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## ROMANIA AND THE GREAT WAR: POLITICAL, TERRITORIAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES<sup>1</sup>

Romania had come into existence as national state in 1859, through the unification of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (Old Kingdom). Since that moment the essential objective of the politicians, of the cultural and national elites became, together with achieving the state independence, the establishment of the national state which comprises the Romanians who lived in provinces of the neighbouring empires: Transylvania<sup>2</sup> and Bukovina belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Bessarabia, former province of Moldavia, had been incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1812. As in other states in Central and South-Eastern Europe, the discourse which prevailed in Romanian society especially towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century focused on achieving the 'national ideal', reduced to the phrase 'Great Romania'. This objective became an obsession for the political and cultural elite and would be used for political legitimation of some parties, but also became a source of inspiration for writers and poets. Until recently, the Romanian historiography built the exaggerated image of a true "national movement", which would have acted constantly and uniformly and would have gathered all political parties including political and cultural elites and organisations of Romanians from the neighbouring provinces around the quest for achieving the 'national ideal'.<sup>3</sup> The political discourse in Romania was justified also by the poor political, economic and cultural state of Romanians in Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia. The Romanians in these provinces, although they were a majority demographically speaking, were not recognised as a fully fledged nationality and implicitly they did not enjoy the same rights as the dominant nations. Moreover, exactly because of the political system, the Romanians in these provinces had a backward social and

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Transylvania" refers to all historical regions: Ardeal, Banat, Crisana and Maramures.

<sup>3</sup> In Romanian historiography there is a debate, there are a divergent opinions, regarding the way in which political elite understood to act in order to fulfil "the national ideal", Great Romania.

cultural status in comparison to the other nations and were subject to strong denationalisation processes, Russification in Bessarabia and Magyarisation in Transylvania. The status of Romanians in Bukovina was higher; in this region the Austrian authorities were more tolerant. The consequence of these situations was, as in the case of other nations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the establishment by the Romanian elites in the Austro-Hungarian provinces of political, economic and cultural institutions meant to protect their national identity. This did not happen in Bessarabia, where the repressive policy of Russia did not allow the Romanians to develop institutions meant to preserve the national identity. Encouraged by the development of national movements in the Empire, the national movement of Romanians made remarkable progress but they hesitated between loyalty to the Emperor, Vienna, and the idea of establishing a state of all Romanians by possibly uniting all the other provinces with Romania. Beyond the unquestionable cultural and linguistic identity of Romanians on both sides of the Carpathians there was a wish for some natural unification but there were also enough things which displeased the Transylvanian and Bukovina Romanians when they looked toward Romania: the deplorable state of the peasants, corruption and Balkan political mentalities etc. Nevertheless the idea that the establishment of "Great Romania" was possible seemed impossible from the very beginning since nobody could say how to achieve it. The outbreak of the war in 1914 would create a high level of expectation with the Romanians in the provinces, especially in 1916, when Romania would enter the war against the Central Powers with the declared objective to annex Transylvania and Bukovina, or, as the public discourse stated: to liberate the Romanians under foreign oppression. By joining the Entente Romania accepted implicitly that it would fight for partial achievement of the national project, in the context in which the problem of liberation of the Romanians in Bessarabia was postponed.

On another note, the outbreak of the war found Romania preoccupied with the fact that some fundamental social and political problems, on which the modernisation of the state depended and which troubled the society structurally: the necessity of a land reform to create social balance and the conditions of the development of the rural economy (which was prevailing in the state), and extending the right to vote and democratisation of the political system. The social cleavages were profound also for a researcher who goes into the details of the Romanian society, as it was a profoundly rural society, it would not be difficult to understand the state of economic, social and cultural backwardness of the peasants. In 1907 the last peasant revolt of a medieval type in Europe would erupt, and it had a magnitude that frightened the state institutions. The issue of land reforms, although it dominated the public agenda of political parties, together with the obsession of achieving the national ideal, remained unsolved.<sup>4</sup> The politicians agreed on the necessity to legislate these reforms but they did not agree on their scope and the ways to achieve them. The World War created a high level of expectation from this point of view.

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<sup>4</sup> Sorin Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România* (Iași: Institutul European, 2005).

## THE WAR

When the war broke out, the dominant discourse of the political and cultural elites was that of supporting the 'national ideal', uniting all Romanians in a single state ("Great Romania"), and the way to achieve this fundamental political objective was the war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The leaders of this group were mainly the Liberals led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, the Democrat Nationalists led by Nicolae Iorga, and the Democratic Conservatives led by Take Ionescu. Also numerous other representatives of the cultural elite who were not politically committed, publicists, and writers were supporters of this objective. The arguments in favour of the alliance with the Entente were mainly the creed that Great Britain, France and Russia would be the winners in the war and the alliance with them would offer Romania the possibility to annex Transylvania and Bukovina. The entry of Romania into the war against the Central Powers seemed realistic and was justified considering the achievement of the Romanian national project. Such a strategy was a decisive step towards Great Romania, even if Bessarabia remained outside the project. Anyway, the debates monopolised the public agenda, and especially when it was disclosed that Romania had signed a secret alliance treaty in 1883 with the Central Powers.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless there was no consensus of opinion regarding the way to achieve the national objective. An important part of the political and cultural elite, the majority being members of the Conservative Party but also some members of the Liberal National Party expressed a different opinion in favour of maintaining the alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany. Such an option was justified by the "Germanophiles" (as they were called at that time) by the necessity to fight the Russian Empire with the objective to first liberate Bessarabia. The Germanophiles (Titu Maiorescu, P.P. Carp, Alexandru Marghiloman and others) argued that the unification of Bessarabia with Romania must be a priority considering that the intense denationalising and Russification policy of Romanians of this province threatened to turn the province between the Prut and the Dniester into a non-Romanian province. The situation of the Romanians in Bessarabia, who were a demographic majority, was extremely poor, considering the Russian Empire did not allow the development of a Romanian national movement, and the Russification policy went so far that even the religious services were held in the Russian language. The Germanophiles thought that the situation of the Romanians in Transylvania and Bukovina was much better, considering they had developed political, social, economic and cultural structures meant to protect their national identity.<sup>6</sup> The patriotism of the so-called "Germanophiles", despite the failure of this orientation in 1918, cannot be questioned.

<sup>5</sup> Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *România și Tripla Alianță la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900–1914)* (București: Editura Litera, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Lucian Boia, "Germanofili". *Elita intelectuală românească în anii Primului Război Mondial* (București: Humanitas, 2009). The promoters of this direction were politicians, professors, writers, publishers: Felix Aderca, Ioan Slavici, Tudor Arghezi, Mateiu și Luca Caragiale, Constantin Stere, Ioan C. Filitti, Grigore Antipa, Duiliu Zamfirescu, Simion Mehedinți, Dimitrie Gerota, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Dimitrie Gusti, Dimitrie Onciul ș.a.

There existed also a pacifist orientation fuelled by social-democrats. These had a reduced influence in the public opinion in Romania since the level of urbanisation was low in the state and the number of the workers was small. Through the voice of the most important ideologist, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, the Romanian socialists campaigned against the war, condemned the German militarism, the Russian pan-slavism, the French and British colonialism, and the capitalist exploitation of the nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They considered that for Romania the best attitude was that of neutrality. Convinced internationalists, the Romanian social-democrats could not understand how full unity of the Romanian nations could be achieved through the war. There were also slightly nuanced positions of some socialist leaders. For example, Mihail Gh. Bujor and Ottoi Călin argued that the war had an imperialist character and the state unity could be achieved through socialism, but they admitted that the worker had the duty to defend his Fatherland. They claimed that between socialism and Fatherland there was no antagonism, that the Fatherland was the natural environment for the development of peoples. Such positions were considered by the radical Cristian Racovski as deviations on the way to socialism, and those who supported them were referred to as “social-patriots”.<sup>7</sup>

Taking into account that Romania had adhered through a secret treaty to the alliance of the Central Powers in 1883 (the treaty had been renewed in 1902 and 1912), King Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, as the head of state, saw himself forced to decide whether to comply with the clauses in the treaty and as a consequence Romania would enter the war together with Austro-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria against Russia or to let himself be influenced by the prevailing public opinion, which was shaped by “Entente-philés” and chose to fight the Central Powers (and implicitly against his own German people!) for partial achievement of the national project (i.e. the annexation of Transylvania and Bukovina to Romania). Neglecting his creed, Carol I took a balanced position and as a consequence Romania chose neutrality in the years 1914–1916. He died in October 1914, and his follower, Ferdinand, would choose to respect the pro-Entente option of the majority of the political elite and public opinion, Romania entering the War in August 1916 as an ally of the Entente. The alliance with the Entente pursued the partial achievement of the national project through annexing Transylvania and Bukovina to Romania, and the prime minister Ion I.C. Brătianu took responsibility for a war two fronts: with the Bulgarians and the Germans south of the Danube and with the Austro-Hungarians (later supported also by the Germans) on the other side of the Carpathians.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Jurca, *Istoria social-democrației din România* (București: Editura Științifică, 1994); Vasile Niculae, *O istorie a social-democrației române*, vol. II (București: Editura Institutului de Teorie Socială, 1997), p. 70–71; Flavius Solomon, “Un diplomat al revoluției. Cristian Racovski și social-democrația rusă în 1917,” in Vasile Ciobanu, Flavius Solomon, Sorin Radu (editors), *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX*, vol. VI (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Kriterion, Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2011), p. 275–279.

<sup>8</sup> *România în anii primului Război Mondial* (București: Editura Militară, 1987); Anastasie Iordache, *Reorientarea politică a României și neutralitatea armată, 1914–1916* (București: Editura Paideia, 1998); Ion Bulei, *La Romania Nella Grande Guerra. România în Primul Război Mondial (1914–1918)* (București: Editura Militară, 2006); Sorin Cristescu, *Ultimele 67 de zile din domnia Regelui Carol I al României* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2016).

In Bukovina and Transylvania, provinces in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the activity of the Romanian political parties had been suspended during the war. The leaders of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania (George Pop de Băsești, Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Aurel Vlad Aurel Lazăr and others), the main party that represented the national interests of the Romanians, and had profound dilemmas between the loyalty towards the Emperor and the Romanian national feelings, which urged them to support the policy of Bucharest. Not few were those who still believed in the capacity of the Empire to reorganise in a federalist structure. The tragedy of the Transylvania and Bukovina Romanians increased due to the mobilisation of youths, including the children of some Romanian political leaders, in the imperial army and sending them to the Eastern front where they came to fight the Romanian army.<sup>9</sup> The Romanian socialists in the Empire, beside the issue of loyalty to the Emperor, were tormented by principled ideological problems: what were they first, socialists and implicitly internationalists or Romanians and at the same time supporters of the national ideal Great Romania?! These doubts would preoccupy them until the end of the Great War. If the leaders of the National Party hesitated to make public declarations in relation to the interests of the Romanian nation during the war, the Social-Democratic Party in Transylvania and in Bukovina, who had an influence amongst the workers and urban public opinion, did not hesitate to condemn the war. Ion Flueraș, Enea Grapini, Emil Isac and others (Transylvania), as well as Gheorghe Grigorovici (Bukovina) pleaded for pacifism, claiming as did the Hungarian and Austrian social-democrats that the political, social and economic problems of the working class could not be solved through war.<sup>10</sup> One may conclude that because of censorship and the possible political repressions, the leaders of the Romanian political parties in Transylvania and Bukovina had a loyal attitude towards the Empire in the first part of the war and avoided expressing themselves regarding the national problem, the legitimization of the Romanian war against Austro-Hungary. Their attitude would become nuanced towards the end of the year 1917 and especially in 1918. In Bessarabia the national movement of Romanians would become active at the end of the year 1917 and the beginning of the year 1918, at the same time as the Bolshevik coup d'état and the collapse of the Russian Empire.

Beyond the national discourses and the favourable atmosphere to entering the war, Romania enters the great conflict militarily unprepared, with an economic infrastructure incapable of sustaining the war effort and relying on the promises of help from France and Great Britain. The campaign of the Romanian army against the Austro-Hungarian Empire (“Reunification War”) began with an extraordinary enthusiasm amongst the soldiers, and the war was popular with public opinion. After a promising debut in the war, in the military campaign in Transylvania, the Romanian army suffers a shameful defeat at Turtucaia (September 1916), south of the Danube, on the Bulgarian front. A series of

<sup>9</sup> Liviu Maior, *Doi ani mai devreme. Ardeleni, Bucovinieni și basarabeni în război 1914–1916* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2016); Keith Hitchins, *România, 1866–1914*, 4th edition (București: Humanitas, 2013), p. 207–252.

<sup>10</sup> Sorin Radu, *Ion Flueraș (1882–1953). Social-democrație și sindicalism* (București: Editura Nemira, 2007), p. 23–35.

defeats followed and culminated in the occupation of the capital city of Bucharest by the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and the retreat of the government, the king and the state institutions in Moldavia. The capital would move to Iași, and for security reasons, which indicate the panic of the leaders, the treasury was sent to Russia so that it would not fall into the hands of the Germans. The winter of the year 1916–1917 saw Romania reduced to Moldavia, Muntenia and Oltenia occupied by the armies of the Central Powers. The situation was dramatic: the military defeats were amplified by the epidemics, which plagued the army and population, the high number of refugees but also internal turmoil generated by the revolutionary movements in Russia. There was hope again in the summer of 1917, when the Romanian army, reorganised with the direct support of a French military mission, succeeded in winning a series of victories in Mărăști, Oituz and Mărășești, and resisting the offensive of the German army and saving the Romanian state. The moral of the Romanian army had been raised by the promises of land and electoral reform made on the front by King Ferdinand. The exit of the Russian Empire from the war would force Romania to request an armistice in the spring of the year 1918; the peace was signed in Bucharest on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1918, under extremely unfavourable conditions for Romania. The refusal of King Ferdinand, who postponed indefinitely the formal gesture to sign this treaty made it possible for the hostilities to reignite in the last two days of the war, thus preserving the status of a combatant state at the Peace Conference in Paris.<sup>11</sup>

### BIRTH OF THE “GREAT ROMANIA”

By a quirk of history, despite of the defeat of the Romanian army on the front and concluding a separate peace, at the end of the Great War Romania obtained not only Transylvania and Bukovina, but also Bessarabia! The unification of Bessarabia with Romania on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, being the 9<sup>th</sup> of April (according to the Gregorian calendar) 1918 was rather a surprise for the Romanian government considering that the alliance with the Entente (implicitly the Russian Empire) removed the annexation of this province from the plans of Romania. The unification of Bessarabia with Romania resulted from two elements: the defeat of Russia and the action of the Romanian Bessarabian political leaders who mobilised rapidly in the autumn of 1917, succeeding in proclaiming first the autonomy of the province and later its unification with Romania. Bessarabia had been a Romanian province separated by the Russian Empire in 1812 from Moldavia. Despite the fact that it had suffered a brutal process of Russification in the century and more of Russian domination, the former province continued being predominantly Romanian. Still, at the time of the collapse of the Tsarist Autocracy, the idea of unification with Romania was not clearly structured since uncertainty, fear and a Russophile mentality prevailed. In this context the pro-Romanian propaganda began to spread also with the

<sup>11</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1997), pp. 272–291; Hitchins, *România, 1866–1947*, p. 293–332.

support of some refugees from Transylvania (Onisifor Ghibu) or from Bukovina (Ion Nistor), the immediate result was the establishment of pro-Romanian political parties: the Moldavian National Party (led by Vasile Stroescu), the Peasant Party (led by Pantelimon Halippa). The situation of Bessarabia became complicated in the summer of 1917, after, in June, when Ukraine became an independent republic from Russia and claimed Bessarabia. Under these circumstances on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1917 a plebiscitary assembly of the Romanians, which assumed the right to proclaim political and administrative autonomy of Bessarabia, on the basis of the principle of self determination, and convening a Council of the Land (a kind of parliament), an assembly who had to be chosen based on the principle of being representative. The Council of the Land officially assumed the leadership of Bessarabia under the presidency of Ion Inculeț, and proclaimed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September/8<sup>th</sup> of October 1917 the autonomy of Bessarabia within Russia, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> of December 1917, proclaimed the Moldavian Democratic Republic. As a leading executive organ, a “Council of Directors” was chosen. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1918, shortly after Ukraine separated from Russia, the Moldavian Democratic Republic also declared independence. Under the circumstances of the revolutionary anarchy the Council of Directors decided to call for the help of the Romanian army. After several appeals, received with prudence in Bucharest, the government decided to send an army corps across the River Prut for restoration of order and protection of the population. The Soviet power, ignoring the principle of self determination, which it seemingly had supported until then, considered the action as an aggression act on its own territory, and broke off the diplomatic relations with Romania and confiscated the treasure of Romania which was preserved in Moscow. The orientation, which requested the unification, had become unstoppable. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March / 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1918, the Council of the Land proclaimed the unification of Bessarabia with Romania. The unification was conditioned by preserving a provincial autonomy with its own administration and its own Council (Parliament) until the adoption of a new constitution. The Bessarabians would give up the conditioned unification on the 27<sup>th</sup> November/10<sup>th</sup> of December after the Council of the Land adopted the agrarian law, which solved an extremely delicate problem of the Bessarabian peasants. On the same day the Council of the Land dissolved.<sup>12</sup>

In the autumn of 1918, the political crisis in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy increased. While the hostility of the oppressed peoples subverted the monarchy from the interior, the military and strategic situation of the Central Powers was becoming disastrous on all fronts. The declarations of the leaders of the Central and Associated Powers, in favour of the principle of national self determination catalysed the movements of nationalities in the Empire. One by one, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Southern Slavs,

<sup>12</sup> Gheorghe Platon (editor), *Istoria românilor*, vol VII, tom II, De la independență la marea unire (1878–1918) (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001); Alexandru V. Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* (București: Editura Victor Frunză, 1992); Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Basarabia de la unire la integrare* (Chișinău: Editura Cartdidact, 2007); Gheorghe E. Cojocaru, *Sfatul Țării: Itinerar* (Chișinău: Editura Civitas, 1998); Iurie Colesnic, *Sfatul Țării: Enciclopedie* (Chișinău: Editura Museum, 1998); Ion I. Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* (Chișinău: Editura Cartea Moldovenească, 1991); Ion Țurcanu, *Unirea Basarabiei cu România. Preludii, premise, realizări – 1918* (Chișinău: Editura Tipografia Centrală, 1998).

the Poles, and the Romanians established national political organisms with the wish to proclaim freedom and independence. The dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was in October 1918 a fact.<sup>13</sup>

After launching the manifesto *To My Loyal Peoples*, by the Emperor Carol I (16 October 1918), in the Parliament of Vienna, the Romanian Bukovina deputies turned the Romanian Parliamentary Club into the Romanian National Council. Against the background of the movements and transformations in the Empire, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, in Cernăuți, on the initiative of Sextil Pușcariu and Iancu Flondor, a national assembly was organised, in which the deputies of the Parliament of Vienna, the former deputies from the last Bukovina Diet, and the representatives of the Romanian population participated. A *Motion* was adopted, through which the representatives of the Romanian people in Bukovina declared themselves “with the power of national sovereignty the Constituent Assembly of this Romanian land”. The Constituent Assembly decided “the unification of entire Bukovina with the other Romanian lands in an independent national state”. The Constituent Assembly instituted a National Council (with the President Petre Bejan), consisting of 50 members, “in order to govern the Romanian people in Bukovina”. The National Council established also a provisional government, the Council of State Secretaries, led by Iancu Flondor. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 the General Congress of Bukovina took place in the Synod Hall of the Metropolitan Palace in Cernăuți; 74 delegates of the National Council, 13 delegates of the Ukrainians, 7 of the Germans, and 6 of the Poles participated. A motion was adopted through which the “unconditional and eternal unification of Bukovina” with the Kingdom of Romania was proclaimed.<sup>14</sup>

In Transylvania, the Romanian National Party abandoned passiveness and took political action, adopting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October in Oradea a political declaration regarding the self determination of the Romanians in Transylvania. The document was accepted without reservations by the Social-Democrat Party, the Romanian section. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1918 following the collaboration of the two parties, the Central Romanian National Council of Budapest was established; this functioned as a collective governing body in the name of all Romanians in Hungary and Transylvania. This Council acted as the legal authority of the Romanian nation in the power vacuum that existed after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of its constitutional and state institutions. The Hungarian government tried unsuccessfully, in the negotiations held in Arad (13–15<sup>th</sup> of November 1918), to convince the Romanian Transylvanian leaders to not initiate political actions for the unification of Transylvania with Romania and

<sup>13</sup> Mark Cornwall, *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: a Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century* (Europe Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002); John C Swanson, *The Remnants of the Habsburg Monarchy: the Shaping of Modern Austria and Hungary, 1918–1922* (Boulder, Eastern European Monographs, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Bradley Scott Zakarin, *The Struggle for the New World Order: the United States, Self-determination, and the Dissolution of Austria-Hungary* (Amherst: Amherst College, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> *Istoria românilor*, vol. VII / II, p. 500–506; Radu Economu, *Unirea Bucovinei 1918* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1994); Ion I. Nistor, *Unirea Bucovinei, 28 noiembrie 1918. Studii și documente*, ediție nouă de Ioan Felea, prefată de Mircea Popa (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Napoca Star, 2010).



promised them that the Romanian nation would be included in the Hungarian Republic with autonomous status. Shortly afterwards, the Central Romanian National Council organised a plebiscitary assembly in Alba Iulia, in which the appointed representatives of the Romanian nation participated in order to decide, based on the principle of national self determination and the demographic principle, the unification of Transylvania with Romania. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, in Alba Iulia 1228 elected delegates of the Romanian nation participated, supported by over 100,000 Romanians who in a very enthusiastic atmosphere voted for a *Resolution*, which proclaimed the definitive unification of Transylvania with Romania.<sup>15</sup>

The decision for the unification, and the documents proclaiming the unification of the three provinces with Romania respectively was made, and were signed after fiery talks, whereas between the leaders in the provinces different views existed regarding the status of the three provinces inside Great Romania. The resolution of Alba Iulia referred expressly to the status of provisional autonomy of the province until the drawing up of a new constitution. The proclamations of Chişinău, Cernăuţi and Alba Iulia requested a series of social, economic and political reforms. Another reality must not be disregarded, the fact that many of the political leaders in the provinces had serious reservations towards some political realities in the Old Kingdom, and expressed their criticism of the political principles, corruption, backward state of the peasantry and especially of the centralist policy supported especially by the liberals.<sup>16</sup> In Romanian historiography, the discussion regarding the birth of Great Romania is still open: was it a result of the participation of Romania in the war, of military action; a result of the national movements, of the actions of the Romanians in the provinces in the neighbouring empires; or a result of “luck”, as the conservative P.P. Carp would claim.<sup>17</sup>

The new political and territorial reality would be recognised internationally at the Peace Conference in Paris by signing the peace treaties with Austria and Hungary, which would validate the unification of Bukovina and Transylvania with Romania. In the context in which Russia did not participate in the peace conference, and the Ukrainian Rada (parliament) refused to recognise the unification of Bessarabia, the Romanian government took diplomatic actions to convince the Great Powers to sign a separate treaty through which the unification proclamation of Chişinău would be recognised. The treaty was signed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1920 in Paris by Great Britain, France, the USA, Italy and Japan.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ion Clopoţel, *Revoluţia din 1918 şi unirea Ardealului cu România* (Cluj: Editura Revistei „Societatea de Măine”, 1926), p. 111–118; *Istoria României. Transilvania*, vol. II (Cluj-Napoca: Editura George Bariţiu, 1997); Keith Hitchins, „Socialiştii români şi Republica Sovietică Ungară,” in Keith Hitchins (editor), *Mit şi realitate în istoriografia românească* (Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997), p. 192–193.

<sup>16</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură şi naţionalism în România Mare, 1918-1930* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1998), p. 64–224.

<sup>17</sup> Lucian Boia, *Primul Război Mondial. Controverse, paradoxuri, interpretări* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2014), p. 78. See, also, the nationalist perspective, reflected by Florin Constantiniu: The union was made by the people, by the nation!

<sup>18</sup> David Sherman Spector, *România la Conferinţa de Pace de la Paris. Diplomaţia lui Ion I.C. Brătianu* (Iaşi: Institutul European, 1995); Lucian Leuştean, *România, Ungaria şi tratatul de la Trianon 1918–1920* (Iaşi: Polirom,

## THE GREAT REFORMS: UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND LAND REFORMS

### Peasants and the Right to Vote

Until the Great War political life was the privilege of the educated people who had a high standard of living, the participation of peasants in political life was a rather token participation, considering the right to vote was a census one. The number of those who had the right to vote was extremely small. The democratic system had been instituted at the same time as the establishment of the modern Romanian state in 1859 and consolidated by the adoption of the Constitution of 1866. The latter established a modern political system based on the separation of powers in the state and on a census voting system, which represented a reflection of existing social cleavages in Romanian society: on one hand, a rich and educated elite limited in numbers and, on the other hand, a demographically overwhelming rural class, poor with a minimal education.<sup>19</sup> The principles of participatory democracy, and the value of the vote was assimilated with difficulty by citizens at large and by some citizens in particular, and this was due mainly to the extremely slow evolution of rural public education and peasants remaining in a precarious material state.

It was not by chance that the political agenda of the state was dominated until the time of the Great War by polemics between political parties on the topic of social advancement (through land reform) and political advancement (through electoral reform) of the peasants. The political and cultural elite of the country argued that the two reforms represented the only way to accelerate the modernisation of the country. Those who were in favour of such a change (Liberals, Social-Democrats, Radical-Democrats), although they had different views on the actual reforms, needed to confront a common adversary, identified as the Conservative Party. The Conservatives showed their scepticism toward the granting of the right to vote to the peasants, thinking the people were not prepared, illiterate and economically backward. Universal suffrage could bring anarchy into the country. The Great War would speed up the reform process, with the peasants' entry into the political life taking place finally through a radical reform performed under exceptional conditions. The Romanians in Transylvania and Bukovina (provinces within the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and also Bessarabia (a province of the Russian Empire) had an inferior status in comparison to the dominant nationalities. In Transylvania the Romanians were not recognised as a nation and did not have political rights. An extremely small number of them had the right to vote because of accumulated wealth. The Romanians in Bukovina and Bessarabia had a similar status.<sup>20</sup>

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2002); Ion Constantin, *România, Marile Puteri și problema Basarabiei* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1995); Valeriu-Florin Dobrinescu, *Bătălia diplomatică pentru Basarabia (1918–1940)* (Iași: Editura Junimea, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România*.

<sup>20</sup> Liviu Maior, *Mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania. 1900–1914* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1986); Keith Hitchins, *Conștiință națională și acțiune politică la românii din Transilvania (1868–1918)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1992; Vlad Popovici, *Studies on the Romanian Political Elite from Transylvania and Hungary*

In a paper published recently<sup>21</sup>, I argued that legislating the universal suffrage<sup>22</sup> and of the land reform in Romania in the years of the Great War, which were initiated during the actual military conflict and applied in the very complicated and fragile context that followed, had the value and impact of a real “revolution”. The World War, in which Romania was engulfed, accelerated the incorporation of peasants in the new liberal state order. After establishing the unitary state (*Great Romania*), this may be considered as the biggest transformation brought about by the war.<sup>23</sup> The reform of universal suffrage would bring about major changes in the political mindset of the Romanian peasant, it became overnight the main factor of the electoral life and the main subject of public discourse, the centre of the electoral life was transferred from town to village.

Under these circumstances the changes in the structure of the electoral body were essential. Mutations took place not only regarding the structure of the electorate but also in the mentality of the electors. Due to legislating the universal suffrage, the rural class now became more than two thirds of the electorate. As a result of the Great Unification in the electoral body, one now also finds adult Romanian citizens of Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia who not only led to the doubling of the number of electors, but also brought a completely different mentality. Among the new electors approximately 1/3 were ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Gipsies, Ukrainians, Russians and others).

The number of voters increased exponentially in comparison to the pre-war times. By comparing the pre-war electoral register, which was based on wealth, with that drawn up for the 1919 with universal suffrage, one may see a remarkable increase in the number of voters. Thus, in 1911, in Old Romania, 126,260 citizens had the right to direct voting, the other 1,518,046 electors expressed their vote through delegates (indirect voting). In other words, from a population of 7,000,000 inhabitants, only 6.1% of the adult men had the right to direct election for the Chamber of Deputies and 1.5%

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(Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2012); Vlad Popovici, Ovidiu Iudean, “The Elective Representation of the Romanians in the Hungarian Parliament,” I (1869–1892) *Studia Universitatis «Petru Mayor»*. Series Historica XI (2011), 121–146; Vlad Popovici, “Elite of The Romanian National Party from Transylvania (1881–1896),” *Transylvanian Review* XIX (2010), supplement no. 2; Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* (București: Humanitas, 1991); Ion Nistor, *Istoria Bucovinei* (București: Humanitas, 1991); Ioan Scurtu (editor), *Istoria Basarabiei de la începuturi și până în 1998*, ediția a II-a, Semne, București, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Teodor Pavel, (editors), *Opțiuni democratice la popoarele central-est europene în secolul al XIX-lea* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> The enactment of the universal suffrage in Romania took place in several stages, which started with a constitutional change in July 1917, a time when the limited vote was replaced with the universal one. In November 1918 the first electoral law decree, which covered the universal principle regarding the election of deputies and senators for the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia was elaborated. For Bucovina another legal decree was implemented in August 1919. Even though it was following the legal decree implemented for the Old Kingdom, this one had numerous differences regarding the voting procedure, distribution of mandates etc. For Transylvania by invoking a certain local right, the Ruling Council preferred to elaborate their own electoral law, which was adopted by the Great National Council and promulgated by King Ferdinand in August 1919. Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România*, p. 151–219.

<sup>23</sup> A similar opinion has also Cristian Preda, *Rumâniilor fericiți. Vot și putere de la 1831 până în prezent* (Iași: Polirom, 2011), p. 131–152.

of them for the Senate.<sup>24</sup> In 1919, during the first parliamentary elections of Reunified Romania, organised on the basis of the universal suffrage, there were 1,916,225 voters<sup>25</sup> on the electoral register (partly in Transylvania, where we do not have full statistics<sup>26</sup>), i.e. 12.53% of the population of the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia.

The legislating of the universal suffrage during 1917–1919 was the equivalent of a true revolution, achieved from top to bottom, through the willingness of King Ferdinand and political elites, which brought a marginalised social organism on the political scene, mostly the subject of a political speech developed by political parties, that turned overnight into a major political power: the Peasants' Party. The universal suffrage, states Mattei Dogan, turns peasants from subjects into citizens.<sup>27</sup> The village, stuck in an endemic backwardness, becomes the main place to carry out electoral activities, to the detriment of the city. Mostly illiterate and uninterested in public affairs, the peasant sees himself armed with power given by the universal suffrage. This new electoral participant enters the political life of Great Romania thinking that he suffered most from the war and that the electoral reform, as well as the land reform, are just. The leader of the Peasants' Party, whose creation was in fact caused by the legislating of the universal suffrage Ion Mihalache, saw the new reform as an "earthquake" that had struck the country and scarred the people's conscience. The reform of the universal suffrage could mean to many analysts and monitors of public life the only way to political education of the peasantry, and also the way to solve some of the issues of Romania's political system, which, until then, had been dominated by corruption. It was obvious that the land and electoral reforms had amplified people's enthusiasm, which was already increased by the feeling that the country was victorious in war, and also by the achievement of the Great Unification, and created a profound feeling that an era had ended and that Romanians were on the verge of a great change, but with no one who could say or define what this change and renewal would be. In general, the post-war public discourse was dominated by an enthusiastic, mostly exaggerated interpretation of the positive consequences that would pour on the rural world and over the whole Romanian society. The universal suffrage seemed to gain the healing properties of a panacea.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Leonida Colescu, *Statistica electorală Alegerile generale pentru Corpurile Legiuitoare din 1907 și 1911* (București: Stabilimentul Grafic Albert Baer, 1913), p. 7, Tabel 1; Mattei Dogan, *Comparații și explicații în știința politică și în sociologie* (Iași: Institutul European, 2010), p. 10–11.

<sup>25</sup> Sorin Radu, *Electoralul din România în anii democrației parlamentare, 1919–1937* (Iași: Institutul European, 2004), p. 75–76; Preda, *Rumâni fericiți*, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Due to the Application of Article 46 of the Election law, which was drawn up by the Directory Council of Transylvania, the elections were cancelled in approximately two thirds of the districts, i.e. no data of the number of registered electors, the number of voters, etc. was collected. In 1919, in Transylvania, the elections were organised only for 61 out of the 205 Members of Parliament, and in 1922 only for 87 out of the 121 mandates. According to Cristian Preda, *România postcomunistă și România interbelic* (București: Editura Meridiane, 2002), p. 79; Marcel Ivan, *Evoluția partidelor noastre politice în cifre și grafice 1919–1932* (Sibiu: Editura Krafft & Drotleff, [1934]), p. 6. Marcel Ivan is wrong when he says that the article applies to the elections from Bucovina, too.

<sup>27</sup> Dogan, *Comparații și explicații în știința politică și în sociologie*, p. 281.

<sup>28</sup> Sorin Radu, "«Peasant Democracy» or What It Was Like to Practice Politics in Countryside Romania between the Two World Wars," in Sorin Radu, Oliver Jens Schmitt (editors), *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), p. 30–31.

Such a background, in which the hope of change was amplified, was opportune to the creation and development of some political phenomena, specific to the crisis exit times, such as the establishment of new political organisations or the emergence of 'the saviours of the Fatherland'. Charisma played a major part in the legitimacy of political leaders, especially in the countryside. The most relevant case was the one of General Alexandru Averescu and of the People's League. Due to the recognition, which he earned during the war, a great myth shall be born surrounding the general. His commanding qualities, which had been proved during the battle of Mărășești, gave him unprecedented recognition among both the army and public opinion. An irresistible surge of sympathy, even adulation, started in Moldavia and spread across the whole the Romanian Old Kingdom. After entering an active policy, the myth of General "Saviour" extended and increased, gaining a new value. It is obvious that the demobilised, former combatants that were trying to fit in a post-war civil society had a say in that matter. Unfortunately, they had a feeling of distrust, of fear that civilians would not understand their sacrifice. In such a state of mind, General Averescu guaranteed that their hopes and dreams would not be wasted by the old politicians. But in Transylvania one is dealing with another psychosis, that of the Romanian National Party and of Iuliu Maniu, which manifested itself on a much lower scale. It is interesting how Maniu and his Transylvanians aroused passion and exaggerated interest for Bucharest's political elite, being seen for a while as a potential founder who was meant to revive political life in the Romanian Old Kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, at the first universal suffrage based legislative elections, organised in Great Romania in November 1919, "both the experienced and the un-experienced" participated, according to an observer of the time.<sup>30</sup> Peasants' enthusiasm for using, for the first time, the suffrage represented a feature of the first post-war elections. In small groups, wearing national costumes, sometimes even accompanied by a fanfare or some violinists' songs, the peasants created a special atmosphere, entirely new for the elections.

As for the electors of the provinces united with Romania in 1918, an important aspect was the integration of a large number of ethnic minorities, such as Hungarians, Saxons, Swabians, Jews, Ukranians, Ruthenians, etc. into the electoral body. The electoral legislation did not discriminate as far as it concerned the suffrage. Still, the integration of minorities, especially the Hungarians, in the electoral system of the new Romanian state was not an easy task. The Hungarians from Transylvania were put in an unexpected situation. After being part of a dominant nation, they were reduced to an ethnic minority and, thus, the emergence of a profound discontent due to losing some historical privileges as well as showing a hostile and arrogant attitude towards Romania. Such a sudden change of their status and the position they had found themselves in inevitably led to the Hungarians' absolute refusal to be politically involved in the structure of the new state. The Hungarian political leaders urged their electors to adopt the so

<sup>29</sup> Radu, "«Peasant Democracy» or What It Was Like to Practice Politics in Countryside Romania between the Two World Wars," p. 32–34.

<sup>30</sup> Ion Constantinescu, *Din însemnările unui fost reporter parlamentar. Camera Deputaților. 1919–1937* (București: Editura Politică, 1973), p. 29.

called “passive resistance”, anxiously waiting for the decisions made by the Paris Peace Conference, which was going to clarify Transylvania’s status. The Hungarian peasants’ confusion was amplified by the lack of information in the rural world. A great number of Hungarian electors did not sign up on the electoral register, not participating at the 1919 elections. That attitude was going to change after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, and the founding of the Hungarian Party. The new political view of the Hungarians from Transylvania meant a token of loyalty towards Romania.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, turning their priorities towards the rural environment influenced the political parties’ organisation, and also determined the emergence of some new political parties. Canvassing moved to the village, the parties being forced to go through a readjustment process not only of the political programme and discourse, but also of the territorial organisational structures and, sometimes, even their name. The Conservative Party led by Alexandru Marghiloman, seen as the main opponent of the land and electoral reforms before the war, will change its name into the Conservative-Progressive Party, in an effort to survive, but this strategy could not prevent its brutal disappearance from the political stage. The falling apart of the political organisations could not be prevented even by the Conservative-Democratic Party led by Tache Ionescu. The introduction of the universal suffrage suddenly put the conservative parties in a situation where they would not be in direct contact with the electors. Moreover, the conservatives were discredited in Romanian rural life, where their influence had been very poor and they often had been greeted with a hostile attitude.<sup>32</sup>

Numerous political analysts of the time stated that the two great parties, which had controlled the political life until then, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, did not have a policy framework or the abilities to extend their organisational network into the rural environment and to canvass peasants. The universal suffrage reform made the liberals and the conservatives “lose contact with the electors”<sup>33</sup>, making way for new, conjectural political groups and parties, mostly without a political view, but with a profoundly demagogic discourse. The liberal elite, which had fully claimed the accomplishment of the land and suffrage reforms, quickly understood the necessity of adapting to the new electorate; however it would take a few years to partially<sup>34</sup> accomplish that. During the first legislative elections organised in November 1919, the liberals would be penalised by the electorate that could not forget their reluctance towards the reforms, as well as the mistakes in governing from the war period.

<sup>31</sup> Radu, *Electoratul din România în anii democrației parlamentare (1919–1937)*, p. 57–63.

<sup>32</sup> Ion Bulei, *Sistemul politic al României moderne. Partidul Conservator* (București: Editura Politică, 1987), p. 531–533.

<sup>33</sup> Andrei Corteanu, „Cei zece ani din urmă,” in *Lui Alexandru Marghiloman. Omagiu cu prilejul unei îndoite aniversări. Prietenii și admiratorii lui* (București: Tiparul „Cultura Națională”, 1924), p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> For more details see Ovidiu Buruiană, *Liberalii. Structuri și sociabilități politice liberale în România interbelică* (Iași, Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, 2013); Ovidiu Buruiană, “The National Liberal Party and the Failure of Political Integration of the Rural World in the Interwar Romania,” in Sorin Radu, Oliver Jens Schmitt (editors), *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), p. 125–186.

The crisis that affected the Traditional Parties after 1918 was also due to the fact that the attention of the rural voters, eager for something new, had turned towards those who promised a new policy, a new course. The population was dissatisfied with the old parties and the same politicians. A change was desired everywhere, a renewal. As a direct effect, the birth of new political parties dedicating themselves almost entirely to the peasant population is registered: Liga Poporului (The People's League) and Partidul Țărănesc (The Peasant Party). If Liga Poporului (The People's League), now Partidul Poporului (The People's Party) linked its rise and fall in popularity to the figure of "the saving hero" Alexandru Averescu, Partidul Țărănesc (The Peasant Party) tended to become a political organisation, which relied upon the aspirations of a second rank elite, especially from the villages, consisting of teachers, priests and local notable individuals, to strengthen the political valency of a peasantry on the brink of social and political emancipation. The new political organisation will be to the left of the political spectre, declaring itself a "class party". The peasantry elites, among which one finds important intellectuals (Virgil Madgearu, Constantin Stere, Cezar Petrescu etc.), admired the fact that the peasantry held real political capabilities and that they believed in the possibility of organizing it politically. The new peasantry leader, Ion Michalache, seemed to understand the real needs of the peasants, promoting clear and simple political slogans, and would manage in record time to shape Partidul Țărănesc into a successful political organisation. The peasantry euphoria spread to Bessarabia, a mostly rural province, where Ion Inculeț and Pantelimon Halippa would establish Partidul Țărănesc Basarabean (The Bessarabian Peasant Party). The two peasantry parties have conjunctively obtained a large number of seats in the Parliament, which would place them second in the country, after Partidul Național din Transilvania (The National Party of Transylvania). In Transylvania, an interesting phenomenon is to be seen regarding voters. Here, the land reform and the universal suffrage were legislated through the care of Consiliul Dirigent (The Ruling Council) and Marele Sfat Național (The Great National Council), both controlled by Partidul Național Român (The Romanian National Party). The two reforms were perceived by the Romanian peasants as an act of social and political advancement, as well as an act of national liberation. Maniu's Nationals are considered the reason for the national emancipation and from here the beginning of a rejection of any other political organisation. The rejection of the parties of the Old Kingdom transformed into attitudes of refusal towards any of their attempts to establish a political organisation in the Inter-Carpathian province. The phenomenon was present especially in the Transylvanian villages, where the "empire" political organisations were perceived as "foreign". The regionalist discourse promoted by the PNR elite in the first years after 1918 was based on the idea that Partidul Național (The National Party) was the only one entitled to represent the "interests" of Ardeal (Transylvania) and Banat, contesting the right of any other political force of old Romania to extend its influence in Transylvania.<sup>35</sup> The parliamentary voting results of 1920<sup>36</sup>, and especially those of

<sup>35</sup> Radu, *Electoratul din România în anii democrației parlamentare, 1919–1937*, p. 64–73.

<sup>36</sup> Partidul Poporului (The People's Party), that was governing, had obtained 84 deputy seats in Transylvania

1922<sup>37</sup>, would show that Transylvania, in fact, had started the process of differentiating the political options of the voters politically.

### The Land Reforms (1917–1921)

The Great War accelerated the implementation of one of the most important and long awaited reforms in Romanian society: the land reform. The previous land reform had been performed in 1864<sup>38</sup>, shortly after the establishment of the national state. The reform had an important role in reducing the inequality in Romanian society between the large properties and the small properties owned by the peasants. However, the profound social cleavages remained, generating social discord, and sometimes peasant uprisings, culminating with the great uprising of 1907, the last of its sort in Europe. The poor productivity of the large properties, the constant poverty of the peasants, and the outdated agrarian relations<sup>39</sup> generated intense debates in Romanian society regarding the necessity for a new land reform.

The military disaster suffered in 1916, the need to find a way of raising the spirit of the soldiers and win their loyalty to the state coerced the political class and King Ferdinand to accelerate the implementation of the two great reforms: the land reform and the electoral reform. Therefore, in July 1917, Parliament initiated the implementation of the reforms by changing the Constitution in force, which ensured that private property had a sacred and inviolable character, meaning that from that moment, it would be seen as a social function; the principle of expropriation for public use would also be enacted. The land reform was to be implemented legislatively between 1918 and 1921, through the elaboration of legal regulations for the Old Kingdom and for the united provinces. The structure of property was fundamentally changed through the Land Reforms enacted between 1917 and 1921. Radicalism differed from province to province, which reflected the nature of the economic and social conditions under which each of the provinces developed. For example, the legislation in Transylvania and Bessarabia was more radical than that in the Old Kingdom and Bukovina. All these agrarian laws had as a primary purpose the division of the land among peasants and were motivated socially rather than strictly economically.

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from a total of 121: PNL – 4 seats; PNR – 23 seats (compared to 170 in 1919); other political organizations – 10 seats. Tancred Constantinescu, “Efectele legii electorale și învățămintele ce decurg din alegerile făcute după război,” *Democrația* XIV/10-12 (1926), p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> P.N.L., that was governing, had obtained 81 deputy seats in Transylvania, in comparison to the 25 obtained by P.N.R. and 15 of other political organisations. Constantinescu, “Efectele legii electorale și învățămintele ce decurg din alegerile făcute după război,” p. 100; Ivan, *Evoluția partidelor noastre politice în cifre și grafice 1919–1932*, tabloul II.

<sup>38</sup> *Istoria românilor*, vol. VII/I (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), p. 602 et seq.; Iulian Oncescu, Ion Stanciu, *Introducere în istoria modernă a românilor* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2009), 153 et seq.

<sup>39</sup> The socialist Gherea would introduce in the public debate the term “neoiobăgie”. Around the year 1914, in the Old Kingdom, the small and medium property represented 57.6% of the whole agricultural surface, while the large agricultural properties of over 100 hectares represented 42.4% of the whole. Ioan Flavius Rovinaru, Florin Manuela Mada, “Structura agriculturii României în perioada interbelică,” in Iosif Marin Balog, Rudolf Gräf, Ioan Lumperdean (editors), *Relația rural-urban: ipostaze ale tradiției și modernizării* Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010, p. 449.



In the Old Kingdom, the government of Ion I.C. Brătianu enacted, in December 1918, a decree-law through which he proclaimed absolute expropriation of all the lands owned by the Crown, by public and private institutions, by absentee owners and by foreigners, as well as private domains over 500 ha. Owners possessing several domains were protected through the clause, according to which expropriation was intended for each property and not the entire ownership of the individual. The former owners would then be indemnified with treasury bills with 5% interest, redeemable in 50 years. The peasants who had received land were supposed to pay two thirds of the compensation and the state a third. The political changes stopped the implementation of the law. A new law on Agrarian Reform would be enacted on the 17th of July, 1921, during the rule of the government led by General Alexandru Averescu. The Agrarian Law was not very different from the previous one in regard to the main points. This envisaged that, an area of 5 hectares was the appropriate land area for a viable farm and, consequently, proposed that the expropriated land be divided into 5 hectares or smaller plots in order to bring the existing farms to the size limit of 5 hectares. The Agrarian Law also tried to solve two fundamental problems of Romanian agriculture: the scattered strips of land owned by peasants and the continuous fragmentation of the small farms. Concerning this matter, the Agrarian Law prohibited the division of the farms, consisting according to its provisions, in plots of 2 hectares for the plains and 1 hectare for the hilly regions.<sup>40</sup>

In the united provinces the agrarian laws followed the same principles as applied in the Old Kingdom. The changes in the structure of land property were directed towards the satisfaction of the requests of peasants and not necessarily economic measures intended to reorganise agriculture. The radical character of reforms may be explained by the greater need for land generated by the higher density of the population, but also by the fact that ownership of farmland belonged mainly to the former Austro-Hungarian and Russian states and to the Hungarian, German, Russian etc. owners. The land reform in the annexed provinces stirred the discontent of ethnic minorities, of Saxons, and especially of Hungarians. In Transylvania the Consiliul Dirigent (Governing Council) drew up a project of agrarian law, adopted by the Marele Sfat Național (Great National Council) on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, which envisaged the complete expropriation of the estates of foreigners, of public and particular institutions, and especially of the properties exceeding 500 jugers.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to the Old Kingdom, the law considered all properties of a single owner as a unit. The properties between 200 and 500 jugers were subject to a partial expropriation, and the properties could be expropriated if that terrain was necessary for the application of the reform in that county. The peasants who had fought in the war were at the top of the list of those having the right to acquire land.<sup>42</sup>

Bessarabia also experienced a radical land Reform. Starting with the Russian revolution from March 1917, the peasants themselves had started dividing the land, so that

<sup>40</sup> Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România* (București: Editura Academiei, 1975).

<sup>41</sup> 1 jugera (*iugăr*) = 0,5775 hectares.

<sup>42</sup> Marcel Știrban, *Din istoria României 1918–1921. Probleme ale vieții politice, economice și sociale* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1987); Gheorghe Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent la Consolidarea statului național unitar român (1918–1920)* (Cluj-Napoca, 1985), p. 223 et seq.

at the moment of adopting the resolution of uniting Bessarabia with Romania (27<sup>th</sup> of March 1918), nearly two thirds of the area of large estates had become the property of peasants. The Agrarian Reform of Bessarabia, which had been adopted by the Council of the State (26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 1918), expropriated about 1,100,000 hectares of arable land from private owners. Each owner's land was expropriated to the limit of 100 hectares of arable land.<sup>43</sup> The agrarian reform in Bukovina did not generally differ from that of the Old Kingdom. About 75,000 hectares had been expropriated. Small households had increased by 28% as a result of the big estates being reduced to the limit of 250 hectares of arable land by the agrarian reform.<sup>44</sup> The agrarian reform in Romania was the most radical in Eastern Europe<sup>45</sup>, without including Soviet Russia, fundamentally transforming the structure of agricultural property, as G.N. Leon would say.<sup>46</sup> 6,377,668 hectares were expropriated, of which in the Old Kingdom – 2,608,689, Bessarabia – 1,491,930; Bukovina – 61,461; Transylvania – 2,215,587.<sup>47</sup> Approximately 1,600,000 families were given ownership of arable land.<sup>48</sup> From a country of great private properties, Romania becomes a country of small and medium-sized households. “The Agrarian Reform in Romania, as Professor G.N. Leon said in 1943, solved only a social problem, but not an economic one and the social one only provisionally. It did not solve an economic problem because it had dealt exclusively with the process of land repartition without taking the necessary measures regarding the production process.”<sup>49</sup>

Agrarian reforms had been justified primarily by social considerations, by the need to create a social balance in the new Romanian state. However, the immediate effects were not positive. Agrarian reform had led to a decline in production and productivity in agriculture, as many properties were too small to be economically viable and continued to be re-divided by inheritance. A negative effect of the reform was the lack of a credit policy to which peasants had access, the lack of agricultural inventory, the inability of peasants to understand the need for association in the form of co-operation, and so on. The application of the agrarian reform had caused many complaints from the peasants due to the insufficiency of the land, the abuses encountered in the application of the agrarian laws, the extension, and the delay of the landowners, caused mainly by the lack of specialists. In 1927, only approx. 50% of the estates that were subject to the expropriation had been measured and only a relatively small part of them, around 1,100,000 hectares, had been turned into parcels to be distributed. The economic crisis struck in 1929 and hit the small and medium-sized households in Romania. Many

<sup>43</sup> Cojocaru, *Sfatul Țării. Itinerar*, p. 153 et seq.; Svetlana Suveică, *Basarabia în primul deceniu interbelic (1918-1928): Modernizare prin reforme* (Chișinău: Editura Pontos, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România*, p. 61–62.

<sup>45</sup> Johan F. M. Swinnen (editor), *Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in Central and Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing, 1997); Sarahelen Thompson, “Agrarian Reform in Eastern Europe Following World War I: Motives and Outcomes,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 75/3 (Aug., 1993), p. 840–844.

<sup>46</sup> G.N. Leon, *Economia politică și politica economică* (București, 1943), p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> *Anuarul Statistic al României 1923* (București: Tipografia Curții Regale, 1924), p. 48 – *Apud* Mada Rovina-ru, „Starea agriculturii României în perioada interbelică,” p. 450.

<sup>48</sup> Leon, *Economia politică și politica economică*, p. 159.

<sup>49</sup> Leon, *Economia politică și politica economică*, p. 159.

of the impoverished peasants would sell their plots to the wealthy peasants, so that in 1938 a survey carried out in several villages found that peasants who received plots in the 1920s generally lost between 30–40% of their land.<sup>50</sup>

## ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

The economic consequences of the Great War on Romania are extremely difficult to assess, as is the case with all the countries involved. In the case of Romania, the situation was even more complicated due to the fact that the Great Unification had united the Old Kingdom with provinces evolving under different economic systems (Transylvania and Bukovina had been integrated into the Austro-Hungarian economic system, while Bessarabia had been integrated with the Russian Empire). Thus, it is understandable that the destruction and the human losses suffered were accompanied by the restructuring and transformations generated by the integration of the new provinces into the Romanian unitary state. All this was happening amid the emergence and development of new currents of ideological thinking that marked the economic policies and the post-1918 governmental development strategy (reforming liberalism in the neo-liberal direction as well as to the emergence of peasant doctrine are referred to here).

There are conflicting, hard to quantify statistics of the casualties suffered by Great Romania. The historian Bogdan Murgescu provides a new, coherent perspective. According to him, the casualties (people killed in battle or by epidemics) suffered by the Kingdom of Romania were of approximately 250,000 soldiers and 430,000 civilians, plus a shortage of newborn babies during the war, a fact that would lead to a 14% deficiency compared to the pre-war population, a deficiency surpassed in Europe only by Serbia (and Montenegro) with 31.3% and Russia with 18.5% (where it is impossible to distinguish the number of the World War deaths from the Civil War ones). As for the territories united with Romania in 1918, there is no clear information. One should also consider the relatively great number of people who suffered various levels of disability, thus diminishing their work capacity.<sup>51</sup>

The war was fought on a large area of the national territory and caused serious damage. The main consequences suffered by the Romanian economy were: massive damage to industrial production and transport, the destruction of energy sources, as well as a part of the agricultural production potential; inflation; budgetary imbalance, etc. Because of the war devastation, as well as the looting organised by German occupation troops, the extractive and industrial production dropped by more than half, compared to 1914–1915. The same happened in agriculture, the problems being worsened by the lack of manpower, of an agricultural inventory. The agricultural area decreased

<sup>50</sup> Keith Hitchins, *România (1866–1947)*, p. 386–397; Ion Agrigoroaiei, *România Interbelică*, vol. I (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2001), p. 109–110.

<sup>51</sup> Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)* (București: Polirom, 2010), p. 221–222.

by 40% in 1919–1920 compared to 1911–1915's average.<sup>52</sup> Although the material losses were significant, they were overrated at the sum of 31 billion lei in gold.<sup>53</sup> The purpose was to claim considerable damages from the defeated countries. To the damage caused directly by the warfare were added the effects of the disorganised economic process and the effects of the Central Powers' occupation of over two thirds of the Kingdom of Romania, in 1916–1918.

Another direct effect of the war was inflation and financial instability, phenomena worsened by the loss of the Romanian gold reserve (approximately 105 tonnes of gold, which, during the war, was sent to Russia, and, after the Revolution of October 1917, was taken by the new Soviet state), as well as by the German authorities' policy of occupation in the years 1917–1918, that massively issued uncounted, "German" lei, thus magnifying the inflation. Bogdan Murgescu argues that "inflation pressures had already begun to show during the neutrality period (1914–1916), and during Romania's participation in the war, they were increased by the issue of notes, requisition bills, treasury bills and other means of payment used by the Romanian authorities that fled to Moldavia. Thus, at the end of the war there were around 4.6 billion lei in circulation instead of a money supply of 0.5 billion at the start of the war; the German issuance through «Banca Generală Română» represented 2.1 billion lei, meaning that the 1916–1918's inflation responsibility is almost equally divided between the German occupation authorities and the Romanian ones."<sup>54</sup> Besides, one should add the problems caused by the economic integration of the united regions in 1918: monetary unification (changing the Russian rouble and the Austro-Hungarian krone into lei), economic nationalisation. In general, historians agreed that the economic process of integrating the attached regions was accomplished at great cost to the Bucharest government, but mostly from a great losses of the banking and financial institutions and of Bessarabia's, Bucovina's and Transylvania's populations. For instance, the Romanian authorities set a very high exchange rate for the Austro-Hungarian kronas: 1 leu = 2 kronas, while the Transylvanian clerks' salaries were paid at the rate where 1 leu = 3 kronas, and on the free market the rate reached, under speculative circumstances, 5 kronas for 1 leu). The leu stabilised only in 1929, practically on the brink of the worldwide economic crisis.<sup>55</sup>

The process of economically integrating the united regions in the Old Kingdom was complicated and rough, because of the centralised economic policy, encouraged by Bucharest, the shift of the economic flow from Budapest and Vienna towards Bucharest, and due to the competing interests of the provinces and the Old Kingdom's middle-class. The economic differences were visible: the urbanisation and industrialisation level of Transylvania (and Banat) surpassed that to the Old Kingdom, while Bessarabia was

<sup>52</sup> Hitchins, *România 1866–1947*, p. 331–332; Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX* (Bucureşti: Editura Paideia, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Gh. M. Dobrovici, *Istoricul dezvoltării economice și financiare a României și împrumuturile contractate, 1823–1933* (Bucureşti, 1934), p. 392, 461.

<sup>54</sup> Murgescu, *România și Europa...*, p. 223.

<sup>55</sup> Murgescu, *România și Europa...*, p. 223; Victor Axenciuc, *Introducere în istoria economică a României. Epoca modernă* (Bucureşti: Editura Fundației „România de Măine”, 1997), p. 303–310.

characterised by a profoundly agrarian economy. Thus, the Old Kingdom represented 4% of the companies, 50% of the invested capital, 39% of the fuel value, and 53% of the production value. Transylvania brought a fortune of 35% of the companies, 29% of the invested capital, 40% of the energy force, 39% of the fuel value, and 28% of the raw material value. The new provinces brought territorial benefits and rich agricultural and industrial resources; 11,000,000 hectares would be added to the approximate 10,000,000 hectares. As a whole, the post 1918 Romania was a country with a great economic potential, with clear prospects of development, due to both natural and human resources. The war had caused enormous destruction in industry and had almost completely disorganised production, but despite all that, there was a fast and substantial recovery in the '20s. It was mostly due to the liberals, who governed for most of the decade and who used their great political and economic power for industrialisation. The '20s' dynamic is suggested by the increased number of all sorts of companies, from 86,000 in 1918 to 273,000 in 1930, and by the increase of production between 1924–1928, in mining by 189% and in the manufactured goods production by 188%. The development of the oil industry, boosted by a substantial, especially foreign, capital investment, was spectacular. The production increased from 968,000 tonnes in 1918 to 5,800,000 tonnes in 1930, making Romania the sixth largest producer in the world. The metal industry experienced an impressive increase, steel production rising from 38,000 tonnes in 1925 to 144,000 tonnes in 1928. The liberals took a special interest in the metal industry, heavily investing in it and protecting it from foreign competitors.<sup>56</sup>

Bogdan Murgescu states that, through its participation in the Great War, Romania worsened its relations not just with the neutral states, but also with the other war participants, which, for various reasons were less affected. "This deterioration wasn't specific to Romania only, but to the whole of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. However, the production decrease in Romania was worse than in most countries of the region. (...) Of course, the shock of the war was temporary. The recovery was faster in some sectors, in others the effects of the war were felt for a longer period of time."<sup>57</sup>

The Great War; and the need of a post-war economic recovery would shape the Romanian economical thinking, and the neoliberal ideas, which were encouraging the increase of the state's role in economic life, were growing stronger by the day. The state's involvement in the economy was supported by intellectuals such as I.N. Angelescu<sup>58</sup>,

<sup>56</sup> Hitchins, *România, 1866–1947*, p. 397–402; Gheorghe Iacob, Luminița Iacob, *Modernizare – europenism. România de la Cuza Vodă la Carol al II-lea*, vol. I (Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, 1995), p. 86–108; Ion Agrigoroaiei, *România Interbelică*, vol. I (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2001), p. 165–217.

<sup>57</sup> Murgescu, *România și Europa...*, p. 225. This way, the cereal production of Romania per inhabitant was of only 67,6% in 1921–1925, compared to the average level of 1901–1913, while in Bulgaria the level was of 72,1%, in Yugoslavia of 80,4% and only in Greece (which was affected by the war with Turkey until 1922) the production level was of 64,2%. The processing industry represented, in the Romania of 1921, 47,2% of the level of 1913, while the value in Hungary was of 64%, in Poland 46,8%, in France 61,7%, in Germany 74,7%, and the global average was of 81,1%. See also Victor Axenciuc, *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistic-istorice, 1859–1947*, vol. I: *Industria și transporturi* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1992), p. 589.

<sup>58</sup> Agrigoroaiei, *România Interbelică*, vol. I, p. 170 et seq.

Vintilă Brătianu<sup>59</sup>, Mihail Manoilescu<sup>60</sup>, Ștefan Zeletin<sup>61</sup> and others. Despite lacking a developed industrial capitalism, as in the West, Romania moved towards the neo-liberal organisation and modernisation of the national economical system, after 1918. On its way to industrialisation, Romania needed a national, construction strategy, careful of social problems, capable of ensuring the affirmation and consolidation of the national, economic and political independence. Under the circumstances of the new political structure of Great Romania, neoliberalism was seen as an appropriate and efficient solution for national capitalism and Romanian society. The Romanian neoliberals were arguing the need of a state interventionism, monitored, limited to social organisation and the economy. State intervention should have been directed towards helping private initiative, guiding the activity of free entrepreneurs, organising industry and creating a fair regime of circulation and distribution of goods; the state should also have been a mediator between employers and trade unions, it should have ensured social security for its workers and peace between classes, a concept opposed to the “class war”.<sup>62</sup>

## THE PROCESS OF UNIFICATION OF GREAT ROMANIA

The unification of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania with Romania in 1918 generated a major challenge for the governments in Bucharest: the legislative, institutional, administrative and cultural unification of the provinces annexed to the Old Kingdom. The process was long and marked by disputes and dissensions between the political and cultural elites in the Old Kingdom and the annexed provinces. The Great Unification of 1918 was a revolution, which initiated a real artwork of organisation in the new state and establishment of the Romanian nation.

The unification of the state and the integration of the annexed provinces in Great Romania preoccupied a significant part of the political and cultural elite in the years, which followed the unification. Jurists, superior state officers, managers of various institutions with various characteristics, leaders of political parties engaged in debates to identify the most appropriate ways to quickly achieve a unitary legislative system.<sup>63</sup> Problems of this type preoccupied not only the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but also the European states, which extended their territories at the end of the war.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Vieța și opera lui Vintilă I.C. Brătianu* (București: Imprimeriile „Independența”, 1936).

<sup>60</sup> Mihail Manoilescu, „Neoliberalismul,” in *Doctrinile partidelor politice*, 2nd edition (București: Editura Garamond, [1997]), p. 198–228.

<sup>61</sup> Ștefan Zeletin, *Neoliberalismul*, 3rd edition (București: Editura Scripta, 1992).

<sup>62</sup> I.G. Duca, „Doctrina liberală,” in *Doctrinile partidelor politice*, p. 144–154; Cliveti, Gheorghe, *Liberalismul românesc: eseu istoriografic* (Iași: Editura Fundației Culturale Axis, 1996); *Doctrina liberală în România. Antologie de texte* (București: Editura Institutului de Teorie Socială), 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Vasile Pușcaș, Marcel Știrban, „Perfecționare și atitudini critice în sistemul politic al României interbelice,” in *Dezvoltare și modernizare în România interbelică 1919–1939* (București: Editura Politică, 1988), p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Andrei Rădulescu, *Unificarea legislativă* (București, 1927), p. 9–12; Ovid Sachelarie, Valentin Georgescu, „Unirea din 1918 și problema unificării legislației,” *Revista Istorică* 21/6 (1968), p. 1187; Gheorghe Iancu, „Unifi-

The legislative and institutional administrative unification was achieved in a mixed way. Initially some legal regulations specific to the provinces were maintained and these were muddled with the tacit or explicit extension of some laws from the Old Kingdom, with the promulgation of the unification laws and codes, without the possibility to establish a distinct chronological order between these legal rules. On the other hand, one must state that the legislative unification was a long term process, to which the Romanians in the Old Kingdom as well as those in the provinces contributed. Nonetheless the unification happened to a great extent under the auspices and the conditions imposed by Old Romania whose institutions played a disproportionate role in the state, which had increased its dimensions.<sup>65</sup>

The unification meant also the incorporation of some important minority populations, generally more urbanised, more educated and more “modern” than Romanians. It also meant imposing Western democratic processes, as well as equal rights for the national minorities, but also the proof of the absence of a unitary concept of the Romanian political class, which was affected, as the minorities, by regionally specific traditions, cultures and loyalties.<sup>66</sup>

But the problem of legislative unification was extremely complex because of the different views of representatives of provincial elites on the unifying perspective of Bucharest, and also because of major legal differences in Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia in comparison with the Old Kingdom. In Transylvania, a Hungarian legal system was in place, Bukovina had been part of the Austrian legal system, whereas in Bessarabia the Russian legal system had been applied in a mixture with traditional customs, which were specific to the province. For the most part the jurists and generally the elites in the Old Kingdom were in favour of a rapid unification of the state by extending the legislation from the Old Kingdom into the provinces. Such options were supported by personalities such as Andrei Rădulescu, one of the most important inter-war jurists with important contributions to the study of the process of legislative unification of Romania. He argued that legislative unification was necessary, not only because it was necessary to create legal structures to ensure the functionality of the state, but also “in order to accomplish the unification in the soul of the nation”, for “strengthening as much as possible the national consciousness”<sup>67</sup>. Rădulescu thought that the most appropriate way for the rapid unification was the extension of the legislation from the Old Kingdom into the new provinces<sup>68</sup>, refuting the idea of drawing up new laws for the entire country.<sup>69</sup>

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careia legislativă. Sistemul legislativ al României (1919–1939),” in *Dezvoltare și modernizare în România interbelică 1919–1939*, p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare, 1918–1930*; Ion Agrigoroaiei, Gheorghe Palade, *Basarabia în cadrul României întregite 1918–1940* (Chișinău: Editura Universitat, 1993), p. 73, 74; Sorin Radu, „Unificarea administrativă a României Mari în gândirea politică a lui Iuliu Maniu,” in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica* 2–3 (1998–1999), p. 15–27.

<sup>66</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare 1918–1930*.

<sup>67</sup> Andrei Rădulescu, „Unificarea legislativă,” *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice* VII (1927), p. 2–6.

<sup>68</sup> Rădulescu, „Unificarea legislativă,” p. 36.

<sup>69</sup> Andrei Rădulescu, „Dreptul românesc în Basarabia,” *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii istorice* XXV/13 (1943), p. 30–31.

The unification was hindered by the existence of regional political organisms, which drew up their own legislation, especially in the case of the Governing Council in Transylvania. In Bessarabia in the period since the proclamation of the unification (27<sup>th</sup> March/9<sup>th</sup> April 1918) until the 27<sup>th</sup> of November/10<sup>th</sup> December 1918 the Country Council and the Council of General Directors whose task was the administration of the province functioned. Among the more important achievements of these institutions one notices the agrarian law with a very democratic nature, which was adopted on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1918, among the first laws of this type in unified Romania.<sup>70</sup>

In Bukovina, with the unification with Romania proclaimed (14<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> of October 1918), a National Council was established consisting of 50 members who represented the interests of the Romanian people of this province. The National Council established an organism with the function of government consisting of 14 State Secretaries, led by Iancu Flondor. In December 1918, at the same time as the decree-law for the recognition of the unification signed by King Ferdinand and the prime-minister, I.I.C. Brătianu, a decree regulating the administration of Bukovina was published. Thus, under the leadership of a minister delegated by the King an Administrative Service consisting of nine Service Secretariats was established with the mission to disband the services and transfer their attributes to the appropriate departments in the government in Bucharest.<sup>71</sup>

In Transylvania, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1918, the Grand National Council (a body with legislative functions equivalent to a regional parliament) and the Governing Council, a temporary government led by Iuliu Maniu, comprising 15 resorts (a kind of ministries), was established. These institutions conferred a temporary autonomy on the Intra-Carpathian province, a state that would last until the meeting of the Great Romanian Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of universal suffrage, without having any political significance. The Governing Council, with its headquarters in Sibiu, had widespread legislative and executive powers. It was subordinate to Bucharest only in areas of military and foreign policy issues, railways and several areas of national jurisdiction. The council consisted of two members of the Social-Democratic Party of Transylvania, three independents and ten members of the National Party. The Governing Council began to organise a decentralised Romanian administration in Transylvania and took action in all areas of legal, economic, social, cultural and political life. Among the prior achievements are to be distinguished the agrarian law and the electoral law (August 1919). The separate administration of Transylvania is to be explained by the existence of a different administrative, juridical organisation compared to the Old Kingdom, as well as by the specific situation, which appeared immediately after the union, when the war was just over, when the peace talks had not begun, when the old Romania experienced the consequences of the damages caused by the war and by the German occupation. As a result, the temporary, time limited autonomy, decided by the Alba Iulia Resolution (after which the union of Transylvania with Romania was decided) appeared as a practical need. In Transylvania, the life of the Romanian state was to be organised and vigorous measures

<sup>70</sup> Gheorghe E. Cojocaru, *Integrarea Basarabiei în cadrul României (1918-1923)* (București: Editura Semne, 1997).

<sup>71</sup> Economu, *Unirea Bucovinei 1918*; Nistor, *Unirea Bucovinei*.



were to be taken in all the areas, which must accelerate the absolute harmonisation of the situation in the province with that of Old Romania. With the opening of the proceedings of the first Parliament elected on the basis of universal suffrage, on November 20, 1919, the Great National Council dissolved itself. This fact also automatically led to the dissolution of the Governing Council but a number of the politicians, led by Iuliu Maniu (the president of the National Party), were disagreeing. They considered that it was not the occasion for this autonomous body to be abolished, because no significant steps had been taken yet towards the political-administrative unification. But soon, among the Transylvanians, and especially within the leaders of the National Party, there appear increasingly virulent criticisms regarding the maintenance of the Governing Council. The dispute over the abolition of the Governing Council was authoritatively brought to an end on April 4, 1920 by a decree-law signed by the prime-minister, Alexandru Averescu, and King Ferdinand I, which dissolved this autonomous body, its duties transferred to the government in Bucharest. If the decision was received with satisfaction within the political environment of the Old Kingdom, the representatives of the National Party protested vehemently against this act of the central government, demanding its annulment. The task of unifying Transylvania with Romania was taken over by the so-called Unification Board. One concludes that the work of the Ruling Council, temporary provincial body with legislative and executive responsibilities, further complicated the issue of the institutional-legislative unification of Romania by the drawing up of laws that required a different organisation from that of the old Romania.<sup>72</sup>

A first step on the path of unification was the *unification of the calendar*, given the fact that in Romania (the Old Kingdom) and Bessarabia the Julian calendar functioned, whereas in Bukovina and Transylvania the Gregorian calendar was in use. On February 1/14, 1919, the Gregorian calendar was introduced into the army, so that on 6/19 March it was to be extended to the whole country. The day of April 1 was to become April 14, 1919. The transition to the new style met some internal and external needs and represented a condition of modernisation at the national and European level. Its introduction did not take place immediately on the whole territory of Romania and in all layers of society. Difficulties were experienced in this direction, especially in Bessarabia, where a significant part of the population refused to accept the “reformed calendar”. The most important step on the way to the unification of the state was the enactment of the *Constitution* from March 1923. It established the modern principles of state organisation that shall underlie the legislative unification of Great Romania. The expansion of some laws from the old Romania shall also continue after the adoption of the Constitution. For example, the Romanian *Forest Code* dating from 1910, with its subsequent modifications, was extended by the law of 17 June 1923 also to the territories united with the Romanian state. As from 11 June, 1928, there were also extended to Bessarabia *the Civil Law Codes*, with some exceptions. In Bukovina, it was only in 1938 that the civil codes of the old Romania were applied.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent la Consolidarea statului național unitar român (1918–1920)*.

<sup>73</sup> A synthetic analysis of unifying legislation, see: Ion Agrigoroaiei, Gavril Preda, Gheorghe Calcan, *România interbelică. Economie – Administrație – Apărare* (Ploiești: Editura Universității Petrol-Gaze, 2008), p. 210–266.

After 1923, on the basis of the constitutional principles a number of “new unification laws” were adopted. In respect of justice, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1924 the Justice Law was promulgated and it guaranteed the independence of court power and the principle of the separation of powers in the state. A very important problem, which needed a speedy solution, was the administrative unification of the state. In Great Romania, after 1918 there functioned four administrative arrangements. The Old Kingdom had a certain administrative regime determined by the laws of 1864, 1872, 1894, 1904, 1908 etc., in Bessarabia the tsarist laws were still applied, and Bukovina preserved the archaic organisation, typical for an Empire consisting of several nationalities. In Transylvania there was also a Hungarian administrative system governed by the Law XXII of 1886.

The administrative unification of Great Romania was undertaken in accordance to the political conception of the National Liberal Party. Immediately after the war, this was in favour of an “extended decentralisation”: the municipality and the county were to have their own autonomous lives, and the central power was to intervene in their management only to the extent in which this would be necessary for the unity and security of the state. But the political programme drawn up by the Liberals in November 1921 categorically opposed local autonomy. The Liberals were in an uncomfortable position, i.e. on one hand they were convinced of the necessity to promote a policy of state centralisation; on the other hand, the neoliberal doctrine imposed the principles of administrative decentralisation and local autonomy. They eluded this dilemma by a trick: they proclaimed they were the partisans of the principle of decentralisation but they gave it their own interpretation. The Liberals constantly promoted a centralising policy. The *Law of Administrative Unification* of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1925, drawn up by the liberal government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, beside the fact that it introduced a unitary organisation in the administration did not achieve any of the principles on which it was based. The legislators of that time, although their purpose was to achieve an administrative reform based on decentralisation, did not manage to establish this principle in reality. The opposition parties, particularly the National Party, criticised the administrative law, especially for the tendencies seen as being too centralist. Nonetheless, the Law for Administrative Unification of June 1925 was a real reform in its field, it introduced nationwide the same system of administrative organisation, which was modelled on the realities of the Old Kingdom.

In the category of unification laws there is also a series of laws concerning the status of public officers, pensions, Sunday break, and public holydays, these belonging to a larger category of measures meant to regulate the employment relationships, the social insurance system, organisation of unions etc., a category known also as the labour legislation as part of the social policy. Some of these measures resulted from the necessity to replace the various arrangements, which were inherited from the former Empires of which the united provinces were part in 1918, with a unitary system in the entire country.

But the most intense arguments were caused by the so-called cultural unification of the state. Thus, in the field of education the following laws were drawn up: *the Law for the Primary State Education* of the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1924; *Law for Changing the Law of the Secondary and Superior Education* of the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1925; *Law of the Particular*

*Education of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1925 and Law for the Organisation of Secondary Education of the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1928.* The unification of the educational system after 1918 was much more complicated than it seemed initially. Beyond the difficulties in determining the existence of four different educational systems there was also the necessity to develop an education system for the national minorities who constituted 30% of the country's population. Also in this process liberals played the most important role. The using of the term "cultural offensive" was significant for the aggressive cultural policies of national liberals in order to describe their own programme of national unification by means of education. But this process stirred also the discontent and opposition of parts of the Romanian and minority elite in the united provinces, which were disaffected by the fact that Bucharest promoted a policy of cultural standardisation. In the view of these "regionalists" (as they were identified by the politicians in the Old Kingdom), the policy of unification of education is "not natural" or "formal" since it does not permit the desired fusion of the various educational systems to take place gradually. The measures taken by the Romanian state between 1918 and 1928 led to the national unification of the educational system and contributed essentially to the development of the school network nationwide. But there also appeared a series of material difficulties, which did not permit the implementation of all the provisions of the law, and generally of the projects of modernisation of the educational system.

The period 1918–1928 may be called the *unification decade* because of the intensity of the legislative work. Nonetheless, the unification process was not finished completely even at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. Despite the fact that the unification policy led by Bucharest dissatisfied to a great extent the political and cultural elite in the provinces united with Romania in 1918, the latter came to terms with the centralisation which was, after all, the Romanian ideal to which it had aspired for so long.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the Great War Romania increased its territory substantially by unifying the provinces Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania. The national project, Great Romania, was achieved, the territory increased from 137,000 km<sup>2</sup> to 295,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and the population increased from 7,771,341 inhabitants in the year 1914 to 15,287,528 inhabitants in the year 1919.<sup>74</sup> At least from the point of view of the campaign initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for achieving the national ideal the objective had been achieved, and the new generations could focus on other objectives, especially on the process of state modernisation. The Great Unification brought together diverse populations, with a different educational level, different social statuses and different mentalities. The ethnic minorities would be approximately 30% in the entire population, and the religious diversity became a reality for the new state, which had been until then predominantly

<sup>74</sup> Sabin Manuilă, D. C. Georgescu, *Populația României* (București: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1938), p. 9.

orthodox. In the years following the war, for the state and politicians the biggest challenge was the institutional, administrative, cultural, economic unification and integration of the provinces. The enthusiasm and joy of Romanians caused by the end of the war and achievement of the national ideal would be followed by intense talks, arguments, dissatisfactions generated by the means to unify the state. This issue still generates debate (the emotional element plays an active role), controversies and especially different approaches and perspectives of the specialists. The official national paradigm, in which this issue was interpreted, may be summed up thus: national integration took place at the same pace as the modernisation of the social, administrative and mental structures. The adopted rhythms and the obtained results prove a continuity, which beside the separatist political ideas, is part of an organic and unitary development.<sup>75</sup>

Another major consequence of the war but also of the unification acts of Cernăuți, Chișinău and Alba Iulia was the achievement of agrarian and electoral reforms. The apportionment of property would radically change the social status of the peasant, and the universal suffrage would change him from a vassal into a citizen. The new educational policies of the state put a particular emphasis on Romanisation („Românizare”) on the creation of the “citizen of Great Romania” (with explicable exaggerations considering the context), but equally opened the access of the peasants to education. It is not in doubt that the two reforms strengthened the development process and led the state on the path of economic, social and political modernisation. The change would be slow and was brutally interrupted by the Second World War. Between the two world wars Romania showed the world the striking contrast between profound backwardness, on one hand, and the prosperity, although unequal, of the industrial and urban areas, on the other hand. Its economic and social structure largely retained the configuration of the period before the war. The urban population increased but the peasantry maintained its overwhelming percentage in the social structure of Romania. Approximately 80% of the population in the villages had agriculture as the main occupation, illiteracy continued to represent the fundamental problems of the peasantry despite the land reforms after the war.

After the Great War the governing elites shared the idea that Romania had entered the path of democratisation after the Western model but there were not many to appreciate the Europeanisation phenomenon. The challenge of liberalism was ever more present, giving way in the thirties to anti-democratic currents, which exalted the ultranationalist phenomenon. Under a different form the currents reappear that exalted the rural world, that idealised the village and the peasant, the peasant tradition, understood as the keystone of the Romanian nation. He, the peasant was the sole of the country’s foot, the keeper of the moral values of Romanian society.<sup>76</sup> European democratic values were opposed by the secular virtues of the Romanian peasant, the quintessence of the

<sup>75</sup> This interpretations, not assumed by numerous specialists, reader can see: Agrigoroaiei, *România Interbelică*; Agrigoroaiei, Preda, Calcan, *România interbelică. Economie – Administrație – Apărare*.

<sup>76</sup> Alex Drace-Francis, *The Traditions of Invention. Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013).

Romanian orthodox nation. Thinkers on the right, such as Nicolae Iorga, Nae Ionescu, Lucian Blaga, Nichifor Crainic, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru and many others tirelessly encouraged the ethnic direction, in which the values of the rural world were opposed to the values of the urban world (space of alienation), cultivating doubt of democracy, of the Western model of political liberation. In such a world, and especially in an atmosphere full of ethnic-Orthodox speech, it was extremely difficult for the politically emancipated peasant, blessed with universal suffrage and a piece of land, to understand his own purpose and role within a parliamentary democracy.<sup>77</sup>

#### KEY WORDS

Great Romania, unification, universal suffrage, land reform, Romanization

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<sup>77</sup> Sorin Radu, Oliver Jens Schmitt (editors), *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

## Rumunia i I wojna światowa – konsekwencje polityczne, terytorialne, ekonomiczne i społeczne

W artykule przedstawiono syntetyczny obraz najważniejszych, społecznych ekonomicznych i politycznych konsekwencji I wojny światowej dla Rumunii. Mimo atmosfery sprzyjającej przystąpieniu do wojny Rumunia weszła do wielkiego konfliktu nieprzygotowana militarnie, z gospodarczą infrastrukturą niezdolną do poniesienia trudów wojny, polegając jedynie na obietnicach pomocy ze strony Francji i Wielkiej Brytanii. Pod koniec wielkiej wojny Rumunia znacznie zwiększyła swoje terytorium dzięki przyłączeniu prowincji Besarabii, Bukowiny i Siedmiogrodu. Zrealizowano tym samym narodowy projekt „Wielkiej Rumunii”. Nowe granice państwa zostały zaakceptowane podczas konferencji pokojowej w Paryżu. Wielkie Zjednoczenie połączyło w ramach jednego państwa zróżnicowaną ludność, o różnym poziomie edukacji, statusie społecznym i mentalności. Mniejszości etniczne stanowiły około 30 proc. społeczeństwa, a zróżnicowanie religijne stało się nową codziennością w kraju, który był dotychczas w przeważającej części prawosławny. W latach powojennych największym wyzwaniem dla państwa i polityków stała się integracja nowych prowincji pod względem ustawodawczym, instytucjonalnym, administracyjnym, kulturowym i ekonomicznym. Proces ten był długotrwały i towarzyszyły mu dyskusje wśród polityków i elit kulturalnych Starego Królestwa oraz przyłączanych prowincji. Kolejną ważną konsekwencją wojny było przeprowadzenie reform: agrarnej i wyborczej. Podział majątków w sposób zasadniczy zmienił status społeczny chłopów, którzy dzięki powszechnym prawom wyborczym z wasali przekształcili się w obywateli. Nowa polityka oświatowa państwa położyła szczególny nacisk na latynizację i kształtowanie „obywateli Wielkiej Rumunii”, jednocześnie umożliwiając chłopom dostęp do edukacji. W Rumunii, podobnie jak w innych państwach, niezwykle trudno jest ocenić ekonomiczne konsekwencje I wojny światowej. Sytuacja jest tu tym bardziej skomplikowana, że Wielkie Zjednoczenie połączyło Stare Królestwo z prowincjami, które poprzednio rozwijały się pod wpływem różnych systemów ekonomicznych. Wiadomo więc, że zniszczeniom oraz stratom w ludziach towarzyszyły restrukturyzacja i transformacja spowodowane przyłączeniem do rumuńskiego państwa unitarnego nowych prowincji. W tym czasie również kształtowały się i rozwijały nowe prądy ideologiczne (neoliberalizm i doktryna chłopska), które determinowały politykę ekonomiczną oraz strategię rozwoju.

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Wielka Rumunia, zjednoczenie, prawa wyborcze, reforma rolna, latynizacja