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DOCTORAL THESIS

The Academic City of Cluj and the Rise of the New Nationalism (1919-1925)

Summary

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For most Romanians, the Union of 1918 was a genuine miracle. It was all the more surprising as it came after a devastating war, during which the very existence of the Romanian state had been put to the test, and the "age-old dream", the project of unifying all Romanians, had seemed more distant than ever. The upheavals on the battlefronts and the troubled aftermath of the war had once again twisted the outcome. Triumph had arrived, after much suffering, shame and fear, and while it was unexpected, it was also overwhelming: that uplifting feeling that Puşcariu had experienced nowhere more fully than in Cluj. Of all the newly incorporated provinces, Transylvania seemed to best illustrate the success that had already been gained. It also had the potential to make significant attempts to consolidate this achievement. Soon afterwards, those who had awakened from the euphoria of celebration faced new responsibilities. Greater Romania proved to be more than a miracle; it was a great challenge. The economic, social, cultural and legal disparities between the regions – and between the regions and the Old Kingdom – were obvious and could not be resolved overnight. The avalanche of problems calling for a unifying effort came amid the persistent post-war economic crisis. It took years (a decade) to pass a unitary school legislation for the whole country. And this is just one example. Other issues that demanded resolution remained in abeyance for an even longer time, or were never resolved. And the solutions that were found were far from satisfying for everyone.

The heritage Transylvania brought to the table also had a significant peculiarity: the high percentage of minorities, their diversity (even if one was numerically dominant, the Hungarian minority), and their overrepresentation in cities and in the urban social and economic environments. All these proved to be touchstones for the country that defined itself as a "national" state.

The nationalism of the Transylvanian Romanians came with its own peculiarities as well: it had been practiced until then from the stance of an opposition political force, in conflict with a foreign power. The Romanians, who had demanded national rights before 1918, were now in a position to grant them to others and, at the same time, to build the new unified Romanian state and to reconcile distinct political traditions (their own and those of the Old Kingdom). The solutions to these challenges were also diverse. Some embraced the radicalism of political and ideological extremism; in terms of the attitude towards Jews, they endorsed an explicit and assumed anti-Semitism. The nationalist-Christian and the Legionary doctrines also had representatives in Transylvania, where two different experiences in managing the "Jewish

problem" found a meeting ground. The confrontation between what we would call the "Romanian model" and the "Hungarian model" highlighted the gap between those two experiences.

For the modern Romanian state, the question of the status of the Jews was a kind of millstone carried in diplomatic suitcases to all the great international meetings of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the next. The Romanian Jews obtained legal and political emancipation only at the Paris Peace Conference, and the question of the effective granting of this status remained in the hands of the Constitution that was voted in March 1923. By comparison, what had happened in Hungary during the same period was different. In 1867 Jews obtained the desired political-legal status, shortly after their co-religionists in countries such as England (1860), Germany (1864), Italy (1866). The quarter-century after the initialing of dualism would become, for Hungarian Jewry, a true "golden age", revered with nostalgia, even if this would eventually prove to be a bitter nostalgia. This successful model of solving the Jewish problem also brought discontent. From the point of view of other nationalities in the monarchy, it could pose serious problems, as in the case of the Slovaks or in that of the Romanians from Transylvania. For the latter, the perception of the Jews as the closest and loyal allies of the Hungarians (in the policy of Magyarization) did not create a very encouraging perspective on mutual relations. The configuration of Romanian attitudes towards Jews after 1918 often took place within a triangle of Romanian-Hungarian-Jewish nationalism). The "Jewish Problem" in interwar Transylvania was to be swept into the frantic carousel of the "national problem" in Romania.

The enthusiastic national consensus – easy to gain even between the politicians of Transylvania and those of the Old Kingdom when it came to achieving the Union – turned shortly after the achievement of the goal into something else: a competition for putting it into practice. As the new center was in Bucharest, the Liberals quickly imposed themselves, especially as they played by their own rules. Once the Treaty on Minorities was signed, the Vaida-Voievod government – whose leader was in talks on the broader Paris peace process – was overthrown. The Governing Council (the provisional government of Transylvania) was also disbanded before the agreed deadline. For these reasons, but also for others (the large number of heads of institutions coming from across the mountains, for example), the Transylvanian elites sometimes felt they were pushed aside and not allowed to take part in the new national

construction. Hence, the harsh opposition within which the Transylvanians' National Party barricaded itself, including by refusing to participate in the coronation celebrations in Alba Iulia, for which they would always be reproached by their opponents (and others): regionalism. This was the label meant to enrage the Transylvanian Romanians, considered incapable of putting the general national interest above all else; a label they tried to get rid of, at one point, by merging with the Peasants' Party from older Romania. They did so in 1926, after long deferrals. Too long, according to a wing of the party headed by Vasile Goldiş, which had meanwhile joined the "Averescani" (People's Party); they accused Maniu's branch of rigidity and imposed unacceptable conditions on him. Without a political program, there was also a different faction which embraced "regionalist regionalism": the more Orthodox South versus the more Greek-Catholic North.

Nor was the centralizing effort of the Liberals always ardently accepted. It was sometimes detrimental to the new provinces, and the Transylvanians, no matter how patriotic, could not ignore this: "The Liberals tenaciously apply their system of unification. It consists in leveling everything, at any cost, even if it is tantamount to a downgrading effort. If we can't go forward, let's go backward."

For those who read the documents of the time, the social and political climate of everyday life in the capital of Transylvania does not seem an oasis of peace. On the contrary. Disputes, grievances, the stresses and worries of daily living are reflected every step of the way, whether in the mutually accusatory political discourse (government/opposition/party x is to blame for all this), or in the compensatory-nationalist discourse (we will overcome all obstacles in the name of national solidarity, we will overcome all the hurdles raised by our internal enemies; external danger was rarely or never invoked in those first years). There was also an extreme version of the latter discourse, which gradually gained traction and managed to almost completely exempt the Romanians from any responsibility in relation to the often-bumpy road that the difficult project of National Construction had to travel.

As the circular of the "Petru Maior" Center told its members, during the Easter holidays of April 1923, they had to convey to the people (the peasants) "that, if there are many difficulties, it is not the fault of our people, who are perhaps better endowed by nature than other nations". The text does not name those "other nations", but merely leaves room for insinuation. The next leader of the students was much more inflexible: "all the Jews are our enemies today"

(Ion I Moţa)”. The new, anti-Semitic, nationalism managed to absolve the “Romanian people” much better from any guilt for the hardships of the present. The Hungarian government was usually held responsible for the past, at least in Transylvania. Some of its errors were still producing effects. They could be invoked, but only at a regional level. For country as a whole it was much easier to project a common danger, distributed in all areas, especially in cities: the Jewish danger. Anti-Semitism could thus simultaneously play the role of central pillar of intransigent nationalism (as it defined itself), in which foreigners (Jews) were the first to be held responsible for the “disaster” (hardships) of the country, but also that of a unifying factor. It functioned just as well in the territories of older Romania as in those of Greater Romania. As proof, the National-Christian factions or those belonging to similar currents (all champions of the new nationalism) managed to merge before others (in 1925) and then presented themselves, together, as an expression of the new “spiritual union” of all Romanians. If the “Jewish element” was indicted in countries such as Germany or Hungary (the countries that had lost the war) as “the main reason” for their defeat, the one responsible for their disaster, lo and behold!, ideological resources were found in countries such as Romania to declare the same Jewish population guilty of making it very difficult to manage and implement the victory. Depending on various needs, an anti-Semitism of mainly social and economic extraction could “explain” the difficulties faced by the Romanian population, still so strongly connected to the rural area, in its attempts to integrate in cities and to have more bourgeois occupations. This type of anti-Semitism was also used by the new organizations that called themselves “national-Christian”. But the term “Christian” in that phrase was meant to convey more than that. It pointed out the need for a struggle to return to the situation before the legislation that had allowed Jews to integrate themselves in the modern state, including in the Romanian one; a state in which full equality was ensured on the basis of “nationality” or “citizenship”. And the Jews could thus become “Romanian”, just like they had become “English” or “French”, etc. The particle “Christian” was recharged with an additional ideologized meaning, meant to correct this error of modernity and to introduce a clear determination to reject others (non-Christians). In this new sense, the term “Christian” acquired more of a racial connotation (a criterion for rejecting an entire category) than a religious one. Hence, the reaction of some Christian thinkers or Churches (see the intervention made by the Vatican, at one point).

In those first years after the Union (1919-1925, 1926), the academic city of Cluj tapped into several resources in the process that led to the coagulation and mobilization of this anti-Semitic nationalism. The above-described features of a doctrinal anti-Semitism with multiple tiers were defining especially for the generation of well-established professors who founded the "Romanian Action" and who then joined the LANC.

The younger generation, the students, followed for a while (partially) this doctrinal and institutional organization, up to the point where they realized that it limited their capacity for action. After all, had they, the students, not started everything (that is, the anti-Semitic revolt) in the autumn of 1922? Weren't they the "generation of 1922", "the new generation" – as the name of the periodical (*Generaţia nouă*) that appeared in Cluj in 1927, with an almost identical layout with that of *Dacia Nouă* from 1922? It's just that by 1927, the "generation of 1922" had graduated university and set out on its own, autonomous ideological and organizational path.

The students of Cluj played one of the most complex roles in this new nationalist movement, often and inexplicably ignored or swiftly glossed over. In 1920 Cluj hosted the first Students' Congress in Greater Romania and witnessed the confrontation between the current of opinion coming from the Old Kingdom, demanding the exclusion of foreigners (Jews) (also) from student organizations, and the ideal of integrating and protecting the minorities, entrenched in the new Paris peace regulations.

In 1922, the revolt for the "numerus clausus" was to break out in the laboratories of the Faculty of Medicine, leading to a suggestive transition from an issue that was relevant in the Central-European and Transylvanian context to one with national implications for the New Romania. A wasted academic year at the University of Cluj was nonetheless to yield one of the most prominent leaders of the new anti-Semitic student movement, the future Legionary Movement.

This thesis reconstructs the Transylvanian side of the story about the beginnings of the new nationalism in Cluj. For many of its adherents, this movement started while they were students here and turned into a true generational project. Born in the university and moving outside its walls, with periodic appeals to new generations of young people, the initial "student movement" shaped its ideology and means of action, designated its leaders, from its very first years of existence – those from "before the Legion", as Ion I. Moţa put it.

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