

## SERFS INTO ROMANIANS. THE ROAD FROM BLAJ TO ALBA IULIA (1848-1918)

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**Abstract** The goal of the present paper is to show how both in the autumn of 1918 and before the Union of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December 1918, liberalism and nationalism steered the course of the Romanian nation in Transylvania as it entered the modern era. Romanians had accumulated democratic experience over several decades, with effective results in managing ecclesiastical, educational, cultural, social and economic problems. Our attempt at reconstructing the destiny of the Romanian civil society in the process of laying the democratic foundations of the Union of 1918 has revealed the complex political, economic and social transformations of the Habsburg monarchy from the 1848 revolution to the First World War.

**Keywords** Modern Times, Habsburg Monarchy, Transylvania, Romanians, civil society, democratic processes.

For many contemporaries, the maturity of the Romanians in Transylvania in the autumn of 1918, who in less than two months managed to detach themselves from the dualist Austro-Hungarian state and decide democratically and responsibly to unite with Romania, was and remains a surprise. How was it possible that the Romanian nation, apparently amorphous for decades, incapable for a long time of rising up to the struggle for national

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emancipation, could now mobilize itself in an exemplary manner, set up representative institutions (military and political-administrative) to organize the takeover of the territories inhabited mainly by Romanians in the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy? The present work is the result of certain older reflections regarding the affirmation of the Romanian nation in Transylvania in the modern era.<sup>1</sup>

The title of our paper is inspired by the book authored by historian Eugen Weber,<sup>2</sup> a work dedicated to the process of modernization in France in the decades leading up to the Great War. Weber believes that France achieved its full unity as a nation in the sense of national coagulation much later than is usually assumed, the documents consulted by the author showing that a century after the French Revolution of 1789, millions of peasants were still living in a timeless world, their existence being little different from that of generations before them. In the process of France's modernization, Weber argues, the state, the centralized one as we know it to this day, played a considerable role in overcoming the divisions between urban and rural France. Thus, the modernization of local roads and the development of a coherent system of railways throughout France were decisive factors not only in the modernization, but also in the cohesion of the nation, bringing together remote and inaccessible regions into easy contact with the major markets and centres of the modern world. At the same time, the expanding school system, compulsory military service, the proliferation of newspapers and their accessibility in all rural communities contributed not only to the acquisition of the literary language, the dominant culture, but also the values promoted by it, including patriotism and national solidarity. All of this helped him to describe a world on the verge of disappearing around 1870, which was progressively replaced by one in which the peasant, previously represented as "savage" or "barbaric", was urbanized, civilized, politicized and nationalized, and finally transformed into a true citizen – a Frenchman.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are many novel ideas and fragments in this material. Many other ideas and passages from this article have been exposed in various works published by Ioan Bolovan in recent decades. For them, it would be chronophagous to detect them all and to indicate in each paragraph the place where it was published, identical or in a similar wording.

<sup>2</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> See, along with Weber's book in the first place, Miguel Cabo and Fernando Molina's comprehensive analysis, "The Long and Winding Road of Nationalization: Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* in Modern European History (1976-2006)," *European History Quarterly*, 39 (2009): 265sqq.

In a slightly more recent work, Keely Stauter-Halsted<sup>4</sup> examines the roots and development of peasant nationalism developed in the Austrian Galicia rural area. The author has attempted to reconstruct the mechanism by which, for two generations, between the liberation from serfdom in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the outbreak of the First World War, “serfs became citizens,” namely Polish patriots, aware of their own national identity and manifesting themselves as such. A major role in this process of metamorphose from serfs into Poles was played by the civil society, Keely Stauter-Halsted highlighting the contribution not only of intellectuals but also of rural elites, of that *peasant intelligentsia* which is typical of many other parts of Central Europe. Of course, the school was also an important pillar on the road of the establishment and affirmation of Polish identity, the celebrations and commemorations of the heroes of the old independent Poland being as many opportunities to strengthen national feelings.

We can quite confidently apply both Eugen Weber’s and Keely Stauter-Halsted’s formula to the Romanians in Transylvania for the period 1848-1918. The abolition of serfdom was followed in the seven decades that followed by a process of development and modernization, with different paces within the period mentioned and throughout the province. In the first years after the abolition of feudal relations, Transylvania was still anchored in a traditional social and professional structure. However, a complex investigation of the economic and social realities of the province in the decades following the 1848 Revolution reveals the growing influence of factors tending to impose a capitalist type of stratification.<sup>5</sup> The census of 1869 captures in a more nuanced way the tendencies evident in the evolution of Transylvanian society towards an occupational model specific to the bourgeois socio-economic regime. In the decades following the 1848 Revolution, Transylvania underwent an upward economic evolution from an eminently agricultural province to an agrarian one with visible signs of industrial development. Acts XLIV of 1881 and XIII of 1890 stimulated the development of industry, the accumulation of capital and thus the expansion of the network of credit institutions increased, trade intensified, the need for specialists in administration grew, the number of people with liberal (intellectual) occupations increased, etc. In the decades before the war, the social categories linked to

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<sup>4</sup> Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village. The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland 1848-1914* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Simion Retegan, “Mutații economice în satul românesc din Transilvania la mijlocul veacului al XIX-lea. 1848-1867,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj-Napoca*, 21 (1978): 190 sqq.; Egyed Ákos, “Transformări în structura societății din Transilvania în primele două decenii de după Revoluția de la 1848,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj-Napoca*, 29 (1989): 187-202.

industrial, commercial, credit, etc. occupations increased in Transylvania, the share of the working population in primary production decreasing accordingly. A considerable role in the process of Transylvania's transition from a quasi-agrarian to an agrarian-industrial model was undoubtedly played by schools and the progress made in literacy and education. Without going into the details of this problem, we will only point out that in 1869, 311,847 inhabitants in the province could read and write, representing 13%, while in 1910, 823,053 inhabitants (28.3%) had these intellectual faculties. The doubling over four decades of the educated population (of course, with varying degrees of training) was the framework that allowed the adoption and multiplication of professions specific to the open, capitalist economy: civil servants in justice, the army, administration, banking, commerce, health, intellectuals, etc. On the eve of the outbreak of war, despite the discrepancies that still existed in the province, Transylvania was irreversibly on the road to a modern society, with an occupational structure that showed the progress made in the six decades since the abolition of feudal relations.<sup>6</sup> The formation, although timid, of a Romanian middle class, together with the growing number of wealthy peasants, provided the social basis for the elite to support their efforts to gain economic, political and cultural rights. In addition to the contribution of the railways to the economic and commercial progress of Transylvania in general,<sup>7</sup> the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians used the advantages of modern civilization to travel to the territory at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for parliamentary election campaigns, making direct contact with the population and succeeding in strengthening the confidence of the peasants in their leaders. The railways facilitated rapid travel between the main economic, cultural, religious and political centres (Arad, Lugoj, Orăștie, Sibiu, Brașov, Cluj, etc.), and provided rapid access for the elites of these centres to the rural areas.

What was important, however, was that the Romanian peasants gradually metamorphosed from the status of humble serfs into worthy citizens of a state in which they were still deprived of many of the economic, social, political and cultural benefits to which

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<sup>6</sup> Ioan Bolovan, "Aspecte privind populația Transilvaniei între 1850 și 1910: schimbare, progres și/sau modernizare," in *Schimbare și devenire în istoria României*, coord. Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română – Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2008), 603-618; Ciprian Porumb-Ghiurco, "On the Borderline Between Tradition and Modernity. The Socio-Professional Structure of the Sălaj Population Between 1880 and 1941," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, 24, 1 (2019): 117. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2019.24.1.07>

<sup>7</sup> See Nagy Robert, "Investiții străine în Transilvania, Banat și Maramureș, în perioada dualismului austro-ungar", *Revista Bistriței*, XVIII (2004): 344sqq.

they were entitled. The post-1848 period generously offers us many examples of dignity and affirmation of the rights of the majority population. At the beginning of the liberal era, one of the issues on the agenda for Romanian leaders was the introduction of Romanian as an official language in Transylvania. The efforts of the political elites in the representative democratic institutions that existed at that time at central and local level were matched by energetic and responsible actions at the masses level. The document published in the *Transylvanian Gazette* in mid-1861 is most relevant in this respect: “*The village communities in the seat of Orăștie (Balomir, Șibotu, Cudsieru, Waideiu, Romosu, Romosielu, Beriu, Pricasu and Turdașu), in their communal meetings, declared Romanian in all their communal affairs to be the official language and their declarations, with that addition, were made known to the magistrate of the seat, namely that they would receive orders and notices from the magistrate of the seat only in written Romanian.*”<sup>8</sup>

It is also impressive to see the efforts of the recently free-from-serfdom Romanian rural communities to set up a school, to give the children of the peasants the opportunity to be educated and then to enter a career that would change their social status. Simion Retegan has captured such a process that took place throughout Transylvania.<sup>9</sup> Such “professions of faith” from the world of the village remain memorable over time: “*the members and inhabitants of the Romanian Greek-Catholic community of Derețea, imbued with that intimate belief that culture, education, and therefore schooling, for man, for the Christian and especially for the Romanians, is the most imperative necessity, is a condition of life, is the guarantee of the future and is a duty to God, to oneself and to posterity.*”<sup>10</sup>

Church, school, civil society-associationism (economic, social and cultural) and the press (both secular and ecclesiastical) were the pillars on which the modern Romanian nation was founded and established in the decades before the Great Union. During the period of Austro-Hungarian dualism, as a result of the status enjoyed by the Romanians in Transylvania, hundreds of regional and local professional and cultural institutions (cultural associations and societies, women’s meetings, teachers’ meetings, pupils’ and students’

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<sup>8</sup> *Romos (jud. Hunedoara). Protocolul ședințelor reprezentanței comunale 1896 - 1912*, ed. Aurel Răduțiu (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Ecou Transilvan, 2014), X. See the original in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, XXIV, 48 (1861): 208.

<sup>9</sup> Simion Retegan, *Satul românesc din Transilvania, ctitor de școală: 1850-1867* (Cluj: Editura Echinox, 1994); Retegan, *Sate și școli românești din Transilvania la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea. 1867 – 1875* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1994). *Bibliografia istorică a României* for the period 1944-2010 and *Anuarul Istoriografic al României* after 2011 offer dozens of relevant titles from authors of different generations.

<sup>10</sup> Retegan, *Sate și școli românești din Transilvania la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea*, 71.

reading societies, choirs, economic associations, etc.) were set up, which helped to strengthen the Romanian national sense of identity. In practical terms, this effervescence of associations, which served to strengthen and affirm the Romanian nation, represented, as has been very aptly stated, a genuine “Romanian civil society”, adapted to the specific political, cultural and economic conditions of the time.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to the current understanding, the Romanian civil society in Transylvania had a specificity resulting from the conditions in which the Romanians in the province lived until the Great Union. However, this in no way diminishes its value and importance for the Romanian national body in the province, as the contribution of Romanian civil society to the modernization processes that took place in Transylvania in the decades before the First World War was visible and undeniable. The model was widespread in the double Austro-Hungarian monarchy, where some peoples had begun earlier the process of associationism, of building civil society, the Czechs being the most advanced in this regard.<sup>12</sup>

The creation of the hundreds of associations that made up the Romanian civil society favoured and amplified the dialogue in society, bringing people in large numbers to the scene of public life, even if this was sometimes done through the local elite (teachers, priests, notaries, merchants, leading peasants, etc.). Civil society brought the Romanians into the arena of public life, involving them in the life of the national community, which itself emerged from the historical marginalization into which it had been pushed for centuries.<sup>13</sup> The periodic election of the leadership of the associations involved the exercise of the right to vote by thousands and thousands of Romanians who did not normally participate in political elections because of the census vote. For them, the democratic exercise represented by the election of governing bodies at central and local level of ASTRA was a valuable experience that prepared and validated the political maturity of the Romanian nation in Transylvania in the autumn of 1918, when the national county and local councils were democratically elected, as well as the delegates in Alba Iulia. ASTRA distinguished itself by initiating cultural and social actions for the benefit of the whole national community. The

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<sup>11</sup> Liviu Maior *Habsburgi și români. De la loialitatea dinastică la identitate națională* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2006), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Havranek, “The Development of Czech Nationalism,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, vol. III, part 2 (1967): 239. See also the chapter on Polish civil society in Galicia in Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village...*

<sup>13</sup> Vasile Curticăpeanu, “Caracterul european și modernizator al concepției și activității ASTREI până la Unirea din 1918”, in *ASTRA, 1861-1950, 125 de ani de la înființare*, (ed.) Dr. Victor V. Grecu, (Sibiu: Soc. de Științe Filol. din R.S. România, 1987), 85 sqq.

social prestige of the teachers was particularly high, as this professional category constantly supported the modernization of Romanian society at all levels. As has already been observed recently, the Romanian civil society in Transylvania, through its numerous associations, societies and meetings, had the task of generating and stimulating not only the process of secularization of the national ideology, but also that of modernization of the national body, of social discipline.<sup>14</sup> Here we must emphasize the huge role that ASTRA played in supporting the students of the trade schools, their numerical growth being such as to make their involvement in the service of the community in which they worked more effective. It is well known that the development of civil society is usually associated with the existence of a middle class that can afford to engage in specific economic and cultural activities from a certain position. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this Romanian middle class was quite visible in Transylvania.

All associations and institutions resulting from the emergence and development of Romanian civil society in Transylvania were supported exclusively by private donations and membership fees. They were forms of association based on ethnic and social-professional criteria, based on voluntarism and the desire to be involved in the community for material, social, cultural and not least national progress. In conclusion, the massive integration of all the Romanian social categories in Transylvania in the society-culture-nationality dialogue, achieved primarily through ASTRA and all the associations that functioned during dualism, is an undeniable proof of the political-national dynamism manifested at the level of all socio-professional structures among the Romanian nation in Transylvania on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War. In general, in the decades preceding the war, not only in Transylvania but also in the Romanian territories outside the Carpathian region, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social categories related to industrial and commercial occupations, credit, etc. increased, with a corresponding reduction in the share of the active population in primary production.

Cultural societies and professional institutions originated primarily in the evolution towards modernity of the Romanian society in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the conditions of foreign domination which not once proved to be intolerant towards the manifestations of the national spirit of the Romanians. However, beyond the national component that they expressed, they undoubtedly represented a genuine Romanian civil society, in which extremely acute problems concerning the society were addressed (the emancipation of women and the extension of the right to vote to women, universal suffrage, the social protection of industrial workers, the fight against antisocial phenomena such as

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<sup>14</sup> Maior, *Habsburgi și români...*, 8.

illiteracy and alcoholism, support for specific professional rights, etc.). As a detail not unimportant for the issues dealt with here, the fact that in most of these institutions of civil society throughout Transylvania lawyers were present in large numbers gave the associations not only greater social prestige, but also the possibility of materially supporting many initiatives.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, the broad Romanian solidarity that was so vigorously manifested in the autumn of 1918 was also due in large part to the activities of the professional associations and cultural institutions that had been in existence for more than five decades and had consistently promoted the ideal of national unity. The contribution that Romanian civil society made to the national revival of the Romanians in Transylvania in the modern era was recognized and appreciated as such by the entire Romanian political class. In the call of 7/20 November 1918 for the convening of the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, the presence of representatives of cultural associations as elected delegates was expressly provided for: "The assembly will be attended... by 2 representatives of cultural societies (ASTRA Association, Theatre Fund, Arad Association, etc.)," which signifies the recognition of the cultural-national importance of this institution.<sup>16</sup> On the memorable day of 1 December 1918, in Alba Iulia, delegates from the main institutions and associations that made up the Romanian civil society in Transylvania were present. Thus, ASTRA was represented by 2 delegates, the National Association of Arad sent 2 delegates, the Society of the Fund for the Help of Romanian Journalists in Transylvania, Banat and the parts inhabited by Romanians in Hungary sent 2 delegates, etc. Without having had the scope of the civil society in other parts of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Romanian associative movement in Transylvania represented a not negligible component in the process of modernization of the Romanian society in the area and in the affirmation of the national identity.

In this sinuous and complex process of affirmation of the Romanian nation between 1848-1918, an important element remains the binding element of the identity project: the Revolution of 1848-1849. The invocation and perpetuation of the model of the 1848 revolution, both by the elites and by the popular masses, had the power of an engine generating hopes and milestone objectives, invigorating in moments of hardship, it became a guiding beacon on the road to awareness of the strength of the nation. Therefore, the similarities that can be detected between the National Assembly of 1 December 1918 in Alba

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<sup>15</sup> Dan Demşa, "Avocații români arădeni în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea," in *Societate și civilizație în Banatul istoric*, (ed.) Camil Petrescu (Timișoara: Mirton, 2003), 147sqq.

<sup>16</sup> *1918 la români. Documentele Unirii*, vol. VIII, (eds.) Ștefan Pascu, Ion Popescu-Puțuri (Bucharest:, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989), 6.

lulia and the National Assembly in Blaj on 3/15 - 5/17 May 1848 are not accidental, they represent the finality of the approach of the Transylvanian Romanian political elites to perpetuate the revolutionary model as the saving solution for the Romanian nation, sometimes even in a messianic form.

The political historian George Barițiu, historian and active participant in the sense of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.<sup>17</sup> with a not insignificant role in the Romanian revolutionary leadership in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, considered the Revolution of 1848-1849 *“an epoch as great and memorable as it was tragic... To the question thus put and applied to the whole Romanian nation, of all the countries inhabited by this element, it can be answered ... that it has reached not only the consciousness of its national individuality, but also to the consciousness of its dignity and value, such as after other catastrophes through which it had passed in hundreds of years, had never happened before.”*<sup>18</sup> It is worthy of note that the man from Brașov, who became president of the Romanian Academy, saw the revolution as a fundamental moment not only for the Romanians of Transylvania but also for the entire nation. He also emphasizes the educational value of history, considering that the restitution and knowledge of the past (in this case of the glorious lessons offered by the generation of the forty-eighters) is of considerable value for future generations. Indeed, the revolution allowed the unleashing of the forbidden energies of the Romanian nation in all the provinces, demonstrated its determination to change an unjust world from a socio-economic, political and not least from the perspective of the organization of the territorial-national space. Naturally, the May assembly in Blaj on the Plain of Liberty appears everywhere as the culmination, the symbol of this liberation: *“That assembly, forever memorable, in which the Romanian people of this principality proclaimed and affirmed its being as a nation.”*<sup>19</sup>

Only a few months after the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, a booklet was published in Orăștie by an anonymous author, who made a historical analysis of the path taken by Romanians over a millennium, from its formation and political affirmation in several states to the Great Union. One of the sentences in this booklet is symptomatic of our approach: *“The Transylvanians, peasants, people, when they met in 1848 on the Field of Liberty and listened to the scholars’ interpretation of what the Hungarians*

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<sup>17</sup> See for this hypostasis Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Historian as participant,” *Daedalus*, 100, 2 (1971): 339-358.

<sup>18</sup> George Bariț, *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei. Pe două sute de ani din urmă*, vol. II, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Ștefan Pascu, Florin Salvan (Brașov: Inspectoratul pentru cultură al județului Brașov, 1994), 580.

<sup>19</sup> George Bariț, *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei...*, 183.

*meant by their union, grasped then the meaning of the word in their own way, and said, shouting with one voice: We want to unite with the country! The country! When the Romanian peasant from Transylvania uttered this word, he understood: our country, the country that he also felt was his own, and therefore he did not need to add which country... The desire to unite with the country, if it did not appear among the people until so late and only on such an occasion, does not mean that it had not been there for a long time, but its outburst in the cry on the Field of Freedom is proof that who knows for how long it had been brewing in his soul..."*<sup>20</sup>

It must be said that the author of the anonymous booklet from Orăștie had a thorough knowledge of history because he/she was able to invoke for the achievement of the objective of political-national unity the unionist message left by Nicolae Bălcescu in an article, based on a speech delivered in Paris by the patriot from Tara Romaneasca in exile after the defeat of the revolution in Wallachia. It is the text *The Movement of the Romanians in Transylvania in 1848*, printed from 1851 onwards in several editions, in which a pertinent analysis of the Romanian revolution in Transylvania in 1848-1849 was made. Nicolae Balcescu's admiration for the second national assembly in Blaj on 3/15 - 5/17 May 1848 was undisguised, the historian and revolutionary from Țara Româneasca being impressed by the strength and importance of the event organized by the Romanian leaders of Transylvania: *"May 15, 1848! Day of light, of freedom and of Romanian greatness, we remember you and celebrate you with love! In the Romanian annals no other day shines more beautifully than you and the one like you, your beloved sister, the day of 11 June 1848 of the people of Bucharest. We remember you and celebrate you with love, a great day! For we first heard a whole people answering those who spoke of the union of Transylvania with Hungary, with this cry: "We want to be united with the Country"."*<sup>21</sup> The note put by Bălcescu after the sentence *"We want to unite with the Country"* is relevant to his creed: *"Under this word Country, the Transylvanians mean Wallachia. I was not fortunate enough to be in Blaj on 15 May 1848, but several Romanians from Transylvania who were there assured me of this cry of the people."*<sup>22</sup> Thus, Nicolae Balcescu considered that the assembly in Blaj on 3/15 May 1848 was a sign of national maturity, of the achievement of the national freedom for which

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<sup>20</sup> *Unirea desăvârșită. Ce am înțeles noi în trecut și ce trebuie să înțelegem acuma prin Unire*, foreword by Ovidiu Pecican, transl. by Roxana Bauduin (Bistrița/Paris, 2018): 53.

<sup>21</sup> Nicolae Bălcescu, *Opere II. Scrieri istorice, politice și economice 1848-1852*, eds. G. Zane, Elena G. Zane (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1982), 115.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanians had long yearned.<sup>23</sup> Even if today we have a different interpretation of the correct meaning of what many participants in the second assembly in Blaj proclaimed (“We want to unite with the Country”), the interpretation given by Bălcescu is important for the post-1848 era and for the effort of an entire generation to create a national ideal through the union of all Romanians, namely that the Romanians of the Transylvania chanted in Blaj that they wanted union with the Romanian Country. In fact, the idea of a single Romanian political body was expressed as clearly as possible in the memo written by the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians at the third national assembly in Blaj in September 1848 and sent to the Austrian Parliament, which put forward the idea of an autonomous Romanian state within Austria, by uniting Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia: *“In no state have all nationalities obtained so many guarantees for their freedom and nationality as in Austria, by the just, liberal decisions of a high Parliament... We want the free union of free peoples under the rule of Austria, free within, strong without... But not only for us we pray, **but also for our brothers in the Danube Principalities (emphasis added).**”*<sup>24</sup> The Memorandum of 16/28 September 1848 is the culmination of the collaboration between the Romanian revolutionaries in Transylvania, Wallachia, Moldova and Bucovina. At the same time, it is proof of a concerted action aimed at saving the political and legal status of the Romanian Lands under double foreign occupation. The political regime established after the defeat of the revolution in Wallachia was a clear violation of autonomy, and the solution advocated by the Transylvanian memorandum, although proposing the creation of a Romanian state under the aegis of Austria, was clearly a step forward compared to the situation in the two Romanian states across the Carpathians. However, the solution of uniting all Romanians remained in the consciousness of the nation, as the strength of the 1848 model generated attitudes and behaviour on both sides of the Carpathians.

There is no doubt that everything that happened on 1 December 1918 in Alba Iulia, namely the democratic exercise of the right to national self-determination by the majority population of Transylvania, gave the union of this province with Romania durability and legitimacy. The decision of the Paris Peace Conference to officially and internationally recognize the union of Transylvania with the Romanian state was primarily based on the acceptance of a geopolitical reality based on a clear demographic majority of Romanians in the territories that had decided by plebiscite on their statehood. This important aspect was confirmed by the conclusions of all the commissions of foreign experts who came to

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<sup>23</sup> Ion Buzași, *Câmpia libertății în literatură* (Cluj Napoca: Editura Clusium, 1998), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cornelia Bodea, *1848 la români. O istorie în date și mărturii*, vol. II (Bucharest: Ed. stiintifica si enciclopedica, 1982), 911.

Transylvania in 1919-1920 to investigate the ethno-demographic structures, especially in the area of the future border with Hungary, who formulated their own versions regarding the drawing of the north-western, western and south-western borders of Romania. If the demographic argument played in 1918-1920 a not negligible role in the geopolitical reconfiguration of this area that had belonged to the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, it is also true to say that in their previous efforts for national emancipation, the Romanian leaders of Transylvania used this demographic factor in their political approaches for more than a century and a half throughout the modern era. The Romanian case regarding the relationship of statistics-demography with society is somewhat identical to that of the Italians, as Silvana Patriarca's work on the status of demography as a science of the civilization of nations suggests; associating "patriotic statistics" with the national identity of the Italians, etc.<sup>25</sup>

The conquest of Transylvania by the Habsburgs at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century meant the introduction of an efficient administration, the organization and inventory of the human and material potential of the territories integrated into the empire. This led, among other things, to the gradual introduction of conscriptions and the regular registration of various socio-professional categories or even the entire population. In other words, since the arrival of the Austrians, statistical and demographic sources multiplied, their content diversified, the qualifications of those in charge of their compilation increased, and we began to have an overview as close as possible to reality of the demographic potential and material resources of Transylvania. The available data for historical Transylvania (Transylvania) indicate for the period 1690-1847 an average proportion of Romanians of 52.7%, Hungarians (including the Szeklers) of 27.3%, Germans (Saxons, civil servants and imperial army) of 16.7%, other ethnic groups (Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) of 3.3%. As a constant of the mentioned period, there was a slight upward trend in the share of the German population, to the detriment of a decrease of a few percent in the share of Romanians and Hungarians.<sup>26</sup>

The official statistics of the Austrian state, which of course also reached the Romanian elite, had a double importance: on the one hand, they showed the number of the Romanian population within the province, on the other hand they showed their socio-economic and cultural level, guiding the leaders towards the elaboration of a national agenda

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<sup>25</sup> Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood. Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Ladislau Gyémánt, "Evoluția demografică a Transilvaniei între 1690-1847," in *Populația României. Trecut, prezent, viitor*, eds. Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, Traian Rotariu (Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006), 42sq.

in which short, medium and long term actions were prioritized. The demographic predominance of the Romanians in Transylvania, together with their autochthony, gradually penetrated not only the consciousness of the elites but also of the common Romanians. This is why, when, around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Transylvanian Romanians drew up the first documents calling for a change in their status, they appealed to the demographic factor, among others. The first to include the pre-eminence of the Romanians in the province in his arguments was the United (Greek-Catholic) Bishop Inochentie Micu in his memorandum *Supplex Libellus* of 1743. He accuses the authorities that many of the economic and legal abuses to which the Romanians are subjected are due to the fact that they do not benefit from officials of their own ancestry who know their language and understand their problems: “*although the Romanians live in districts such as Făgăraș, Chioar, Hațeg, and more than half of some counties, seats, etc., they still cannot have, like the other so-called receipt nations, servants of their own.*” Then, as regards the claims concerning the whole national body, Bishop Inochentie Micu sees no reason why the Romanian nation could not also be *receipt* like the other three privileged nations “*when it surpasses them all in numbers, and in the increase of the treasury, in public duties and services at least equals them, and has contributed in the same way both to the wars and to the defense of the country.*”<sup>27</sup>

It was not by chance that the bishop associated the majority number of Romanians in Transylvania with the quantity of public tasks, the combination of demographic and economic factors being harmoniously integrated in the support of national-political claims. Although they initially acted within a strictly confessional framework, gradually the leaders of the Church united with Rome, starting with Bishop Inochentie Micu, extended their claims to the entire national body, thus covering the wishes of the entire Romanian nation in Transylvania.<sup>28</sup>

The question of number thus became a pressing one for the Romanian ecclesiastical elite in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, both for pragmatic reasons related to the need to keep track of the parishioners of each confession in order to better manage strictly religious issues, and from the perspective of including the demographic factor among the elements supporting the claim. Thus, for more than 150 years, “demography” would become a priority on the agenda of the movement for national emancipation of the Romanians in Transylvania. As far as they were able, the Romanian leaders organized their own statistical-demographic records, especially within the confessional frameworks, but at the same time they were

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<sup>27</sup> David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 164-165.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolae Bocșan, Ioan Lumperdean, Ioan Aurel Pop, *Etnie și confesiune în Transilvania (secolele XIII-XIX)* (Oradea: Fundația Cele Trei Crișuri, 1994), 69.

extremely attentive to all the population records made by the administrative and military authorities, in order to be able to use the information gathered periodically during the conscriptions and censuses for their own benefit. George Barițiu wrote very convincingly in this regard in 1879: “*And yet there is no country in Europe where the need for clear and accurate statistical information is more deeply felt than in Transylvania.*”<sup>29</sup>

The Revolution of 1848 posed the problem of demography with both acuity and difficulty. For the Romanians, the majority population of Transylvania, the promises of individual freedom and progress generously offered by the programme of the March 1848 revolution in Hungary were not enough. The Romanians, who did not enjoy representation in the legislative and executive bodies of the province, wanted, in the spirit of the romantic conception of nationhood, recognition of their language and nationality, equal rights with the other inhabitants who were inferior in numbers. Gradually, the main objectives of the Romanian revolutionary programme were outlined, which at first sight did not go beyond the framework of a pronounced legalism and reformism.<sup>30</sup> The ideological argument in support of the rights of the nation largely reiterated what the Supplex of 1791 had already incorporated: the appeal to Roman origin and continuity in Transylvania, the invocation of the majority number of Romanians in the province, their dispossession of natural rights over the centuries, etc.<sup>31</sup> As expected, the demographic argument could not be missing from the inventory of motivations for obtaining national-political rights in the revolutionary manifestos of the first weeks of the revolution.

The first more important programmatic act was the manifesto drawn up on 25 March 1848 by the professor Simion Bărnuțiu from Sibiu, entitled *Provocațiune*. The document rejected the idea of uniting Transylvania with Hungary as long as the Romanians were not recognized as a nation with political rights, and called for the national solidarity of all Romanian classes and social and political forces. Naturally, Bărnuțiu also invokes quantity, the number of Romanians, when he urges his fellow countrymen to demand their rights: “*You, but one million and three hundred thousand Romanians, are not in the world as a*

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<sup>29</sup> George Bariț, “Noțiuni relative la economia socială și istoria civilizațiunii în Transilvania,” *Transilvania*, 20-21 (1877), and *Analele Societății Academice Române. Tomul XI. Sesiunea anului 1878, Secțiunea II, Memorii și Notițe* (Bucharest: 1879).

<sup>30</sup> Liviu Maior, *1848-1849. Români și unguri în revoluție* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 49; Nicolae Bocșan, Valeriu Leu, *Revoluția de la 1848 din Transilvania în memorialistică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa universitară clujeană, 2000), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Maior, *Memorandul. Filosofia politico-istorică a petiționismului românesc*, [Cluj-Napoca – Bucharest: , Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1992), 10.

*nation. Once again, brothers! Today is the day of the resurrection of our right.*<sup>32</sup> On 2/14 May 1848, Simion Bărnuțiu, the main ideologist of the Romanians, presented in the cathedral of Blaj, in front of the intellectuals who came to the second national assembly, a famous speech entitled “Romanians and Hungarians”, a true theoretical and programmatic prologue of the Great National Assembly that took place on 3/15 5/17 May. In this speech, Bărnuțiu repeatedly inserted references to the demographic factor: *“the Romanians live at this time in their Romanian districts unsupervised by anyone, because the Hungarians have never filled the country, over which they claim to rule, they have always been fewer in number ... apart from a handful of Saxons and Hungarians mixed among the Romanians, Transylvania is the true property of the Romanian nation, which rightly won about seventeen hundred years ago, and since then until today keeps it, defends it and cultivates it with much sweat and toil.”*<sup>33</sup>

About 40,000 people, mostly peasants from all the counties of Transylvania, came to this meeting in Blaj, the second in their chronological order. The assembly swore an oath of allegiance to the Romanian nation, to the homeland and to the Emperor of Vienna and adopted the 16-point programme of the Romanian revolution, the document being entitled the National Petition.<sup>34</sup> The programme adopted in Blaj is in keeping with the spirit of the Romantic conception of the state and the nation, and is similar to other programmes of the European democratic revolution. Point 1 called for the national independence of the Romanian nation and equality in rights with the other nations of Transylvania, and for the Romanians to have representatives in the Transylvanian Diet “in proportion to their number, to have their rulers in all administrative, judicial and military branches in the same proportion”, and point 13 provided for the establishment of primary and secondary schools, military and technical high schools, seminaries for the training of priests and a Romanian university, all maintained “from the state in proportion to the contributing people.”<sup>35</sup> The appeal to the numerical preponderance of the Romanians in the province, to their economic contribution to the good running of the state, was a normal one in support of the demands of the Romanian nation, which did not enjoy the same benefits in Transylvania as the other inhabitants who, although a demographic minority, had taken over most of the political-administrative functions and enjoyed the subsidization of education and churches.

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<sup>32</sup> Cornelia Bodea, *1848 la români. O istorie în date și mărturii*, vol. I (Bucharest: Ed. stiintifica si enciclopedica, 1982), 401.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 449, 462.

<sup>34</sup> Maior, *1848-1849...*, 111sq.

<sup>35</sup> Bodea, *1848 la români...*, vol. I, 485-486.

Just as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the 1848 revolution the demographic factor was a not insignificant element in the arsenal of weapons used by the Romanian leaders in their quest for a new claim, the same was true in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the end of Austro-Hungarian dualism in 1867. It is well known that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was one of the most heterogeneous countries in Europe until the First World War, not only in terms of nationalities but also in terms of confessions. Specialists are almost unanimous in their assessment that between 1850 and 1910 considerable ethno-linguistic changes took place in the monarchy. In addition to all these changes within the provinces, the opposite trend can be seen in the numerical ratios of the hegemonic nations in the two halves of the empire: while the percentage of Germans in Cisleithania fell from 36.2% to 35.6%, that of Hungarians in Transleithania rose from 36.5% to 48.1%.<sup>36</sup> This considerable improvement in the percentage of Hungarians was due to three factors: a) firstly, the natural increase in population, the fact that the natural increase of Hungarians was higher than the average for the country; b) secondly, their lower participation in emigration compared to other ethnic groups; (c) thirdly, the process of assimilation, which developed to an increasing extent in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Hungarianisation of part of the non-Hungarian population and of the majority of immigrants.

We have briefly described the realities and also the demographic policies during the Austro-Hungarian dualism in order to better frame the attitudes of the Romanian elite towards them. The reference of the leaders of the national emancipation movement to the demographic factor during dualism was generally an extension of the strategy used since Supplex Libellus, and new nuances also appeared, references to the way of collecting data on the population, etc. For example, on the occasion of the 1869 census, the first population registration after the end of dualism, the Romanian leaders understood the importance of this demographic data collection operation not only for the state but also for Romanian national interests and reacted in accordance with these imperatives. Consequently, the Greek-Catholic Vicar of Năsăud, Grigore Moisil, sent a circular to all the priests in his subordination on 26 November 1869 in which he informed the clergy of the order received from the Năsăud district administration and also stressed the importance of statistics for the proper functioning of the state (“in any civilized and well-organized state, statistics is an act of the greatest importance and usefulness”). Beyond the pragmatic usefulness of collecting statistical-demographic data for the government, the diocesan hierarch of Năsăud stressed

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<sup>36</sup> *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band III. Die Völker des Reiches*, hsg. Adam Wandruszka, Peter Urbanitsch, 2. Teilband (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 414.

the special significance of this census for Romanians. Given the fact that it was the first comprehensive registration of the population after the end of the Austro-Hungarian dualist pact, it was the duty of the priests to do everything in their power to ensure that the data to be collected reflected the real ethnic and confessional structure of Transylvania: “*If there has ever been a conscription or census of the Romanian people of any importance, that of 1870 will certainly be of the utmost importance, and therefore the priests must do their utmost to ensure that this is done.*”<sup>37</sup>

The Memorandum of 1892, submitted to Emperor Francis Joseph I by the representatives of the Romanians in an impressive delegation (about 300 people) was undoubtedly the most important political act in Transylvania at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that period, major changes took place in the strategy and ideology of the national emancipation movement of the Transylvanian Romanians, so that the Memorandum is also affected by these new orientations. In the opinion of some of the most knowledgeable experts on the subject, the ideology of the Memorandum was to some extent identified with *tribunism*, a trend that had set out to spread a new direction in the Transylvanian public spirit. On such a vein and starting from the premise that *number is the foundation of our value*, tribunism militated for a reconsideration of the attitude of the elite towards the people, for a cultural action aimed at raising the level of the popular classes, culturally, economically and politically, in order to make political use of the potential offered by these categories.<sup>38</sup>

Romanian historiography has revealed not only the innovative but also the democratic character of the 1892 Act. Drafted by the leaders of the movement for the national emancipation of the Romanians, the Memorandum subjected to a broad and virulent indictment the policy promoted by the governments in Budapest after 1867, a policy whose consequences had negative repercussions on the other nationalities as well.<sup>39</sup> The Memorandum is therefore the natural result of the action of the majority, faced with the

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<sup>37</sup> The National Archives, The Bistrița-Năsăud County Service, the *Emil Precup* fund, inv. 31, pages 211-213; The *Oficiul parohial greco-catolic Sângeorz-Băi* fund, inv. reg. no. 7, f. 39-40. See Ioan Bolovan, Adrian Onofreiu, Viorel Rus, *Familiiile din Năsăud în anul 1869. Contribuții de demografie istorică* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2010), 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolae Bocșan, “Ideologia politică a Memorandului,” in *Memorandul 1892-1894. Ideologie și acțiune politică românească*, (Bucharest: Progresul Românesc, 1994), 262; Maior, *Mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania 1900-1914* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1986), 16; more recently, Vlad Popovici, *Tribunismul (1884-1905). Ideologie și acțiune politică, direcții culturale și angajament social* (PhD diss., Cluj-Napoca, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> *Procesul Memorandului românilor din Transilvania. Acte și date*, vol. I (Cluj: Editura buletinului justiției 1933), 43.

dispossession of certain rights and freedoms and subjected to a constant policy of altering ethno-linguistic identity. Free of excessive historicism that might have made it difficult to read, the Memorandum tilts the balance of arguments and condemns the assimilation policy pursued by the authorities from other positions, not least the demographic perspective. Thus, from the very text of the document, submitted in the spring of 1892 to the Emperor Francis Joseph, it is clear that the reasoning behind the renunciation of many historical examples is clear. Now, as has been very aptly noted, this view practically means “the abandonment of the historical right in favour of the natural right, the normal growth of arguments coming from the arsenal of the majority principle.”<sup>40</sup>

Whether premeditated or circumstantial, but always correctly portrayed, the appeal to demography, or to the majority number of Romanians in Transylvania, gives more weight to the memory of the leaders of the national emancipation movement. Thus, within the Memorandum, we have identified at least 15 fragments from which it is possible to observe as clearly as possible the invocation of the principle of demographic majority in support of the claims made, from which we expose some quotations: “*The Union and its inauguration by Art. of Law 43: 1868, are the blatant disregard of all the rights of the Romanian people as an element, which makes up the absolute majority of the old Transylvania*”; “*We make up almost ¾ of the country’s population, we also possess the land of the country in the same proportion and in the same proportion we also bear the common burdens; It is unquestionable, but our right to be represented in the Diet and to participate in the running of the country’s affairs in the same proportion*”; “*It is a painful truth that more than 3 million of Your Majesty’s subjects are not and do not consider themselves represented in the Diet of their country*”; “*In Transylvania everywhere, as well as in many of the counties that fall outside of Transylvania, such as Bihor, Sălaj, Arad, Timiș, Sătmar, Maramureș and Caraș-Severin, in all in 23 counties the Romanians are in the majority, almost the only people*”; “*We Romanians, a complete nation of more than 3 million souls, contribute with our blood and our wealth to the support of the state, but we have no state-supported settlement for our cultural advancement*” and so on.<sup>41</sup>

Demographic aspects are constantly invoked throughout the Memorandum to highlight, once again, the injustice of maintaining Romanians in a state of inferiority on the land, where they represented the oldest and most numerous ethnic element. At the same time, the appeal to the demographic argument also has a significant democratic ideological

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<sup>40</sup> Maior, *Memorandul. Filosofia politico-istorică a petiționismului românesc*, 176.

<sup>41</sup> *Procesul Memorandului...*, 15-42.

component, in line with the modern doctrinal tendencies present in other national emancipation movements in Central and South-Eastern Europe.<sup>42</sup>

Then, in their speeches in the Parliament in Budapest, in their electoral campaigns and in some political articles published in the press, the NRP leaders addressed several themes that had as a constant the demographic problems in Hungary at that time. Either they referred to some aspects of the policy of forced assimilation of nationalities promoted by the Hungarian government which they condemned in very categorical terms, or they addressed the problem of mass emigration from Transylvania at the turn of the century trying to find not only explanations but also solutions, or they referred to population colonization and industrial development as a panacea for reducing poverty and stabilizing the population in poor areas etc., Iuliu Maniu, Ștefan Cicio Pop and others proved to be aware of all the most important problems faced by the Romanian population in dualist Hungary at that time. Their thorough knowledge of law, to which they were associated with truthful information about various actions and initiatives of the Hungarian governments aimed at altering the ethno-confessional structures in Transylvania or favouring the Hungarian ethnic element to the detriment of the other nationalities in the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy, enabled them to use demographic realities in support of their political approaches.<sup>43</sup> But they also included them in their speeches to the crowds during election campaigns when they travelled to the territory and made contact with the mass of the Romanian population.

The consistency of the appeal to demographics among many of the Romanian leaders of the national emancipation movement in Transylvania over the course of more than a century and a half eventually led to the awareness of this truth among the many, the ordinary people, and thus made them more confident in their claiming approach. Made through memoirs or political programmes, in the Budapest Parliament or in the county congregations, spoken during popular electoral assemblies or published in the Romanian press of the time, all the statements of the elites who appealed to the quantitative, demographic factor show that Romanian politicians were involved with responsibility and competence in defending the interests of the majority population of Transylvania, exposed to the policy of assimilation, economically and socially disadvantaged due to arbitrary

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<sup>42</sup> Ioan Lumperdean, "Lexicul Memorandului: între tradiție și inovația istorică", *Studia Universitatis "Babeș-Bolyai". Historia*, XXXIX, 1-2 (1994): 134-136.

<sup>43</sup> See Ioan Bolovan, "Probleme demografice în discursurile și articolele politice ale lui Ștefan Cicio Pop la începutul sec. XX," in *Ștefan Cicio Pop. Studii*, ed. Corneliu Pădurean (Arad: Editura Gutenberg Univers, 2009), 23-38.

measures taken by the rulers. Frequent trips to the territory to learn first-hand about the many problems faced by the Romanians, starting with Bishop Inochentie Micu and continuing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with secular leaders, gave them irrefutable arguments against those who opposed them. Practically from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century until the Union of Transylvania with Romania in 1918, there was not a major programmatic document of the national emancipation movement, a speech made at central or local level, an electoral meeting, etc., in which the Romanian elite did not invoke as its main argument what was obvious in the province: the demographic pre-eminence of the Romanians within the ethnic structure of the Transylvanian population. It is worth noting that the invocation of the quantitative factor was not done mechanically, demography was always associated with other liberal, democratic arguments from the ideological arsenal specific to the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Nationalities.

In the decades leading up to the First World War, contacts between the Romanians in Transylvania and those across the mountains intensified, with public opinion in the Old Kingdom often showing empathy for the Transylvanian brothers and being massively won over by the idea of supporting the ideal of national unity with all its might. The general exhibition organized in Bucharest in 1906 on the occasion of King Carol I's four-decade anniversary of his reign provided countless opportunities for effusion and expression of feelings of national solidarity. It was impressive that tens of thousands of Romanians came to Bucharest from Transylvania to see the achievements of their brothers in the independent state. By train, by wagon, etc., simple people and intellectuals alike travelled to the Romanian capital in the spring of 1906 with hope and curiosity. The memoirs of one of the participants in these events from the region of Banat give a glimpse of the atmosphere in Bucharest that year, on the occasion of the anniversary: *"The groups of ten in a row, made up of all the choirs from Banat that had arrived, arrived on Calea Victoriei, passing in front of the Royal Palace. The rain poured down on the column as it passed through the streets, a flood of flowers accompanied by endless cheers from the windows and balconies of the palaces adorned with Romanian barks and flags... The following day, at the Arenele Romane in Bucharest, under the direction of the choirmaster Kiriac, the grandiose jubilee concert took place, awakening the volcano of the Romanian soul vibrations in the chests of the human brothers gathered from all corners of Europe. All the choirs sang together: "The Royal Anthem", "Wake up Romanian" and "Lion Cubs". It was a real glory gratefully expressed in determination, for uniting in an admirable people*

*of Romanianism all over the world.*"<sup>44</sup> Back home, the tens of thousands of Transylvanian Romanians who spent a few exciting days in the Romanian capital popularized the emotions and joy of their journey among those back home.

Thus, thanks to the efforts of the elites in the Church and civil society over several decades, as a result of the increased means of promoting their own identity, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were almost no Romanians in Transylvania who had not experienced the metamorphosis from a quasi-amorphous mass into a civic and national community capable of assuming responsibility for its future. Therefore, the democratic, dignified and at the same time firm behaviour of Alba Iulia (including in the previous weeks) now appears to us in a proper light, crowning the result of the involvement of two or three generations that have achieved the transition from serfs to Romanians!

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<sup>44</sup> Valeriu Leu, *Modernizare și imobilism. Sate și oameni din Banat la începutul veacului XX în documente memorialistice* (Reșița: Banatica, 1998), 20.