Those who have the curiosity to study them will find that the texts possess a similar structure as a whole, and around the mid 1920s, in the opening speech of the new academic year, some rectors also gave a short lecture on a specific topic, usually from their area of expertise (e.g.: about hygiene; about the Greek Academy in Bucharest and the School of Gheorghe Lazăr; about Romanian students studying in the West etc.). The Rector who was beginning his term of office always presented a summary of the activity carried out in the institution in the previous year, and then set directions for the new academic year. There is also information about the scientific activity and publications of the University's professors and researchers; about the number of students and teachers and their organizations; about the

(Faculty of Law); 1929-1930, Emil G. Racoviță (Faculty of Sciences); 1930-1931, Iuliu Hațieganu (Faculty de Medicine); 1931-1932, Nicolae Drăganu (Faculty of Letters and Philosophy); 1932-1940, Florian Ștefănescu -Goangă (Faculty of Letters and Philosophy).

⁵ During the interwar period, the terms used were: "raport", "dare de seamă", "discurs". In the bibliographic references we followed the exact formula used in the Yearbooks of the University of Cluj.

decisions taken by the internal structures of the University or those at national level; about the acquisitions and constructions made; academic exchanges; homage manifestations and more. Whether they served as a reminder of what happened at the University, or as projections for a new academic year, the speeches of the rectors contain interesting evocations, analyses and critiques of the Romanian realities from a legislative, political, cultural point of view. There are sometimes references to events of international resonance.

Chronologically, the first such text is that of the rector Sextil Pușcariu, presented on October 10, 1920, on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the second academic year under Romanian patronage. Sextil Pușcariu began his speech by reviewing the history of the founding of the University of Cluj in the second half of the 19th century, then insisting on the decision of the authorities in 1919 to transform the institution into a Romanian University. Professor Pușcariu specified that the intentions of the Governing Council were not to destroy a cultural institution with a tradition of almost half a century, confessing that the decision to establish the Romanian University in Cluj could be considered one of the important events of our history (*Anuarul Universității din Cluj*, 1921, p. 2). The rector of Cluj also considered it necessary to recall the fact that there were suspicions too, many not believing that it would be possible for the Romanian authorities to take over the old university in Cluj and ensure its functioning at the appropriate standards. He also continued stating that the possibility of the Romanian University of Cluj to start its activity in the autumn of 1919 at the set deadline was due to the fact that in those complex times of transformation that the country underwent, there were people who had the courage to take full responsibility for their actions (*Anuarul Universității din Cluj*, 1921, p. 3). Evoking the efforts of the Governing Council and the University Commission to find well-trained professors to teach in Cluj, Sextil Pușcariu, comparing with the similar efforts of the French at the University of Strasbourg, also highlighted some of the difficulties encountered. For example, he pointed out that in Cluj it was difficult to realize what had happened in Strasbourg, where the elite of French scholars had gathered. On the other hand, he added that in a small country, such as Old Romania, the university professor had so many other duties besides his chair that, if he were to move, he would have had to leave a lot of occupations in which he could hardly be replaced. Apart

from this, the Universities of Iași and Bucharest, which also had a lot of vacant chairs, should not be disembodied. Then, he confessed that the negotiations with some Romanian professors, and especially with foreign professors, were difficult, which delayed the occupation of some chairs. But through new appointments during the year, through replacements and especially thanks to the help received from Bucharest, there managed to be professors and courses in all the main subjects (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1921, p. 5-7). Sextil Pușcariu also had a word to say regarding the differences between the Cluj higher education system, inherited from the Austro-Hungarian system, and that of the Old Kingdom, differences that required the revision of Romanian legislation in the field. Speaking at the opening of the 1920-1921 academic year, Sextil Pușcariu did not only consider the auditor in front of him. He actually sent a message to the decision makers, reminding them that even after a year of operation, the internal composition of the University remained the one established following a decree of the Governing Council, not yet abolished by the Ministry of Bucharest, i.e. the structure existing before the Union, which resulted in a number of shortcomings (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1921, p. 9). He pointed out the need to adopt a law on higher education, a law that would be part of the process of integration and legislative unification carried out by the Romanian governments in the first interwar years (Sălăgean, 2018, p. 75). Professor Pușcariu, referring to the need to adopt a unitary legislation, argued that the University, as an important institution of culture, should set an example to the other institutions, on the way in which the unification should be achieved. At the same time, he drew attention to the need to adopt a responsible attitude, that a new law cannot be made without a preparatory study, that the law of higher education existing in the Old Kingdom since 1912 could not be extended to Cluj, a law that was criticized by university students in Bucharest and Iasi anyway. For that reason, the leaders of the University of Cluj requested the Ministry of Instruction to consult the Universities before presenting the new law on higher education to the Parliament (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1921, p. 12). Rector Sextil Pușcariu's report continues with the presentation of statistical data on the number of students and teachers, the number of departments and institutes established, the persons in charge of the faculties and of the university Senate and the way of organizing the university library and other administrative structures. Last but not least,

the festivity on the occasion of the official inauguration of the University was given the right place, being presented in detail the development and the events that took place, the personalities present etc.

During the ceremony at the beginning of the academic year, held on October 22, 1922 the rector Dimitrie Călugăreanu, presenting the activity that took place in the institution in the previous school year, made public the difficulties encountered. From the outset, we noticed Professor Călugăreanu pointing out that what happened at the University should not be considered as isolated events, but on the contrary, the difficulties are influenced and are interdependent with what was taking place externally at that time. He noted the social role that universities have acquired, a role that is all the more important as, he argued, the war destroyed not only countries but also values that could hardly be rebuilt (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1923, p. 1). Referring to the material damage caused by the war, he stressed that it would not mean much if mankind's state of mind had not been changed, in some respects for the better, in others for the worse. He said that the democratic idea has made progress, but that there are programs that support the need to fulfill some utopias, considered harmful to humanity by the rector of Cluj. He went on to say that in all European countries, defeated or victorious, shoddy work was being done, which had negative consequences for the economic recovery, and progress was not yet visible. In support of his arguments, Dimitrie Călugăreanu stressed that the economic disaster in Europe is deeply felt in the Universities on the continent, all suffering from a lack of staff and materials. Their budgets were insufficient, and they could not cover the high cost of scientific materials, all the more necessary as, not only in our country, but in all European universities, the number of students increased compared to the pre-war situation (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1923, p. 2). Referring to the number of students, considered by him (but also by other rectors, as will be seen in the present material) too high, Rector Călugăreanu did not hesitate to express his own doubts, wondering if it was thanks to a greater desire for culture in the younger generations than before the war, or was it only a pursuit of titles, considered to give rights to positions. Then, the Rector pointed out that young people who decided to pursue university studies did not have the same level of training as in previous periods, and did not show the same desire and strength to work seriously, to acquire the

knowledge offered by university studies (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1923, p. 3)

Of course, Dimitrie Călugăreanu also mentioned the progress of the University, especially the success in acquisitioning the scientific materials that had been commissioned abroad, which facilitated the practical work and the courses to be carried out in better conditions (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1923, p. 3). However, compared to his predecessor, Professor Călugăreanu chose to dwell more on undertaking a critical analysis of the problems in education, thus leaving to posterity a special image about the reality of the time.

As for the next rector, Prof. Iacob Iacobovici, in his opening speech for the academic year 1922-1923 he presented the institutional achievements but, in accordance with what his predecessor also pointed out, the rector emphasized that the purpose of the University was to train generations of people of character, not to get as many graduates as possible, insisting that it was not the quantity but the quality of the students' training that was important (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1924, p. 4). Not insignificant, but rather surprising we consider to be the point of view expressed by the rector Iacobovici concerning the educational process, especially the comparison he made with the Western-British system. In his speech at the opening of the academic year, he said that in the West, Universities (especially British Universities) have cultivated two postulates: culture and education, and that English higher education institutions are those that gave the world that unique human species, the gentlemen. And he goes on to say that the University does not have to be a factory of titles that allows holders to live an easy life (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1924, p. 6-7).

A year later, the new rector, Prof. Nicolae Bănescu, came before those present at the opening of the academic year with something special compared to his predecessors. If this rector's report had a structure similar to that of his predecessors, the festive speech had a distinct theme. Professor Bănescu preferred to give a lecture on the Greek Academy in Bucharest and the School of Gheorghe Lazăr (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1925), but not without remarks on certain delicate situations in the University. At one point, Nicolae Bănescu, referring to the general situation of the institution, drew attention to the fact that the University started as a well-cohesive body and through a valuable collaboration of the factors that compose it, year after year its powers increased, but the

year that ended was a year of crisis, in which unity was broken (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1925, p. 7). We do not consider Bănescu's remark to be meaningless, taking into account the tensions existing in the institution in the period 1922-1924: the anti-Semitic movements; the influence of some political groups on the students; the student strikes and rallies (some of them even violent). In addition to the problems mentioned, Nicolae Bănescu also wanted to emphasize the financial problems faced by the institution, stating that the amounts received from the State could not keep up with the high costs of the scientific material (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1925, p. 36).

Rector Camil Negrea, in his report presented in the autumn of 1924, emphasized the need for appropriate legislation for the proper conduct of academic activities. We consider that his words were aimed not only at those present at the beginning of the academic year but also at the lawmakers. Referring to the existing laws, Camil Negrea considered that the unification of the university education regime by drafting a new law seemed to be still far from the implementation phase. His conclusion resulted from finding that the Law of June 13, 1925, which extended the provisions of the Law of Secondary and Higher Education only to the University of Chernivtsi, resulted in the University of Cluj remaining under special legislation (Monitorul Oficial, 1922), except for the provisions of art. 72-95 of the Law on Secondary and Higher Education extended upon the Universities of Cluj and Chernivtsi. But even those provisions were considered inappropriate for the situation in Cluj, which is why Rector Camil Negrea pleaded for their removal. That removal should be achieved through a truly modern regime, and not through the convenient procedure of the extent of the old law, the numerous and serious shortcomings of which have been the subject of so many complaints (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1926, p. 5).

Highlighting the delicate issue of a unitary law on higher education, expressing his disappointment that even in the last academic year the Legislatures did not fulfil the desire of teachers to compile the code of higher education, however, Professor Negrea did not forget the achievements of the legislative field. According to the opinion expressed then, one of the most important laws was that of November 4, 1926 (Monitorul Oficial, 1924), which decreed the acknowledgement of the legal personality of the University of Cluj, the institution becoming equal to the Universities of Iasi and Bucharest, providing the possibility of

having a distinct patrimony. By the same law, the special laws and regulations that existed in the University were expressly reconfirmed (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1926, p. 6). Constantin Negrea also referred (in a positive sense) to the law published on March 4, 1925 (Monitorul Oficial, 1925), which repealed and replaced with new provisions art.81 of the law of higher education, regarding the appointment of tenured teachers not only through competition, but also by recommendation (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1926, p. 6). However, he was critical of a legislative provision of November 4, 1924 (Monitorul Oficial, 1924), which stipulated the establishment of Judicial Commissions for members of the Faculty in universities. Regarding the initiative, the Rector of the University of Cluj claimed that, once the Judicial Commissions started functioning, the principle of university autonomy was ignored, because the judiciary was placed at the head of the accustomed evaluators of the teachers, who must also be teachers, understanding of the issues in question (Anuarul Universității din Cluj, 1926, p. 6). The episode allows us to have access to essential elements for the construction of the university autonomy of that period - and which indicate the academic standards of the University of Cluj in this regard.

In the next three years, the rectors' reports were simpler, not referencing particular events or decisions, restraining to the presentation of the rectory staff and other structures of the University management, statistical data on students, teaching staff, scientific activity, courses, institutes etc. In his 1927 report, rector Gh. Bogdan-Duică announced that a history of the evolution of the institution would be published in the first decade of functioning in the Romanian state borders. At the same time, he also announced the decision of the University Senate to rename the University as "King Ferdinand I University" (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I din Cluj, 1929, p. 5). Instead, Emil Hațieganu, in the report presented at the beginning of the academic year 1928 - 1929, raised the issue of proper behavior within the University, stating that he planned the cultivation of good collegial relations. Reviewing what happened in the previous academic year, Professor Hațieganu noticed the unproblematic environment in which the academic activities took place: the students had a dignified behavior, the scientific activity progressed (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1929, p. 5-6), marking an academic year without problems. It is a rare

image in the inaugural reports or speeches of the rectors, in the sense that it was clearly stated that there were no tensions or delicate situations, on the contrary, progress became more visible, existing problems being minor, unable to cause dysfunctions in the current academic activities. The university seemed to have reached an internal balance - but also in relation to the society in which it operated. The period of "infancy" and hesitation was over.

However, the situation would change (as a consequence of the tensions in the Romanian and European political field) not long after. Emil G. Racoviță, in the report read in the solemn meeting of October 21, 1930, held under the auspices of HM King Charles II and the Royal Family, practically sounded the alarm when announcing that hard times were coming. He warned that the youth is choosing (in large numbers) higher education institutions, but only in order to acquire a lucrative profession, those who wanted to prepare for a career in research being far too rare (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1930, p. 5). At the same time, Racoviță noticed the ferocity of the economic crisis, its negative consequences affecting the University as well. Emil Racoviță also said that, in parallel with the economic crisis, there unfolded another crisis that is specific to universities. The latter is even more disquieting since the great mistakes of the past aggravated it. Despite all the insistence of many academics in the past, the reform never started (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1930, p. 17). Like other rectors, Professor Racoviță also drew attention to the problem of young people entering universities unprepared, and expressed his concern about a phenomenon he called "multiplication of diplomas" (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1930, p. 17). Last but not least he warned that tensions and unrest had resurfaced among students amid the economic crisis, lack of funding and declining living standards and that various groups and political figures were trying to manipulate university youth. The street riots of the students resumed, which determined the rector to bring back into discussion the principles of university autonomy and the status of the so-called "academic citizens" (professors and students). However, he informs that the debates that took place over several months resulted in two official documents on university autonomy and the status of professors and students (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1930, p. 280), documents that remained in force throughout the second interwar decade.

Emil Racoviță was succeeded by Iuliu Hațieganu. In his inaugural speech on October 21, 1930, on the occasion of the solemn opening of the 1930/1931 academic year, Hațieganu pointed out that, at that time, the concept that the University was an institution of pure culture was slowly being abandoned, since it was evolving in a national and social direction, becoming an indispensable institution in the life of any state. At the same time, he brought back the issue of university education, which was considered that could no longer focus only on the training of professionals, but also on the training of characters. Also, according to Iuliu Hațieganu, the University had to be concerned about the health of young people as well (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1931, p. 7). In turn, he re-examined the existing legislation at the national level, saying that in terms of university legislation it suffered from the same "disease" that was present in any legislation, i.e. the belief that by issuing a new law, morals and habits could be changed. Iuliu Hațieganu also specified that in the life of a University it is not the laws written on paper, but the spirit that leads and the model that is applied which are decisive, and that a legislation regarding higher education cannot be an improvisation, but something deeply thought out, solid and durable. Many social dramas exist due to the too frequent change of laws, but that nowhere do greater disasters occur through frequent changes of laws, than in education, be it of any category (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1931, p. 16). He supported university autonomy, stating that an autonomous university was more entitled (and even had the duty) to exercise criticism and influence over legislators and laws concerning education. He went on to announce that in the last year, several bills have been discussed at the University. That of Neculai Costăchescu ⁶, which (although it remained at the project stage) had the merit that in addition to addressing all the problems of the university, discussed the need for the systematic organization of student life for the first time. In this regard, the University argued that the establishment of a "University Office" designed to coordinate and ensure the balance of student life should be welcomed as an initiative which cannot be delayed. Another document placed in the spotlight was Nicolae Iorga's legislative initiative on university autonomy. The idea was appreciated among the academics of Cluj, but they considered that it could be transformed into a law

⁶Former Minister of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs

appreciated at national level, only if it will be elaborated by the reunited Senates of all the Universities in the country (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1931, p. 16). It was an interesting, innovative point of view, which required the participation of universities in the drafting of laws concerning themselves. Thus decision-making was not only the attribute of the parliamentary majority or of those in government, who did not always know in detail the particularities existing in the university education system.

Nicolae Drăganu, in his inaugural speech delivered on October 25, 1932, on the occasion of the solemn opening of the academic year 1931/32 and subsequently in the report on the school year 1931/32, read in the festive opening meeting (November 8, 1932) of the year 1932/33, emphasized the budgetary problems faced by the University. Highlighting the role and activity of the university Senate, perhaps more than any other rector, he warned that the university structure wasted its powers fighting with insecurity and lack of material resources. Budgetary and “household” problems completely absorbed its activity. For truly academic issues, there was no time left, nor were there opportunities. Accusations were brought against the directors of Finance, whom N. Drăganu suspected of ignorance or the fact that they did not bother to find ways to remove the crisis, given that the institution's budget was reduced by 60% (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1932, p. 17). He also criticized the excessive centralization imposed by the Ministries of Education and Finance, pointing out that, although the University was autonomous and responsible for its own management, if it did not comply with the provisions of the law on public accounting, a series of collective auctions were required by the Central Auction Office, approvals being granted contrary to the proposals made by the University Commissions - internal structures which, knowing the needs of the institution, were also the most entitled to make recommendations (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1932, p. 20-21).

The consequences of the financial crisis on the University were also in the attention of the new rector, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă who stated at the opening of the academic year 1932-1933 that all services are suffering; seminars, laboratories and institutes (which during the current financial year did not receive funding for their teaching and scientific expenditure), could not complete their projects; libraries ran out of magazines and had to stop buying books; clinics struggled to

maintain their activity; student dormitories had to cancel all scholarships (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1933, p. 5-6). He then turned his attention to the government, headed by most prominent politician in Transylvania according to Goangă, who, in his capacity as chairman of the Governing Council, decided and imposed the creation of the University (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1933, p. 6). However, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă would also admit that no matter how great the goodwill of the government, in those circumstances not much could be done for the University, which, only through its own policy of ensuring resources could ensure its proper functioning and its true autonomy (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1933, p. 7). He also brought back the issue concerning the great number of students, calling for a severe selection of those who wanted to take university courses. At the same time, he suggested that in research, the University of Cluj should turn its attention to investigate national realities as well as those of the province (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1933, p. 10).

Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă remained rector until the end of the interwar period because, after the Law on the organization of university education came into force on April 22, 1932, the system of electing the rector changed, being identical to all higher education institutions in the country. According to the new legal provisions, the rector once elected had a term of five years and could be re-elected. But a rector could not have more than two terms (Bunescu et. al., 2004, p. 257).

As the economic crisis passed and its effects were less felt by academia, university life began to run smoothly, as noted by Rector Goanga himself in his inaugural speeches for the next two academic years. For example, at the beginning of November 1934, he highlighted the quiet period when no agitation disturbed the university community, stating that for the first time since the functioning of the Romanian University of Cluj it was possible to establish a full understanding between students and university authorities who collaborated to reorganize student societies and associations. Principles and guidelines were discussed, statutes and regulations were drafted, which were examined and approved in several meetings of the University Senate. The new student committees were also elected (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1935, p. 6).

Those interested in the speeches at the beginning of the new academic year will be able to easily notice that, in 1937, two of the most

common topics over the years were resumed, namely: the degree of preparation of young people willing to pursue university studies and the mission of the University. Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă said in the autumn of 1937 that the fundamental mission of any university is scientific activity and creation. However, as far as the University of Cluj is concerned, its main mission was research and knowledge of national realities, in order to develop an intense national and cultural propaganda, according to the rector (*Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I*, 1938, p. 10-11). These last statements of Professor Ștefănescu-Goangă should not be surprising, taking into account both the internal and European context of those years: a period in which the states contesting the peace treaties concluded at the end of the First World War were more active at continental level; the borders of Central and Eastern Europe were brought back into diplomatic, political and academic debates; Romania's integrity and security being visibly threatened. Romanian academics could not be indifferent to the existing challenges, especially if they were related to the status of Transylvania. The scientific productions regarding the Romanian past and traditions were starting to be more and more numerous, the proof of what was stated being found in the University Yearbooks, more precisely in the numerous pages in which the annual publications of the University professors and researchers were mentioned.

As the situation on the continent became more and more worrying, university life became tense again due to several factors: legislative changes and the establishment of an authoritarian regime in the internal plan; the resurgence of extremist right-wing movements; the reactivation of Hungarian cultural and political circles in Romania which were hoping for a change in the Romanian-Hungarian border in favor of Hungary etc.

On November 6, 1938, at the opening ceremony of the academic year, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă first brought to attention the problem of reorganizing higher education. He reiterated the mission that any university must have (scientific activity and education), but for the first time during the entire interwar period, a rector (in this case Professor Goangă), claimed that in such times The University cannot remain isolated in the ivory tower of the “academic citadel”, without being in touch with the realities and current events of life. As a cultural institution, its mission is to clarify in its unique way the aspirations and currents of

thought that trouble the national, social and cultural life of the people (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1939, p. 11). Furthermore, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă confessed that, in his opinion, in order for the University to be able to fulfill its mission, it must meet three conditions: the first one concerns the teaching staff - which was supposed to be an elite one, with a vocation as a researcher. But in order for the Universities to be able to benefit from such a teaching staff, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă said that more requirements must be met: 1) a system for recruiting teachers and auxiliary scientific staff based on criteria of scientific competence; 2) an appropriate salary; 3) facilitating their activity by equipping libraries and laboratories; 4) ensuring the freedom of scientific research, the freedom of discussion and the expression of scientific beliefs, the freedom to organize and practice their discipline in accordance with scientific requirements; 5) the obligation of scientific research. Whoever did not prove to be able to work scientifically or whoever, for some reason, ceased to be productive had to be retired early; 6) the establishment of a fund, in order to be able to publish the scientific works of the professors and researchers of the University; 7) establishing awards for outstanding scientific works; 8) organizing a simpler system for the promotion of deserving assistants and supervisors, as well as the establishment of more teaching degrees and titles of distinction for teachers with exceptional scientific merit. The second condition that had to be met concerned the students. They had to be more thoroughly selected and their number limited to the capacity of the University, as well as to the real needs of society. The third condition was to ensure favorable working conditions, laboratories, qualified staff, well-organized libraries and institutes (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1939, p. 12-14).

The worsening of the international situation, the outbreak of armed conflicts, the disappearance of some European countries, the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the abuses of the far right, the assassination attempt on Rector Ștefănescu-Goanga (set up by a group of legionnaires), marked the academic life of Cluj, a fact to be noticed in Professor Goanga's speech in November 1939. Making a comparison with the festivities of previous years, the Rector of the University said that, for the first time, the opening of the new academic year was taking place in a changed atmosphere with strong reasons for concern due to ongoing events which violated internal peace and the

security of the borders of the country. Due to the external turmoil and dangers, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă claimed that it was necessary to check the degree of strength or weakness of the state institutions, the University being one of the important institutions, without a doubt (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1940, p. 7-8). Then he returned to the mission of the University, and identified the situations that favored the emergence of some problems in academic life. Rector Ștefănescu-Goangă specified that, in his opinion, one of the essential causes that disturbed the good progress of the University and prevented it, to a large extent, from developing its didactic and scientific activity in favorable working conditions was the excessively large number of students, many of whom did not benefit from a thorough high school. He went on to say that the issue of the selection and training of the ruling elite was the main concern of the Western countries, because both economic prosperity and the social and cultural progress of any country depended to a large extent on its favorable resolution. According to Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, that is why in the West special classes and schools have been set up and organized for discovering the talents and higher mental abilities of gifted young people; that Western universities and colleges are pursuing the selection of gifted young people by instituting severe examinations upon entering universities. And he concluded that in our country a thorough selection of students was required more than in the West (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1940, p. 11-12). Another shortcoming of the University, identified by Ștefănescu-Goangă, was the lack of space and material resources. He did not refrain from criticizing the attitude of the authorities towards academics, stating that, yes, the state has the right to ask the University for activity and scientific creation, it has the right to demand that the scientific and professional training of students be done as thoroughly as possible, but the university too has the right to demand that society and the state provide it with the necessary space and the material means it needs, without which scientific training and productions cannot be achieved satisfactorily, no matter how much effort its staff would make. He also suggested that the state create a national fund to support scientific research in universities. Another problem that arose in the academic life, listed as one of the most serious, was the series of student agitations that took place, preventing the normal functioning of the University, shaking the principles of order, discipline and authority,

degenerating into criminal acts, which endangered the peace and security of the state (Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I, 1940, p. 15-17).

The security and the integrity of the state could not be defended a few months later. The festivity of the autumn of 1939 was the last opening of a university year in interwar Cluj, without suspecting then. The cession to Hungary of a large part of Transylvania (including the city of Cluj), in a complex occurrence of factors, at the end of August 1940, determined that on September 1, the management of the University should consider the. On the same day, the University Senate received a message from the relevant ministry which indicated the city of Alba-Iulia as a place of refuge. The professors from Cluj did not agree with that proposal, preferring Sibiu as a place of refuge for the "King Ferdinand I" University. The evacuation began immediately after the Vienna decision, with the last transport taking place on the afternoon of September 8, 1940. Not all the faculties functioned in Sibiu. For example, the Faculty of Sciences was established in Timisoara. One month later, on October 5, 1940, the new governing structures of the University in the shelter were appointed. Sextil Pușcariu became rector once again. On October 8, during the meeting of the University Senate, the Rector presented a briefing on how the transport and installation of the four faculties were carried out in the intended locations, and then, on November 10, 1940, both in Sibiu and in Timișoara, "King Ferdinand I" University resumed its activity, but without the festivities they had been accustomed to for twenty years.

Despite all the difficulties inherent in the refuge, with teachers, administrative staff and students mobilized for the front, with numerous material and financial deficiencies, the Cluj institution continued to promote national values throughout the war, while maintaining the university ideal of academic autonomy and its own status and prestige in the Romanian university system. The university remained in Sibiu and Timișoara for almost five years. Attempts were made to return in the autumn of 1944, but the existing situation, and especially the new status of the province under Soviet military administration imposed a postponement. The return was made in 1945.

The speeches of the rectors from the investigated period are a special image of the metamorphosis of the University of Cluj, from its creation as an institution of the Romanian state, to the end of a special

historical period, which saw Romania crossing dictatorships and a war, which forced the University to go into refuge and which brought the most difficult constraints and trials on the University of Cluj. But the opening speeches of the academic year were also ways to anchor the University in the historical realities of that moment, to synthetically express a position and to define a destiny. Like true "cameos" of academic construction, these speeches are revelatory for the history of the University.

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