

The Romanians' Ideals of Liberalism and Nationality in 1918*

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Abstract: *The Romanians' Ideals of Liberalism and Nationality in 1918.* The goal of the present paper is to show how both in the autumn of 1918 and before the Union of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December 1918, liberalism and nationalism steered the course of the Romanian nation in Transylvania as it entered the modern era. Romanians had accumulated democratic experience over several decades, with effective results in managing ecclesiastical, educational, cultural, social and economic problems. In the autumn of 1918, when the Great War was nearing its end and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was on the brink of breaking apart, they were able to assume the responsibility of detaching Transylvania from Hungary and providing fair and efficient governance in a province that had been devastated by 4 years of war and was now on the verge of collapse. Our attempt at reconstructing the destiny of the church and of Romanian civil society in the process of laying the democratic foundations of the Union of 1918 has revealed the complex political, economic and social transformations of the Habsburg monarchy from the 1848 revolution to the First World War.

Keywords: Austro-Hungarian Empire, Transylvania, Romanian civil society, liberalism and nationalism

Rezumat: *Liberalism și naționalitate la români în anul 1918.* Scopul acestui articol este acela de arăta cum în toamna anului 1918, dar și în deceniile anterioare Unirii, liberalismul și naționalismul au jalonat parcursul națiunii române din Transilvania în epoca modernă. Prin urmare, românii au acumulat o experiență democratică pe parcursul mai multor decenii, cu rezultate eficiente în gestionarea problemelor bisericești, școlare, culturale, sociale și economice. Ei au fost capabili

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în toamna anului 1918, când Marele Război era spre final iar Imperiul Austro-Ungar la un pas de dezmembrare, să își asume responsabilitatea desprinderii Transilvaniei de Ungaria și a guvernării eficiente și corecte a unei provincii devastate de patru ani de război și aflată în pragul colapsului. Demersul nostru de a restitui, într-o încercare sintetică, destinul bisericii și al societății civile în prepararea democratică a societății românești pentru Unirea de la 1918 a relevat complexitatea transformărilor politice, economice și sociale din monarhia habsburgică între revoluția de la 1848 și Primul Război Mondial.

Cuvinte-cheie: Imperiul Austro-Ungar, Transilvania, societate civilă românească, liberalism și naționalism

The centennial anniversary, this autumn, of the formation of Greater Romania compels the researcher to interrogate both the antecedents that led to the exceptional achievement of 1 December 1918 in Alba Iulia, and the international context from the end of the First World War. This international context encompassed the military realities, political-diplomatic circumstances and ideologies of those times. The end of the Great War made way for the (re)affirmation of new ideologies - for instance, Bolshevism in Russia - or favoured the reinforcement of other ideologies of liberal or democratic inspiration. Thus, at least in 1918, liberalism and nationalism merged to provide the peoples of Central and South-East Europe, which had been incorporated in autocratic multinational empires, with the ideological support they needed in their struggle for the restoration of their statehoods (in the case of the Poles, Czechs and Slovaks) or for the achievement of the unity and integrity of their nation-states (in the case of the Romanians, Serbs, etc.). It is the goal of the present paper to show how both in the autumn of 1918 and before the Union of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December 1918, liberalism and nationalism steered the course of the Romanian nation in Transylvania as it entered modern era.

What the name of *Transylvania* means for most people today is a part of Romania that is composed of a few regions which shared, over the centuries, an almost identical destiny: historical Transylvania or *Ardeal* (which was an autonomous principality from the mid-sixteenth century until 1867, when it was annexed to Hungary, first under Turkish suzerainty, and under Habsburg rule after 1699), Banat, Crișana and Maramureș. These territories that comprise Transylvania in the broader sense were successively conquered by the Kingdom of Hungary (starting from the eleventh-twelfth centuries), partially by the Turks (after 1541), and fully by the Austrians (after 1699). Until the First World War,

Transylvania was ruled almost exclusively – both at the level of central power and at that of the local administrative units – by Hungarians, Germans, and Szeklers. Romanians, who formed the autochthonous population that represented also a majority from a demographic point of view, had been gradually eliminated, starting in the fourteenth century, from political, economic and cultural entitlements in the state in which they lived. According to the Census of 1910, the total population of Transylvania included 5,225,618 inhabitants. From the point of view of the ethnic composition of Transylvania, in 1910 Romanians predominated (2,827,419 – 53.7%). They were followed by Hungarians (1,662,180 – 31.6%, although it must be said that Jews had been almost exclusively recorded as Hungarians because the criterion of the mother tongue, or the most frequently used language, was employed for meting out the citizens into various ethno-linguistic communities), Germans (564,359 – 10.7%), Slovaks, Ruthenians, Serbs, Roma, and so on, all of the latter amounting to about 5%.¹

Ever since the revolution of 1848 but especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly in the German area of the Habsburg Empire, middle-class men and women had formed a political movement that questioned the legitimacy of the central and local government system, which was based primarily on the nobility, on bureaucracy and the Catholic Church. This protest movement offered an alternative system of liberal values and cultural practices. Organized into hundreds of voluntary professional and cultural associations, supported by the efforts of their members, the associationist movement generated a political and civic culture which became a powerful means for the construction, coordination and control of the people's participation in the public and political life of the empire.² In 1848 and especially after that, liberalism appealed to a broader spectrum than those who were traditionally associated with the category of the *bürgertum*/bourgeoisie. Thus, membership in the new *bürgertum* was extended to other social groups, in particular to the educated ones, the liberal professions, etc. The new political movement needed educated citizens, able to look beyond the narrow horizon of local provincialism and to understand the interests of the national community within a global frame. The value

¹ *Istoria Transilvaniei, vol. III (de la 1711 până la 1918)* [The History of Transylvania, vol. III (from 1711 to 1918)], coords. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Magyari András, Thomas Năgler (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română – Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2008), p. 496.

² Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries. Liberal Politics, Social Experience and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 1.

placed now on the abstract idea of education reflected the economic and cultural accumulations that had been made possible by liberalism in Central Europe.³

Liberalism was not the only movement of political contestation in Central Europe. The national emancipation movements of the modern era incorporated culture in their ideology as a decisive element of the process of building national solidarity. National culture was an active and dynamic catalyst of unity, rising above artificial political barriers and serving as an effective weapon in the arsenal of political militancy.⁴ This nationalism, which was cultural in the first place, became another form of social and political mobilization among the peoples of the Habsburg Empire. Nationalism helped to mediate the attempt at transforming the policies promoted by the traditional liberal elites into a mass-oriented policy, predicated on the involvement of broad social categories. Such a transformation was nonetheless permanently under control and closely monitored by the bourgeois elites.⁵ Of course, the focus was on the involvement in the liberal-national movement of the consolidating and expanding middle class, a class that enjoyed financial independence and an appropriate level of education.

The premise from which we start in this research is that the union of Transylvania with Romania in 1918 had its origins in the joint efforts of several generations, which included individuals, but also associations that had managed, in time, through constant and complex actions, to maintain the national individuality of the Romanians in Transylvania, as well as to educate the masses in a liberal-democratic and national spirit. The actions of the Romanian bourgeois elites from Transylvania showed, in exemplary manner, that they deployed a strategy advanced by all the institutional components of any modern civil society: the civic and political education of the masses in order to turn groups of citizens into actors on the stage of the community's public life. All the cultural, economic, religious, professional, youth associations and institutions, etc. developed after the revolution of 1848, that is, after the emergence and consolidation of the Romanian civil society in

³ Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries*, p. 13.

⁴ Josef Chlebowczyk, *On Small and Young Nations in Europe. Nation-Forming Processes in Ethnic Borderlands in East-Central Europe* (Wroclaw-Warszawa-Krakow-Gdansk: Wyd P A N, 1980), p. 150; Peter Brock, *The Slovak National Awakening: an Essay in the Intellectual History of East Central Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Crearea identităților naționale în Europa. Secolele XVIII-XX* [The Making of National Identities in Europe. 18th-20th Centuries] (Iași: Polirom, 2002) etc.

⁵ Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries*, p. 4.

Transylvania, were supported exclusively by private donations and through membership fees. They were forms of association based on ethnic, social and professional criteria. They relied on volunteering and on the people's desire to become involved in the community for promoting material, social, cultural and, not least, national progress. In short, the massive integration of most of the Romanian social categories in Transylvania in the dialogue of society-culture-nationality, achieved by means of hundreds of associations, is an irrefutable proof of the political-national dynamism of all the socio-professional structures of the Romanian nation in Transylvania, from the second half of the nineteenth century until around the outbreak of the First World War.⁶

In general, in the decades before the war, not only in Transylvania, but also in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories, at the end of the nineteenth century there was an increase in the social categories related to industrial-commercial, bank loaning occupations, etc. In parallel, the share of the population that was active in the primary production sector decreased. It is a commonly acknowledged fact that, in general, representatives of socio-professional categories other than the peasantry were involved in the civil society. A considerable role in the socio-professional transition process of the population of Transylvania from a quasi-agrarian model to an agro-industrial one was played, in the decades preceding the Union, by the education system and by the progress achieved through the spread of literacy and by raising the population level of instruction. Without going into details, we can state that while in 1869 311,847 inhabitants, representing 13%, could read and write in the province, in 1910 823,053 inhabitants (28.3 per cent) possessed these intellectual skills.⁷ Within four decades the educated population had doubled in Transylvania (of course, people had different levels of training). This ensured the framework that allowed the adoption and multiplication of professions specific to the open, capitalist economy: officials in the justice, military, administrative, banking, trade and health systems, intellectuals, etc. Implicitly, the base of recruitment for those employed in various organizational structures of the civil

⁶ Liviu Maior, Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan, "Cuvânt-înainte" [Foreword], in *Asociaționism și naționalism cultural în secolele XIX-XX*, eds. Liviu Maior, Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2011), p. 8 sqq.

⁷ Ioan Bolovan, *Transilvania între Revoluția de la 1848 și Unirea din 1918. Contribuții demografice* [Transylvania Between the Revolution of 1848 and the Union of 1918. Demographical Contributions] (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane. Fundația Culturală Română, 2000), p. 235.

society was broadened. On the eve of the outbreak of war, with all the discrepancies still existing in the province, Transylvania had irreversibly embarked on the road to a modern society, with an occupational structure that evinced the remarkable progress registered in the six decades that had lapsed since the breakup of feudal relations. As such, the Romanian civil society reflected that evolution. In any case, the peasantry, illiterate for the most part, continued to provide consistent support to the liberal and democratic elites in their efforts to promote a different political culture in society.

In the national institutional system at work in the Romanian space, regional cultural associations (The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People - ASTRA, created at Sibiu, in 1861, as well as the national cultural associations founded in Sighet or Arad in the following years) held a special position. Their importance was attested by at least two aspects: on the one hand, due to their regional character, they imprinted a dynamic pace to cultural activity across a rather large geographical area, favouring in time the access of village communities to culture. On the other hand, by concentrating the political and intellectual elites of all the Romanians within the Habsburg Empire, these cultural societies supported and launched particularly fertile activities for the assertion of Romanian national individuality. All the associations mentioned above had a democratic character. Most of all, they had common concerns and aspirations, as they were all aimed at the development of the nation and of the liberal-national spirit, fuelling the Romanians' aspirations to unity.⁸

When regional cultural associations were set up, the leaders of the national movement took account of the new imperatives that historical evolution had placed at the forefront of debates in the second half of the nineteenth century, namely the democratization of the nation and the reconciliation between the elites and the masses.⁹ The circulating annual general meetings of ASTRA, the concerns for the organization and progress of peasants and craftsmen, the various cultural

⁸ Ștefan Pascu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român* [The Making of the Romanian National Unitary State], vol. I (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1983), p. 165; Vasile Netea, *Conștiința originii comune și a unității naționale în istoria poporului român* [The Conscience of Common Origin and National Unity in the History of the Romanian People] (București: Albastros, 1980), p. 194.

⁹ Arad County Branch of the National Archives, *Fund ASTRA*, File 6/1863, f. 28: "The new association [from Arad - B.I.] belongs neither... to democrats, nor to aristocrats ... The new association aims to provide a new direction to the education of the masses, an education that will steer all of them towards morality."

dissemination activities on the social agenda of ASTRA, etc., poignantly reveal these new meanings that the cultural-national movement had acquired. The establishment of the cultural society from Sibiu was the result of a "compromise" between the scholarly-elite and the democratic-popular trends. The cultural activities of ASTRA had a better chance of disseminating political projects, contributing greatly to education of the Romanian public in Transylvania in the national spirit. The subsequent evolution of events in Transylvania and the strategy of the national liberation movement from the decades before the 1918 Union fully validated the legitimate orientation of ASTRA. Actions taken pursuant to the principle of nationality led to minimizing the gap between the national movement elite and the people, making it possible to achieve cultural unity and national solidarity beyond temporary political-administrative borders.

The annual general meetings of ASTRA represented a particularly important form of cultural action. Besides promoting valuable national culture elements and launching major initiatives for the defence of the Romanians' individuality, the general meetings provided a legal framework for the coming together of all the leaders of the national movement. Thus, they could debate issues related to the political-national struggle, safeguarding the unity of the regional associations' national cultural strategy, whose model and focal point of resistance against Austro-Hungarian dualism was the cultural association in Sibiu, at least until the creation of political parties in 1869. After 1869 ASTRA created branches in almost all of Transylvania (there were about 60 of these on the eve of the outbreak of war). The periodic meetings of the management committee in Sibiu and the annual general meetings held in various cities or localities all over Transylvania provided many occasions for the political leaders to come together and discuss a political-cultural strategy. Socialization during these general meetings, the regular contacts between the elites and the basis of the political-cultural-national movement led to the accumulation of a solidarity that was specific to the institutional forms of the modern civil society. Romanian political leaders strove to achieve the formation of a middle class, to support the political struggle and encourage the educational and cultural institutions, which did not receive any material aid from the Hungarian state. Romanian banks, founded starting with the eighth decade (Albina, Victoria, Someșana, etc.), supported predominantly the Romanian middle-class and the wealthy peasantry. Analysing the content and character of the associations set up by the Romanians in Transylvania, Ioan Slavici remarked in *Românii din Ardeal*

[*The Romanians in Transylvania*], published in 1910, that “the hallmark of all these cultural establishments is the peasantry’s participation in them. An association, of whatsoever nature it may be, is not successful unless the peasants are sufficiently well represented in it, for everything is envisaged so as to tighten the bonds between the different sections of the people, and in Transylvania the nation means the peasantry, and national is only that which reflects the ways of the peasantry”.¹⁰

The annual general meetings of ASTRA were one of the fundamental forms of activity for the regional associations. In the general meetings, the members discussed issues of Romanian interest, organized public conferences, held theatrical performances, etc. Meeting once a year, the members of regional associations had the opportunity to meet each other, to exchange ideas, and to analyse the strategy of the national liberation movement. These types of activities and forms of socialization were specific to all the associations set up in Central Europe in the modern era.¹¹ Through the large participation of the members and some wider social categories, the general assemblies became genuine democratic bodies in public life, expressing the ideas of the Romanian civil society. It should be noted that some leaders of the association in Sibiu were members of the governing boards of many other cultural societies and local institutions. Mutual participation in annual general meetings or in the monthly meetings of the management committees were great opportunities for strengthening the unity of the national strategy. The expression of Vasile Netea, according to whom these committees, consisting of representatives of all the Transylvanian Romanians, were “a great parliament of Romanian culture, preparing the way for a political parliament”,¹² suggestively captures the entwinement between politics and culture in the Romanian national movement during the period of dualism.

In Transylvania, according to the electoral law of 1874, the number of the inhabitants who had the right to vote was narrower than in the counties of Hungary proper. According to estimates, in the elections held in the last decade of the nineteenth century the number of

¹⁰ Ioan Slavici, *Românii de peste Carpați* [The Romanians on the Other Side of the Carpathians], ed. Constantin Mohanu, foreword by Dumitru Micu (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993), p. 166 sqq.

¹¹ Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries*, p. 19.

¹² Vasile Netea, *Spre unitatea statală a poporului român. Legături politice și culturale între anii 1859-1918* [Towards the Statal Union of the Romanian People. Political and Cultural Links between the Years 1859 and 1918] (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979), p. 74.

voters amounted to 75,000 citizens,¹³ the majority of whom were Hungarians and Saxons. Compared to the entire Romanian population of the province, this number was relatively limited. ASTRA nonetheless developed a democratic laboratory with “electoral value” because the elections of the Central Committee, of the branches’ management committees, and the fact that the members of the association could exercise their right to vote in each general assembly contributed to the civic-democratic education of the Romanians. Thus, the nearly 2,400 members of ASTRA (in 1911) increased the number of Romanians who regularly exercised their democratic rights. Here we need to add several other hundreds of thousands of Romanians who were included in the associationist system all over Transylvania, through reading societies, economic self-help societies, funeral or social assistance associations, choral groups, teachers’ associations etc.¹⁴ Romanians had thus created a kind of *parallel state* to that in which they lived officially, an alternative state in which they had managed to become acquainted with liberal, democratic principles and values and to practice communal self-government skills.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Orthodox Church of the Romanians in Transylvania represented another framework conducive to democratic life and to a liberal-constitutional experiment. In 1868, the Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna obtained from the Hungarian authorities in Budapest and from the Court in Vienna approval for organizing a National Church Congress which was to debate a draft constitution for the organization of the church. At the end of this Congress, a document with constitutional value was adopted, entitled *The Organic Statute of the Greco-Oriental Romanian Church in Hungary and Transylvania*, which sanctioned the issue of the separation of powers (legislative, executive and legal) in the Orthodox Church, the principle of the autonomy of the church in relation to the Hungarian state, as well as the representative and elective system, with the participation of the laity in the leadership of church life and religious

¹³ Eugen Brote, *Un memoriu politic. Cestiunea română în Transilvania și Ungaria* [A Political Memoir. The Romanian Question in Transylvania and Hungary] (București: Tipografia „Voința Națională”, 1895) p. 89.

¹⁴ Pr. Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, *Asociaționismul cultural din zona Bistriței și a Năsăudului (1850-1918)* [The Cultural Associationisms from the Area of Bistrița and Năsăud (1850-1918)] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2017).

communities.¹⁵ The proportion of representation in all legislative bodies at the level of parishes, protopresbyterates, dioceses and the metropolitanate was two-thirds laymen and one-third members of the clergy. Synods at the parish, deanery, diocesan and metropolitanate levels were normally held once a year, but elected executive bodies (parish and protopresbyterial committees etc.) met more often. The fact that starting at the level of parish, ordinary people, sometimes illiterate peasants, participated regularly in the election of these executive bodies represented a tremendous electoral experience, which was essentially democratic, liberal. In the Greek-Catholic Church of the Romanians in Transylvania things were not always the same as in the Orthodox Church. Here the situation was a little more complicated due to its hierarchical subordination and direct affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the two churches acted as “surrogates of the state” for the Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They massively contributed to the acceleration of the process of securing their autonomy from the state, from the executive power. Under the Organic Statute of 1868, the Orthodox Church of Transylvania began a process of “institutional democratization”, to use a phrase that belongs to the sociologist George Em. Marica. This fully contributed, alongside associationism, to the formation and development of a political and civic culture among the Romanians in the decades prior to Union of 1918.¹⁶

Besides the elective democratic mechanism offered by the *Organic Statute*, this regulatory act also contained a few provisions intended to ensure the proper functioning of institutions in the Orthodox Church. Thus, from the level of the parish synod to the central governing bodies of the metropolitanate, only citizens of age who were “untainted and fulfilled their duties in the parish” could participate in the elections. Also, to deter nepotism and conflicts of interest, it stipulated that close relatives should not be included in the executive bodies. In the parish committee “father and son, grandfather and grandson, brothers, father-in-law and son-in-law cannot be at once members of the committee... Church wardens are to be elected by the parish Synod from among the most deserving men in the parish and they may not be related, up to the sixth degree of blood kinship and the

¹⁵ Paul Brusanowski, *Reforma constituțională din Biserica Ortodoxă a Transilvaniei între 1850-1925* [The Constitutional Reform in The Transylvanian Orthodox Church between 1850 and 1918] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), p. 9.

¹⁶ Liviu Maior, “Despre asociaționism și autonomizare în Transilvania secolelor al XIX-lea și al XX-lea,” in *Asociaționism și naționalism cultural*, p. 23.

fourth degree of matrimonial alliance".¹⁷ Of course, the reality was not always consistent with what the *Organic Statute* prescribed. The way in which elections were made by synodal deputies, both clergy and laity, was often a cause of concern for those responsible for the ecclesiastical life of the Orthodox Romanians. For example, Vasile Mangra, an important theologian from Arad (the future metropolitan in 1916) stated in the 1880s that he upheld the importance of the quality of the synod members in the Diocese of Arad, suggesting that Bishop Ioan Mețianu should pay more attention to the selection of these members in the future. Bishop Mețianu was also quick to point out the inability of various deputies or members of the parish, protopresbyterial and diocesan committees to deal with the problems of the church. To discourage the perpetuation of upstartism, he reiterated the conditions of admissibility to the electoral act in the church. Thus, at a conference held at the Theological Institute in Arad, Ioan Mețianu advised those present to elect "synodal deputies only from among men raised in the law of God, men devoted to the causes of our church, zealous men, able to contribute with advice and wisdom to the regulation and prosperity of affairs in our national church". Mangra did not hesitate later to express his concern about the future of the church. He drew the attention of the high prelate to the fact that "people need to learn, once and for all, the rules and order in the church. Because constitutionalism is not a system of anarchy, but one of order and stability!"¹⁸

What was extremely important was the cooperation between the two Romanian churches, at the level of the hierarchs but also locally, at the level of mixed villages inhabited by Orthodox and Greek-Catholics, in spite of the existence of partisanships that could be damaging to the national community. This was reflected in the Romanian civil society in Transylvania. The organizational-functional structure of ASTRA was regulated by the statutes of the institution, which remained relatively stable, although there were some attempts at amending the statutes over time. The governing body of the society was the annual general meeting, which elected a Central Committee of ASTRA, consisting, as a rule, of about 40 members (president, vice-president, notary, cashier, secretaries, controller, etc.). The position of president of ASTRA was occupied, for

¹⁷ Ioan-Vasile Leb, Gabriel-Viorel Gărdan, Marius Eppel, Pavel Vesa, *Instituții ecleziastice. Compendiu de legislație bisericească (secolul al XIX-lea)* [Ecclesiastical Institutions. Compendium of Church Law (19th Century)] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010), pp. 251, 253, 255.

¹⁸ Leb et alii, *Instituții ecleziastice*, p. 26 sqq.

tactical reasons, by both Orthodox and Greek Catholics, starting with Orthodox Bishop, then Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna (1861-1867), the Greek-Catholic Vasile Ladislau Pop (1867-1875), the Orthodox Iacob Bologa (1875-1877), the Greek-Catholic Timotei Cipariu (1877-1887), the Greek-Catholic George Barițiu (1888-1893), the Greek-Catholic Ioan Micu-Moldovan (1893-1901), the Orthodox Alexandru Mocsonyi (1901-1904), the Greek-Catholic Iosif Sterca-Șuluțiu (1904-1911) and the Orthodox Andrei Bârseanu (1911-1922). The same alternation occurred at the level of the vice-president: if the president was Orthodox, then the vice-president was Uniate. As Nicolae Iorga rightly remarked in 1905, "from the beginning the Association was both Șaguna's and Șuluțiu's, it belonged both to the Romanians in Blaj and to those in Sibiu, both to the Uniates and to the non-Uniates. And this represents its chief and most precious characteristic".¹⁹ Not coincidentally, the confessional duality and balance were preserved for the 6 members of the Central Romanian National Council (Vasile Goldiș, Aurel Vlad, Aurel Lazăr, Teodor Mihali, Ștefan Cicio Pop, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod), the national political body that ruled Transylvania until the Great National Assembly held in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918.

Therefore, Romanians had accumulated democratic experience over several decades, with effective results in managing ecclesiastical, educational, cultural, social and economic problems. In the autumn of 1918, when the Great War was nearing its end and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was on the brink of breaking apart, they were able to assume the responsibility of detaching Transylvania from Hungary and providing fair and efficient governance in a province that had been devastated by 4 years of war and was now on the verge of collapse. In Oradea, on October 12, 1918, the Conference of the Executive Committee of the Romanian National Party (PNR) adopted a *Declaration* expressing the desire of the Romanian nation from Hungary and Transylvania to decide its fate in a great national assembly. The conference held in Oradea, on 12 October, had a special significance also because it adopted a resolution to formalize the resumption of cooperation ties between the PNR and the Transylvanian Romanian Social-Democrats. The document drafted in Oradea, read by the deputy Alexandru Vaida-Voievod in the Budapest Parliament, on 18 October 1918, was a political statement of principles, sanctioning the independence of the Romanian nation and its desire of secession from Hungary. The Central Committee of the

¹⁹ Ioan Lupaș, "Înființarea Asociațiunii și conducătorii ei," *Transilvania*, XLII (1911), 4 (jubilee issue), p. 332 sqq.

Romanian Section of the Social Democratic Party in Hungary (PSDU) formed a delegation, consisting of Ion Flueraş, Iosif Jumanca, Enea Grapini and Ion Mihauş. The delegation met, on October 28, 1918, with members of the PNR in the parliament in Budapest. They decided the establishment, on parity basis, of a body that would coordinate the national emancipation struggle of the Romanians in Hungary, called the Romanian National Council (CNR). The council, formed on the night of 30 to 31 October in Budapest, was made up of six representatives of the PNR (Vasile Goldiş, Ştefan Cicio-Pop, Teodor Mihali, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Aurel Vlad, Aurel Lazăr) and six members of the Romanian Section of the PSDU (Ion Flueraş, Iosif Jumanca, Enea Grapini, Bazil Surdu, Tiron Albani, Iosif Renoiu). Leading the council was Ştefan Cicio-Pop, a politician from Arad. After the Declaration of independence on October 18, the setting up of CNR – the national sovereignty body of the Romanians in Hungary, including the major Romanian political forces – represented a major step on the path to national self-determination and prepared the union of Transylvania with Romania.²⁰

At the beginning of November, the CNR moved its headquarters to Arad, in the house of PNR leader Ştefan Cicio-Pop, becoming a genuine *provisional government* of Transylvania. For maximum efficiency, it was decided that only 3 representatives of the two parties should stay in Arad, while the others were to be active in the territory, in different areas of Transylvania or in Budapest. Wherever needed, they were to best serve the national cause. Thus, in Arad, in the house of Ştefan Cicio-Pop, 3 members of the PNR (Ştefan Cicio-Pop, Vasile Goldiş, Aurel Lazăr) and 3 Social-Democrats (Ion Flueraş, Iosif Jumanca, Enea Grapini) carried out their activity. During the month of November, there was a comprehensive process of setting up Romanian national councils on the entire territory of Transylvania, in parallel with the organization of national military guards, designed to introduce and protect the new Romanian administration in the province. Particularly important for the evolution of events was the meeting of the 6 CNR members held in Arad on 9 November, where the issue of this council taking over the whole administration on the territory inhabited by Romanians in Hungary and Transylvania was raised. At the proposal of V. Goldiş that a memorandum to that effect should be submitted to the Hungarian government, which was respond within 15 days, Enea Grapini and the other two Social-Democrats answered that “gone is the era of memoranda” and that Romanians, now on top of the

²⁰ Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan, *Istoria Transilvaniei*, 2nd rev. and complete ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Şcoala Ardeleană, 2016), p. 372.

situation, needed to talk “on equal terms” with the old masters. “We need to impose an ultimatum” and “within 48 hours, we need to have an answer to that ultimatum”. The consequence of this ultimatum, sent to Budapest on 10 November, were the negotiations between Romania and Hungary held in Arad, on 13-14 November 1918, in keeping with all the diplomatic rules between equal partners, more precisely between the CNR and the Hungarian revolutionary government, represented by Oszkár Jászi. At the end of these negotiations, the CNR stated unequivocally its willingness to let the Romanians decide their own fate, in the name of the principle and the right to national self-determination. The position of the Romanian Social-Democrats both in Arad, and, a few days later, in Budapest was very strong, in the sense of the necessity of recognising the right of the Romanian nation, which represented the majority in Transylvania, to decide their state membership. On November 16, 1918, in front of the members of the Central Committee of the PSDU, Ion Flueraş, who had been called to exchange some views with the Hungarian Socialists, declared without reservation that “the Romanian people have suffered too much from the rulers of the empire to be stopped from achieving their dream of union and the Socialists can’t and won’t prevent this, nor leave them under the dominion of those to whom they were enslaved in the past. They will be at the forefront of the people, leading them on the best path possible, until freedom is attained”.²¹

In the second half of November 1918, preparations for the union entered a straight line. On 16 November, the CNR issued the manifesto *To the Peoples of the World*, bringing to the attention of public opinion from around the world the intention of the Romanian nation to set up “its free and independent state” on the territory on which it lived. In the document, the CNR called on the international community to support the democratic endeavour of the Romanian nation in the effective enforcement of its self-determination. Then, on 20 November, a call was launched for convening the National Assembly of Alba-Iulia, on Sunday, 1 December 1918. It showed the democratic ways in which Romanians, the majority population of the province, were to delegate power through elected deputies (delegates), who were to decide on their future in Transylvania. The election of the local delegates was held in national assemblies. The representatives of all social categories (professors, teachers, priests, peasants, clerks, lawyers, students, military, etc.) were designated to express the adhesion to the union with Romania of people

²¹ Sorin Radu, *Ion Flueraş (1882-1953). Social-democrație și sindicalism* (București: Nemira, 2007), p. 56 apud Pop, Bolovan, *Istoria Transilvaniei*, p. 373 sqq.

from thousands of villages across the whole of Transylvania. So were the delegates of political organizations, ecclesiastical, cultural and professional associations and institutions, etc.

Our attempt at reconstructing the destiny of the church and of Romanian civil society in the process of laying the democratic foundations of the Union of 1918 has revealed the complex political, economic and social transformations of the Habsburg monarchy from the 1848 revolution to the First World War. In the autumn of 1918, when the entire Romanian nation in Transylvania was preparing to proclaim the achievement of national state unity, ASTRA and the churches of the Transylvanian Romanians were at the forefront of events. Along with other cultural institutions that had selflessly served the interests of the nation, the cultural society from Sibiu sent two representatives to Alba-Iulia,²² and the two churches elected their representatives for consecrating, together with the masses, the fulfilment of a desideratum that had driven the entire activity of the Romanians' cultural-national associations.

²² Vasile Curticăpeanu, *Mișcarea culturală românească pentru unirea din 1918* [The Romanian Cultural Movement for the Union of 1918] (București: Editura Științifică, 1968), p. 242.