

1940 – Transylvanian Institutions and Personalities Promoting Romanian Culture After the Vienna Arbitration¹

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Abstract: Following the German-Italian decision of August 30, 1940, Romania was forced to cede half of Transylvania, including Cluj. Following this decision, the University of Cluj was forced to take refuge.

With regard to the place of evacuation, it was established that three faculties of the “King Ferdinand I” University of Cluj, i.e., the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, and the Faculty of Medicine, be located in Sibiu, while the Faculty of Sciences in Timișoara. After finding the spaces, and especially after Iuliu Hațieganu took over the mandate of the rector of the university, the academic community of Cluj regained its internal balance. The courses were held in accordance with the curricular standards of that time, and the scientific and journalistic activity of teachers, researchers and students was, throughout the entire period of the refuge, remarkable.

Keywords: exile; World War I; Iuliu Hațieganu; University of Cluj; Romanian intellectuals

¹ An earlier version of the article was published in Romanian in: M. Mureșan & M. Trufan (Eds.). (2020). *Anul 1940 în istoria Europei. Între expansiune și declin* (pp. 240-248). Casa Cărții de Știință.

The news of what happened in Vienna on August 30, 1940, when, under German-Italian auspices, the Romanian-Hungarian border was changed, leading to the Romanian Kingdom losing over 43,000 km² of Transylvania that had to be ceded to Hungary, shocked the Romanian public opinion. Romania then lost almost half of Transylvania, with a population of about 2,600,000 inhabitants (of which more than half were ethnic Romanians), along with important urban centres, in which, during the interwar period, the authorities from Bucharest have invested enormously in order to promote the Romanian specificity. And, as a direct consequence of the policy of supporting national interests and identity, a pleiad of Romanian intellectuals and institutions asserted themselves in Transylvania, a special place having the Romanian University of Cluj.

Romania's obligation to give up a large part of the Transylvanian territory, not long after ceding Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia to the Soviet Union, and Quadrilateral to Bulgaria, led to widespread protests throughout the country. In Cluj, the Romanian inhabitants of the city, already on August 30, took to the streets to demonstrate against what they considered to be an odious diktat. Romanians from the neighbouring communes joined the citizens of Cluj and, in an impressive column, marched on the city's main boulevards and in front of the town hall, showing their desire to defend the country's borders (Simion, 1966, p. 377). In Bucharest, a large crowd gathered in front of the statue of Mihai the Brave, from where they went on to demonstrate on the main arteries of the Capital, then heading to the home of the well-known Transylvanian political leader, Iuliu Maniu. But actions to condemn the injustice done to the Romanians in Vienna took place not only in Cluj or Bucharest, but also in Arad, Braşov, Sibiu, Timişoara, Oradea, Alba-Iulia, Baia-Mare, Iaşi and Constanţa, as well as in several other smaller cities and towns in the ceded territory or in Romania. The magnitude of the demonstrations across the country was not only reflected in the press of that time, but also aroused the concern of Hitler's representatives in Bucharest, which led the German Legation in Bucharest to report to Berlin on September 2, 1940, that great anti-German demonstrations are taking place all over the country. A day later, on September 3, the same legation recorded that demonstrations were taking place throughout Transylvania, with people shouting: "Down with Hitler," "Down with Mussolini," "We are not giving Transylvania." (Simion, 1966, p. 378-381)

Similarly to other states on the continent, in our case as well, the intellectuals, through specific forms of manifestation, were at the forefront of actions meant to challenge the policy of revising the Peace Treaties of 1919-1920, promoted in more and more countries around Romania, especially after the rise of Nazism. In fact, World War II offered many intellectuals from the countries involved, and who had to suffer from territorial losses and military operations, the opportunity to assert their ethical ideals (Sălăgean&Lapadatu, 2013, p. 26) in university courses, lectures and publications that have remained in the attention of researchers and in the bibliographies on national and international historiographical topics ever since.

At the time when the country was facing difficult events during the summer of 1940, Romanian intellectuals were no worse than their foreign counterparts. In that context, we note, first of all, the attitude of the faculty of the Romanian University of Cluj (renamed in the meantime “King Ferdinand I” University), who had no way of remaining indifferent to the act of Vienna on August 30, 1940, that had a direct connection with the future status of Transylvania and the position of the University itself.

While on the streets of Cluj the demonstrations and protests started by the Romanian inhabitants of the city on August 30, lasted several days, in the plenary session of the Great College of the University of Cluj, chaired by the rector Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, several professors expressed indignation at the way in which Transylvania was dismantled (Simion, 1996, p. 378). But the protests did not change either the fate of Romania or that of the Transylvanian Romanian intellectuals. Caught unwittingly, like the whole country, in the throes of the interest games of the Great Powers of the late 1930s, powers that redrew the borders of Central Europe, the University of Cluj was forced to pack up and refuge, after its hometown was no longer part of Romania from August 30, 1940 (Sălăgean, 2019, p. 92).

The imminent evacuation of the “King Ferdinand I” University of Cluj found the academic community at a time when it was planning to consolidate its internal development process and increase the European prestige of the institution. Following the decision in Vienna, the rector of the university, pressured by the events, tried to avoid exacerbating the situation. In the rector's view, the evacuation had to be carried out as quickly and as orderly as possible, with dignity, peace and understanding, knowing that the forms of handing over the university's patrimony to the

new Hungarian state authorities had to be established, according to the provisions of the Vienna Arbitration (Pușcaș, 2003, p. 546-547). With regard to the place of evacuation, it was established that three faculties of the “King Ferdinand I” University (the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, and the Faculty of Medicine) be relocated to Sibiu, while the Faculty of Sciences to Timișoara. Having found the new spaces for the relocation, and especially after professor Iuliu Hațieganu took over the mandate of rector of the university, the academic community of Cluj has regained its internal balance (Pușcaș, 2003, p. 548-549). The courses were held according to the curricular standards of that time, and the scientific and journalistic activities of teachers, researchers and students was, throughout the entire period of the exile, remarkable.

Of course, in the context of the war and given the territorial losses suffered by Romania, the scientific activity of the academics from Cluj focussed mainly on the Romanian past and traditions. The direction was outlined in the message delivered on the occasion of the opening speech of the 1941-1942 academic year, delivered by then-rector Iuliu Hațieganu on November 3, 1914, a speech in which he specified that the University of Cluj, in exile, has an essential duty to promote Romanian spirituality in the formation territory of the Romanian people, Transylvania. At the same time, rector Iuliu Hațieganu stressed the need to preserve the ideal of the university, academic independence and the continuation of scientific research. As in the case of other European universities of the time, his scientific activity was to be placed at national service, given that the university ideal was strongly tied to the ideal of the struggle for national liberation. In support of this objective, and in order to scientifically support the interests of Romanians in Transylvania, together with the research institutes already existing within the university, the *Centre for Transylvanian Studies* (Sălăgean et al., 2012, p.178) was established in Sibiu.

The initiative to found the Centre was launched in 1942, when, in July, at a meeting of the University College, professor Iuliu Hațieganu proposed the creation of a study circle dedicated to Transylvanian studies. The proposal was also supported by other professors of the university (among whom were: Ioan Lupaș, Alexandru Popovici, George Sofronie and Romulus Vuia), so by the decision of the University College, the creation of the Centre for Transylvanian Studies was announced, a university institution entitled “Institute of research and scientific

documentation on cultural, literary, artistic, historical, linguistic, ethnographic, geographical, economic, legal, bioanthropological issues." Later, the centre was also known as the "Centre for Studies and Research on Transylvania." The academic Silviu Dragomir was appointed as head of the institution (Pop, 2001, p. 10).

The Centre for Transylvanian Studies was organised into four sections: History and Archeology, Linguistics and Literature, Ethnography and Geography, and Social Sciences. (Sălăgean et al., 2012, p. 178) The list of publications that appeared under the auspices of the new institution is impressive, especially given the conditions of research and publication in a situation of refuge in wartime. Of course, the publications and the research area of the centre's researchers were directed towards the history of Transylvania, the main objective being to offer, above all, to the political decision-makers but not only, as many scientific materials as possible, through which, with pertinent arguments, the anti-Romanian propaganda could be countered.

The Centre for Transylvanian Studies published its own periodical, the journal "Revue de Transylvanie", a publication reorganised by the new university team in Sibiu. In fact, it must be mentioned that this was a "takeover" of an older journal "Revue de Transylvanie", published since 1943 under the auspices of ASTRA (Pop, 2001, p. 10), a journal, which in the new European context that appeared after Hitler took the power in Germany, and especially with the intensification of propaganda and calls for the revision of many European borders established by the Peace Treaties signed at the end of the World War I, proposed, since the first half of the interwar decade, through the studies it published, to be a source of dissemination in the European academic and political environment, from a Romanian perspective, of the history of Transylvania, of the demographic and ethnographic realities of the province, of the economic achievements and the situation of ethnic minorities after 1918, etc.

In addition to the aforementioned journal, volumes were published at the Centre for Transylvanian Studies, reunited in the collection "Bibliotheca Rerum Transsilvaniae." (Pop, 2001, p. 11) As in the case of journal articles, the subjects of history were predominant in

the case of the published volumes as well, but without leaving out subjects from other fields of study at the university².

And, while they were in Sibiu and Timișoara, under the guidance of rector Iuliu Hațieganu, the Romanian academics from Cluj did everything in their power to ensure the development of academic and research activity. At the same time, in the Transylvanian territory ceded to Hungary in 1940, the Romanian ethnics, having overcome the shock suffered by finding out the provisions of the Vienna Arbitration, tried to maintain and promote the Romanian ethnic and cultural identity within the new borders of the Hungarian state. And in the fulfilment of the aforementioned ideal, the most important role was played by the Romanian intellectuals left in their native places in the ceded territories of Transylvania.

On September 14, 1940, several intellectuals took the initiative to form the “National Community of Romanians in Northern Transylvania”, a group that wanted to become the leader of the Romanians in the Transylvanian territory that became part of Hungary. At the head of the community was Emil Hațieganu, a personality that acquired, through the magnitude and significance of his engaging gestures, the dimensions of a true national institution, being a true apostolic figure among the Romanians living in the occupied Transylvania (Sălăgean & Lapadatu, 2013, p. 31). The situation was not exactly easy for the leaders of the community, given the tensions that existed in many locations after August 30. The violence and abuses of the new administration in northern Transylvania, as well as the retaliatory measures ordered in response by the government in Bucharest, have been the subject of numerous complaints and memoranda addressed to the Axis powers. But this did not lead to an improvement in the Romanian-Hungarian relations (Anton, 2017, p. 34).

Still, under the coordination of Emil Hațieganu, it was possible to carry out an important activity to promote national cultural values, the press offering not only the main channel for promoting culture among the population, but also being one of the most significant forms of manifestation of ethnic and cultural identity at that time. The conditions for carrying out the activities of the newsrooms were precarious, and

² The annual list containing the publications of the university's professors and researchers can be found in the institution's yearbooks.

there were no material incentives either. There were great difficulties in obtaining paper distributions, writing the materials, while printing media were scarce and poor, and official censorship was, of course, opposed to many Romanian initiatives. However, despite the existing difficulties, three newspapers appeared, having a huge impact on the Romanians living in Transylvania: “Tribuna Ardealului” (the official publication of the National Community of Romanians in Northern Transylvania), “Viața ilustrată” and “Săpunâna” (published in Bistrița under the auspices of the community leaders of the Năsăud regiment). There were also other publications that were not so much in the attention of the authorities, due to their well-defined character by the very name they bore: calendars and almanacs. But political engagement existed in them as well, despite their seemingly benign names. In all the aforementioned publications, the articles with historical content were the most numerous, the most important events from national history being permanently invoked and adapted to the new contexts, in order to avoid censorship (Sălăgean & Lapadatu, 2013, p. 31-32). Keeping the proportions, the Romanian press in northern Transylvania (ceded to Hungary), returned to the habits and strategies of avoiding the Hungarian political censorship that it had built in the 19th century and used until the union of Transylvania with Romania, in December 1918, i.e., masking political intentions in literary messages and the use of Aesopian language. Such subversive solutions were, in fact, familiar to many Romanians who had seized the times before the First World War in Transylvania.

Even if the results obtained by the Romanian intellectuals were not always in line with their efforts and desires, their greatest achievement was that, throughout World War II, they managed to keep the national consciousness alive and give people hope. Taken as a whole, the efforts of the Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania, whether they manifested themselves in the territory ceded to Hungary, or in refuge in different cities of Romania, were put at the service of the desideratum arising from the need to preserve and promote the national identity. Becoming an important means of response to the policy of the Horthy regime, many of the writings of those years later entered the Romanian historiographical heritage, enriching it significantly.

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