

100 Years since the Great Union of Romania

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Edited by

Dan Dungaciu and Viorella Manolache

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INTRODUCTION

MANIFEST DESTINY? ROMANIA IN EUROPE

IOAN-AUREL POP

A medium-sized country (with a surface area approximately equal to that of present-day Great Britain), Romania is European in many respects, including its geographical position and its name. The name “rumân/român-România” (Romanian/Rumanian-Romania) comes from the Latin *Romanus-Romania*, bringing one's mind to the era of the Roman Empire approximately two millennia ago. At that time, the largest part of present-day Romania (inhabited mainly by the Geto-Dacians) was transformed into Roman territory, the provinces Dacia and Moesia. At the same time, as a result of this transformation, the seal of Rome was placed forever on the Carpathian-Danubian-Balkan area, where over a period of several centuries the Romanian people were established, becoming the only current direct inheritors of the Roman world. In Dobruja, the area between the Danube and the Black Sea, the Romans followed the path of the Greeks, who founded numerous colonies there during the 7th–6th centuries BC.

Therefore, the European history of the territory that comprises Romania begins with the great colonization by the Greeks, the people who invented the words “Europe” and “democracy” and who left traces in Histria, Tomis (today's Constanta) and Callatis (today's Mangalia). As well as in museums, these traces can still be seen today in a few places, especially in Histria, where archaeological excavations carried out in the 20th century brought to light a large town. Roman history can be found throughout Dobruja, which belonged to the province of Moesia, and in Transylvania, Banat and Oltenia, where Imperial Dacia was based, with towns (*municipia* and *colloniae*) with amphitheatres, temples, administrative buildings, statues, funeral monuments, Roman camps, Roman baths (*thermae*), and roads.

Romania's second move into the European realm was its integration within the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117). The Romanization of the regions of the Lower Danube incorporated these spaces

into the Latin sphere, which today extends from the Black Sea to Rio Grande del Norte and on to Tierra del Fuego. The Romanians, like other Latin people, formed during the first millennium of the Christian Era, and comprised three main ethno-linguistic elements: the native (the sublayer), the conquering (the layer), and the migratory (the upper layer). In the case of the Romanians, these elements come in the following order: Thraco-Dacian-Getae, Roman, and then Slav, with the obvious predominance of the Roman (Latin) component, like the other Latin groups.

The fully formed Romanian people appear historically in the 8th–9th centuries AD, when Romanians are mentioned by Byzantine, Latin, Slavic, Armenian, Arab, and Persian sources as living to the north and south of the Lower Danube. The name of the Romanians in these records is Vlach (Wallachian). The term “Vlach” comes from the name of a Romanized Celtic tribe and initially signified a Latin-speaking group and then a Latin people (an ethnic group). But in the Carpathian-Danubian and Balkan areas, it ended up meaning simply Romanian, because the Romanians were the sole inheritors of Rome. Therefore, similar to other groups of people, the Romanians have two main names, one which they call themselves – rumân/român (Rumanian/Romanian) – and another (with variations) by which they are called by foreigners – Vlach (with many alternatives) – both being connected to Latinity, to Rome.

A Latin people in a Byzantine world, Romanians, Christianized and speaking the Latin language, became Orthodox and, for several centuries, they used the Slavic language (Old Slavic) as the language of culture and of the church. Though it was unusual, this is not unique if we consider that some Slavic peoples – Poles, Czechs, Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes – used Latin in medieval times as the language of culture, the royal court and the church. When Romanians began to organize their church, in the years just before 1,000 AD, the nearest model was the Byzantine one. In this way, Romanians were unique in being a Latin people with a Byzantine religion. During the Middle Ages, Romanians created two principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), within which they organized public life and preserved their national character. Other Romanians lived under foreign political administration, primarily in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, which were under the domination of Medieval Hungary, where they lived side by side with other groups of peoples (such as Hungarians, Saxons and Szeklers). From medieval up to modern times, numerous records recall the participation of Romanians in the Late Crusades in the 14th–17th centuries, those vast undertakings by Christians designed to liberate European territories occupied by the Ottomans after 1354. At that time the Romanians (together with the Greeks, the Bulgarians, the Serbs, the Albanians, the

Hungarians, the Croats, the Poles, the Germans, etc.) regarded themselves as the defenders of Christianity, viewing their countries as “the gateway of Christendom”. Their princes – diplomats and warriors such as Mircea the Old, Vlad the Impaler, Iancu or John Hunyadi, Stephen the Great and Michael the Brave – were praised in Europe for their military virtues on the battlefield, some of them appointed *Athleta Christi* (official fighters for the glory of Jesus Christ) by the Holy See. Because of this, the battles fought to defend Christian civilization and true European traditional values were treasured – the battles of Rovine (1395), Belgrade (1456), Vaslui (1475) and Calugareni (1595). Despite this tremendous effort, by the end of the Middle Ages, the Romanian Principalities ended up as tributes of the Ottoman Empire. Initially, Wallachia and Moldavia paid an annual tribute to the Turks (as the price of the peace) and succeeded in preserving their independence but by the beginning of the 16th century, they were reduced to the status of autonomous provinces, remaining Christian countries with Christian princes and a Romanian political class and state administration. The Turks were never allowed to settle on the territory of the Romanian Principalities, to own land, to conduct Islamic proselytizing or to build mosques. After the unravelling of Hungary in 1541, Transylvania suffered the same fate, becoming an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty until the 1680s. Subsequently it fell under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy, which remained its status until the end of World War I.

The Renaissance and the Reformation represented another moment in the European rhythm of the Romanians during the 15th–17th centuries. The Renaissance reached the Carpathian-Danubian area later, coming from two directions: initially from the north-west, from the Western Catholic world, and then from the south, from Constantinople and Venice, that is from the Byzantine or Byzantine-influenced world. The Western type of Renaissance was stronger in Transylvania and in the surrounding areas while the Byzantine influence was stronger in Wallachia and Moldova. This great cultural wave did not immediately bring about a sudden rebirth of antiquity but it did cause a flourishing of culture, the arts, of vernacular languages, and of printing. In the 16th century, the humanist Nicolaus Olahus (Nicholas the Romanian) would pride himself on his Roman origin and those of his people. In 1508 a monk, Macarie, who had passed through Venice, brought the printing press to the capital of Wallachia. Several people of culture, among them Deacon Coresi, Johannes Honterus and Gaspar Heltai, began printing books in Romanian, German, and Hungarian in Brasov, Sibiu and Cluj so they could be understood by the common people. A bishop from Oradea, John Vitez, founded a humanistic library. Many chroniclers wrote

about the past not in an analytical manner but pragmatically in order to help princes moderate their vices. Churches and monasteries became more imposing to glorify God and their founders, artists and the people. Orthodoxy was renewed, becoming stronger, adapting to the times, in line with the “dominant strand of reason”, and entered into a dialogue with Europe, while Catholicism closed its ranks as a result of the Reformation. The Catholic Transylvanian elite became almost entirely Protestant, the Saxons (a Germanic people) became Lutherans, and the Hungarians and a part of the Szeklers became Calvinists and Unitarians. During a later stage, as a result of the Counter-Reformation and the Catholic Reformation, Transylvanian Catholicism partially regained some of the lost territory (with help from the Jesuits) but never occupied a dominant position again. A key moment in the late Counter-Reformation, promoted by the Habsburgs around the end of the 16th century and throughout the 17th century, was the creation of the Greek Catholic churches, attracting Ukrainians and Romanians to the Roman (Catholic) Church. Around 1700, Romanians from Transylvania recognized Papal authority (together with other principles of Catholicism) but retained Byzantine rites, calendar, holidays, and traditions. This proved to be a great advantage for the Viennese Court, which gained a large number of faithful subjects, and offered Romanians the opportunity to study in the Western world. The union between Romanians in Transylvania and the Church of Rome represented a new rapprochement with Europe, an adaptation to European rhythms. Transylvanian Romanians – and not only – began to act in line with the principles of the Enlightenment movement. From the beginning of the century of the Enlightenment, Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, a member of the Berlin Academy and whose name is engraved on the front of the Sainte G enevi ve Library in Paris, thought similarly to Leibniz, thereby being a representative of the pre-Enlightenment. He wrote lyrics in several languages, was interested in the Mohammedan religion, in the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, in Turkish music, in his country, in Moldavia, and in the unity of all Romanian people in the province of Dacia.

During the 18th century, Enlightenment projects, deriving their inspiration from Europe, were instituted by Romanians, as can be observed on the political level (the fight for national emancipation conducted through petitions), on the social level (represented by uprisings and revolutions) and on the cultural level (the Transylvanian School and the writers of the Danubian Principalities). When the Greeks were fighting for their freedom and attracting the admiration of the whole of Europe (including Lord Byron), the Romanians, led by Tudor Vladimirescu, were themselves fighting against the Ottoman Empire (1821). When thrones were being

burnt in Paris and revolutionary programmes were being conceived in Berlin, Vienna and Milan (1848), Romanians were gathering in Iasi, Blaj and Islaz, where they devised constitutions and planned reforms (in Brasov, Cernauti, Bucharest, and Lugoj), and they took up arms against the Turks, the Russians and the Hungarians, foreseeing a democratic society based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

During the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, modern Romania was formed in accordance with European principles and against the background of a strong French influence but with weaker influences from Austria, Italy, Germany, and England. During this time, strong political personalities asserted themselves, among them Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Nicolae Bălcescu, Ion and Dumitru Brătianu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Vasile Alecsandri, Avram Iancu, Simion Bărnuțiu, George Barițiu, and others. In 1859, when Italy and Germany were founded, the construction of Modern Romania began through the union of Moldavia and Wallachia and under the reign of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. From that moment on, the official name of the country was Romania. In 1866, under the new prince, Carol von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a new constitution was promulgated (based on the Belgian model). In 1878, after a difficult war, following the Berlin Congress, the complete independence of Romania was fully recognized, and Dobruja became a part of the kingdom. In 1918, after participating in the international conflagration on the side of the Entente (1916–1918), Romania (which since 1881 had been a kingdom) welcomed other regions that had a Romanian ethnic majority – from Russia (Bessarabia) and from Austria-Hungary (Bukovina, Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș). The Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920) provided international recognition of this reality.

During the 20th century, Romania had a troubled history, as did the entire continent. After almost two decades (1918–1938) of limited democracy, seen by Romanians as an age of prosperity and during which Bucharest came to be known as the “Little Paris”, there came a series of authoritarian, military, totalitarian regimes of both the right and the left. Allied with Germany between 1940 and 1944, Romania took part in the fight against Communism on the Eastern Front, only to defect in the summer of 1944, switching sides and joining the Allies to see a “new freedom” brought by Russian tanks. With the help of the occupying army and the tacit agreement of the Western powers, Romania, alongside Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, etc., remained until 1989–1990 under Soviet/Russian influence. This meant four decades of isolation, of separation from European values, of fear and suspicion, and of orientation towards values far from Romania’s customary traditions and values. Today,

despite great difficulties, which seemed insurmountable to some, Romania is a member of NATO (March 2004) and a European Union member (January 2007), an official part of the Euro-Atlantic world whose values it shares and upholds.

Romanians are Europeans like other Europeans, no better and no worse. Strong euro-enthusiasts until recently, they can quickly become euro-realists or even euro-sceptics. It depends on the evolution of Europe. They are welcoming but also suspicious, good and bad, hardworking and lazy, happy and sad. During the periods when they were not too isolated or living in fear, they felt they were authentic Europeans and contributed to the wellbeing of Europe. They thought well, even affectionately, of Europe and often expected to be rescued by Europe. Today the time has come for them to work again to build the Europe of the future and contribute to its prosperity.

Romania – with a surface area approximately equal to that of present-day Great Britain – has always been a part of the European continent, starting from its inclusion in the structures of Roman Empire, as a province called Dacia, 2000 years ago. Since that time the country and its inhabitants have participated in all the great European historical processes – the formation of Romance peoples, the great migrations, the founding of medieval states, the defence of Europe in the context of the

Late Crusades, the revolutions for social and national emancipation, the creation of modern states, the two World Wars, the totalitarian regimes, Communism, the building of a democratic society after 1989, and becoming members of NATO and the European Union, etc. – permanently offering important testimony of this tumultuous history.

How Greater Romania was made – Reflections a century on from 1918

Our thoughts about the year 1918 are divided. On the one hand, we commemorate the deaths of millions of people, including hundreds of thousands of Romanians; and, on the other hand, we celebrate the accomplishment of the modern Romanian unitary national state. If in the West the idea of a national state took shape early (in the 15th–16th centuries), in the East, it took shape only in the 18th and 19th centuries. During these centuries, the most enlightened Greeks, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Ukrainians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, and others – that is, those peoples who were not organized in national states or unitary modern national states – were guided by the national idea, trying to achieve what the French, the British, the

Spanish and others had reached much earlier. The great intellectuals and politicians of these nations understood a basic fact: without national states, their peoples were at risk of being swallowed by rapacious empires, being deracinated or forced to emigrate. Until 1859 Romanians occupied just two autonomous countries under the sway of the Ottomans, while the remainder, i.e. more than half of them, were scattered in the Tsarist Empire, in the Ottoman Empire and, mainly, in the Habsburg Empire. They understood, through their elites, that they had no alternative other than union. The Romanian revolution of 1848–1849 mapped out the programme of development for Romanians and the formation and consolidation of Romania.

This emphasized for Romanians the idea that speaking the same language, having the same name (which comes from the name Rome), the same origin, the same faith, the same traditions, living on the same territory, etc., meant that they formed a nation and had the right to their own state. This belief is called national conscience.

Therefore, after 1848, the fundamental goal of the Romanians, who had formed a modern nation since the 17th and 18th centuries, was the formation of a national political state. The leaders of the Romanians understood then (and not only them) that all nations deserve to have their own unitary state, regarded as a framework for the conservation and development of the national body as a whole and of each individual who composes this body. Multinational empires showed signs of fatigue and could no longer be maintained according to their outdated medieval precepts of absolutism and neo-absolutism or through partial solutions and controlled reforms that bred discontent among their severely oppressed peoples.

After 1848, the massive Romanian desire for union in a national state was coordinated with international action to obtain the support of the Great Powers. The Romanians knew that, without the support of some of the Great Powers, their efforts towards union would not be successful; they also knew that the union had to be done in stages, as done by the Italians and the Germans. It was clear that before the union of provinces actually occupied by foreigners could be undertaken, a national state nucleus needed to be formed, comprising Moldavia and Wallachia, which were quasi-independent states only formally under Ottoman suzerainty. The unification of Romanians into a national state comprised the following stages:

- 1) 1848–1859–1866: The union of Moldavia and Wallachia into a state officially named Romania and reformed according to Western principles;

- 2) 1877–1878–1881: The War for the Independence of Romania and the fight for international recognition of the absolute independence of the country; the union of Dobruja with Romania and the proclamation of the country as a kingdom;
- 3) 1914–1918–1920: The participation of Romanians and Romania in the First World War; the unification of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania with Romania; the international recognition of the Romanian unitary national state inside its historical borders.

The middle of the 19th century and the decades that followed were marked, for many nations, by a period of developing and strengthening their political unity. Such was the case for the Germans, the Italians, the Romanians and the Americans, who, in the wake of the Civil War, avoided secession and strengthened their nation.

“The astral hour” of Romania was 1918, when, by the application of the right to self-determination, following the declaration of President Woodrow Wilson, in January 1918, the historical provinces joined the Kingdom of Romania. This was officially recognized by the Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919–1920. Special treaties with Austria (Saint-Germain), Bulgaria (Neuilly-sur-Seine) and Hungary (Trianon) enshrined internationally what the Romanian people had decided in 1918 – the new structure of the country and the new borders of Romania. Only Soviet Russia (after 1922, the USSR), absent from the peace conference, did not recognize the union of Bessarabia with Romania, which was nevertheless acknowledged by the major Western powers. The new framework of the political-territorial division of Central Europe created, after 1918, favourable conditions for the development of nations, but also contained the germs of rivalries and contradictions. In 1919–1920, for the first time in history, the Great Powers heeded the will of the people, acting not simply in their own interests when they approved the new architecture of Europe. This architecture, in spite of the major changes it suffered after the Second World War, is still valid today. After the fall of Communism, the 1919–1920 configuration broke up in certain places and was reinforced in others.

These are the facts. Of course, the Communist regime in Romania – a state order brought about by Soviet tanks and continued by certain Romanians – had a paradoxical attitude towards the history of the Romanians, and especially the formation of the national state: from proletarian internationalism (during which even the word “Romanian” was sometimes prohibited), to Communist nationalism and an almost Asian model of Communism. During the final 10–15 years of Communism, the

history of Romania became white, pristine and glorious, and the “genius of the Carpathians” came to take precedence over voivodes, kings, princes, etc.

That is why the Romanians entered the era of freedom with a great handicap compared to their neighbours and the other former Socialist countries. None of Romania's neighbours, with the exception of the peoples living in the USSR, had known such a regime. As a result, after 1989, there followed a great relief *sui generis*; in the realm of history, this has often led to moves towards the other extreme, namely the idea that since Communism had deceived the Romanians by the glorification of the past and present, the truth must be that they had never been good for anything.

An accurate reconstitution of the past can only be achieved by specialists (historians) using their accepted methods and by studying historical sources. Otherwise, redrawing the past by firing up the imagination is everything except history. Today, a century after the Great War, memory still has a part to play in recalling the past, especially the years 1914–1920. In these years something important happened, and the memory of that time should not fade.

For example, in August 1916, Romania entered the war against Austria-Hungary (and, implicitly, Germany and their allies), with the intention of freeing millions of Romanians in Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Maramureş and Bukovina. But the decision of 14 August 1916, when the King summoned the Crown Council to decide the way forward, was not easy. Two groups were in open conflict – unevenly represented, it's true – both with the aim of defending the interests of the country. The great politician Petre Carp, outraged and angry with the King when he proposed the option of entering the war on the side of the Entente, uttered sharp words (expressing the desire that the Romanian army be defeated and referring to the fact that his sons were in the German army) and reminded the sovereign that he was part of a German dynasty that had certain interests to protect. Pained but firm and lucid, the King uttered these memorable words, today forgotten by many.

Mr. Carp, you were wrong when you talked about the interests of the dynasty. I know nothing about the interests of the dynasty, I only know the interests of the country. In my conscience, these two interests overlap. If I have decided to take this serious step, it is because, after long deliberation, I have arrived at the conviction, deep and unshakeable, that it corresponds to the true aspirations of the people... The dynasty will follow the fate of the country, winning with it, or being defeated with it. Because, above all, you should know, Mr. Carp, that my dynasty is Romanian. You were wrong to consider it as foreign, as German. No, it's Romanian! The Romanians have not brought my uncle, King Carol, here to start a dynasty of Germans at the mouth of the Danube, but a national dynasty; and I claim for my House the

honour of having fulfilled the mission with which this people has entrusted it.

These are the words and deeds of a Greater Romanian statesman, worthy of the respect of our collective memory and worthy of being emulated today.

Therefore, on August 1916, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary, in accordance with the secret agreements signed with the Entente. This was the start of dramatic circumstances for many Romanian soldiers in Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Maramureş, etc., forced to fight against Romanians from the Kingdom, brought to life by Liviu Rebreanu in his novel *Forest of the Hanged*. In 1916–1917, after the occupation of Wallachia and Bucharest, moving the government to Iasi, and the brave resistance in Mărăşti, Mărăşeşti and Oituz, Romania was about to be wiped off the map completely, caught between the threat of the Central Powers and the Eastern Power (Bolshevik, at the time). The year 1918, with a few shadows and many lights, brought the fulfilment of the formation of the Romanian national state. Those years – 1918 and the run up to it – brought about the collapse of multinational empires and the emancipation of their peoples, frustrated after centuries of oppression. Thus, from the old Russian, German and Austria-Hungarian Empires, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (called, in 1929, Yugoslavia), Romania, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and the Baltic countries were born or reborn in new forms.

In the case of Romania, the situation was similar. While the future Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were multinational states, and Austria and Germany were national federal states, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, etc. were national unitary states, with an absolute majority of the people who gave these states their names.

These fundamental changes, which the map of Europe had not known since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), followed precise rules, agreed upon by the international community, and were then approved (with certain adjustments, decided by the victorious powers) at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919–1920.

The territorial changes and the political implications of the war years and the years 1918–1920 had two components, one internal and the other international. The internal component respected the desire of the ethnic majorities (previously considered minorities) in certain regions to live in their own states, or in countries inhabited by the same ethnic group to create conditions for the vast majority of Poles to live in Poland, the vast majority of Czechs to live in the Czech Republic, Slovaks in Slovakia, Hungarians in Hungary, Romanians in Romania, etc. Of course, there were voices who wanted *all* Poles to live in Poland, *all* Czechs to live in the Czech Republic,

and so on, which was impossible. There were others who hoped to preserve the old empires in changed forms, renamed and glossed over, which was again impossible. It is true that this desire for national unity based on the nation state was the final stage in the evolution of the movements of emancipation. Previously, for about two centuries, nationalities wanted only equality within the dominating nations, without necessarily demanding *expressis verbis* the breakup of these empires and the formation of unitary nation states.

Romanians in the Habsburg Empire (and from 1867 in its *sui generis* form called Austria-Hungary) and also those in the Tsarist Empire were included, along with Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Baltics, Finns, Ukrainians, and so on, in this evolution without major differences or peculiarities. In 1918 things started to happen all over the region, especially after Russia produced the greatest change of political regime in its history, leaving the battlefield and signing a separate peace treaty. Given these new conditions, Romanians organized themselves and chose their own representative bodies – both political and military (public order) – and, where it was possible, took over local control of the territory. Such representative central bodies, recognised by the international community as legitimate, decided the fate of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania (in the broader sense, meaning the old Voivode, which included Banat, Crişana, Satu Mare and Maramureş). These forums were the “Councils of the Country” (in Chişinău, between 27 March and 9 April 1918), “the General Congress of Bukovina” (in Cernăuţi, between 15 and 28 November 1918) and the “Grand National Assembly”, with its 1,228 delegates with a right to vote (in Alba Iulia, between 18 November and 1 December 1918).

All these acts of the Romanian nation were then approved by the peace conference in Paris, 1919–1920. The other peace conference, after the Second World War, in the years 1946–1947, reconfirmed the decision taken by the Romanians in 1918 and ratified in 1919–1920, except for territorial kidnapping by the Stalinist Communist regime during and after the end of the war (Northern Bukovina, Herţa and Bessarabia).

Most Romanian and foreign historians present the sequence of facts in the same way, reserving their opinions for the interpretation.

Today, a hundred years after the end of the First World War, almost all these peoples commemorate the events which led, during the years 1917–1920, to major territorial and ethnic changes, resulting from movements of national emancipation and the collapse of multinational empires (at least in relation to the forms in which they previously existed). At the end of 1918,

Romania had almost 300,000 square km and about 15 million inhabitants, thus becoming a regional power of the first rank. In this new

state, Romanians comprised nearly three-quarters of the population (approximately 73%), with minorities of Hungarians (8%), Germans (4%), Jews (4%), Slavs, and others.

Naturally, various historical views have been expressed about the great changes which occurred at the end of the First World War, with the winners being, in general, pleased and praising these developments and the losers being critical and eager for revenge. In the countries that succeeded the collapsed empires, the tone of historians, intellectuals in general and public opinion was full of enthusiasm and joy at the accomplishment of the national ideal, and was even triumphalist in certain periods. This was the voice of the majority because the representatives of the minorities (especially of those minorities comprising erstwhile former majorities) were, for the most part, reserved if not hostile and directly antagonistic. It was not easy to change from the consciousness of an imperial dominant master nation to the consciousness of an ordinary nation or national minority ethnic group tolerated in a different state. Schematization, of course, deprives reality of its wealth and variety of detail, of its varied palette. From this finding it is clear that there were, at the time, certain Romanians (as well as some Czechs, Poles, Croats, Hungarians, etc.) who did not desire the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy for various reasons, from personal opportunity to the belief that their lives or their nation ought to develop in other directions, e.g. Western and not “Balkan”. What is clearly attested and proven without any doubt is the fact that most Romanians wanted to be part of Romania, that they form the Kingdom of Romania and that it was recognized internationally.

Between 1848 and 1918, the most legitimate and progressive European movements were those for national emancipation, demanding democratic freedoms, undermining oppressive empires, and advocating the formation of states based on ethnic-national criteria. All nations of the period acted in this manner, following the example of the Western world, which had already passed through this phase. This trend was the most advanced of that time! No one spoke then of the European Union, globalisation, the territorial autonomy of minorities, or the elimination of religious discrimination.

Most Romanians in those times were trained to fight for their own national state, as were other nationalities such as the Italians, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. They did it no better and no worse than others. They were neither more aware nor more enthusiastic in their fight, nor more apathetic nor more reluctant, than their neighbours. Of course, it is absurd to say that all Romanians participated in the movement for unification or that all of them desired the union with the same ardour. Also, it is unrealistic and incorrect to say that

the Union of 1918 took place in ideal conditions, respecting eternally valid democratic principles, and that no one's rights were infringed. But it would be even more incorrect to pretend that most Romanians did not want unification, that they were more attracted towards superior Western civilization than to the Old Kingdom, or that a group of intellectuals deceived them and acted on their behalf.

The historical data available shows that most Romanians in all the provinces desired the union with Romania and firmly expressed this according to the democratic norms of the times. Moreover, the international community accepted this act of national will formulated by the Romanians in 1918 and recognized the realities that the Romanians had already decided upon. When it was possible, especially in Bukovina, Bessarabia and Transylvania, the opinion of the minorities was sought and some of their members supported their membership of the Romanian nation.

The Romanians had always been led by elites. This was their salvation. The leaders, who originated from the people, guided the aspirations of the people, justifying and sustaining them, and the people followed their leaders. Therefore, in the words of the wise politician and statesman Mihail Kogălniceanu: "The Union was accomplished by the nation!" Thus, it belongs to the Romanian nation, always and everywhere.

The unification binds together the Romanians in their everyday lives; this is why the unification must be continuously rebuilt, recreated and re-experienced, especially now, a century after the creation of Greater Romania. The union and a united Romania are not eternally given but heroically forged monuments, which should not be allowed to fall into dereliction. They should be defended, protected and renewed every day, following the example of past generations and their accomplishments.

ARGUMENT

1 DECEMBER 1918: THE UNREALIZED FRUITS OF THE UNION OF THE ROMANIANS

DAN DUNGACIU

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. / On the willows there we hung up our lyres. / For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" / How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? / If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above me.
(Psalm 137)*

*L'homme, Messieurs, ne s'improvise pas. La nation, comme l'individu, est l'aboutissant d'un long passé d'efforts, de sacrifices et de dévouements. Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes. Un passé héroïque, des grands hommes, de la gloire (j'entends de la véritable), voilà le capital social sur lequel on assied une idée nationale... On aime en proportion des sacrifices qu'on a consentis, des maux qu'on a soufferts. On aime la maison qu'on a bâtie et qu'on transmet. Le chant spartiate: «Nous sommes ce que vous fûtes; nous serons ce que vous êtes» est dans sa simplicité l'hymne abrégé de toute patrie.
(Ernest Renan)*

“L'existence d'une nation est... un plébiscite de tous les jours,” said the Frenchman Ernest Renan at the famous Sorbonne conference of 1882. Hence it has been erroneously deduced that a nation is subjectivity expressed in everyday life and the aggregate will of individuals at a given time.

It is all that, but it is also much more than the above-mentioned thought. And whenever we realize this truth, it is time for celebrations or commemorations. One can see this most clearly in what the French historian

said at the Sorbonne conference, and from which only the famous expression “the plebiscite” survives in popular consciousness.

A nation is therefore a collective entity on a large scale, consisting in the feeling of sacrifices made in the past and those that will be made in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarised, however, in the present, through a tangible fact, namely consensus, the clearly expressed desire to continue common life. National existence is, if you'll forgive my metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as the existence of an individual is a perpetual affirmation of life. (Dungaciu, 2018)

This is the wider context of the French historian's argument. Belonging to a nation is indeed subjective but, as Renan suggests, an *objectified subjectivity*, raised and educated in the framework of a historical becoming.

Man, Gentlemen, does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a past of struggle, sacrifice and devotion. Of all the cults that of the ancestors is the most legitimate for they have made us who we are.

This is the essence of any celebration and especially of national holidays. In the case of Romanians, the “cult of ancestors”, of those who “have made us who we are”, has its most poignant instantiation on Great Union Day, celebrated on 1 December, marking the unification of all Romanians within a single state.

This year, the moment is even more loaded with meaning: 100 years have passed since that date.

The Union of the Romanians

The union of the Romanians on December 1, 1918 is the event that arouses most vividly those feelings Ernest Renan spoke about at the Sorbonne. The Kingdom of Romania became, for the first time, “great” (“Greater Romania”, as the State of Romania was known during the interwar period).

The modern Romanian State entered history in 1859 (“the Old Kingdom”, as it is called today) with the union of the principalities of Moldova and Muntenia (or Wallachia), an event without which the Great Union of 1918 could not have been conceived.

In 1866, Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was placed on the throne of Romania as Ruling Prince, taking the oath on May 10, 1866. Ten years later, in 1877, Romania declared its independence, won on the field of battle, and in 1881 Carol I was crowned King of Romania.

In 1914, King Carol I died, and Ferdinand I became King of Romania.

In 1916, Romania entered World War I on the side of the Entente, and, as a result of the disintegration of the Austrian and Russian Empires, in 1918, the provinces of Bessarabia (March 27, 1918), Bukovina (November 28, 1918) and Transylvania (December 1, 1918) proclaimed their union with Romania, based on the “principle of nationalities”, which became the new guiding idea in European history. In 1922, Ferdinand was crowned King of Romania in Alba Iulia. The Treaty of Versailles recognized all the Proclamations of Union with Romania, in accordance with the right to self-determination established by the 14-point statement of the American President Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

After the fall of Communism, according to Law no. 10 of 31 July, 1990, *the day of December 1 was adopted by the Romanian Parliament as the national day* and proclaimed a public holiday.

This year, 2018, we celebrate the centenary of the unification of all Romanians.

How much did the Romanians pay for the Union?

There is less talk today about the efforts that Romania made after the Great Union of 1918, or in other words about the price the Romanians paid for unification, costs which never fully yielded results. History has not had much patience with the Romanians...

In the years after the “first reunification” of 1859, Romania changed radically, becoming one of the “economic tigers” of that era (Peiu, 2017).¹

Romania already had, in 1918, a National Bank, several popular banks and a commercial savings institution (CEC). The national currency (leu) was fully covered by mono-metalliferous reserves (gold), which made it one of the most stable in Europe. The homogeneity of development in the whole territory was remarkable, and the gaps were insignificant, with the exception of the peak performance recorded in the capital Bucharest and the adjacent oilfields. (*Ibid.*)

Romania’s overall performance in terms of GDP per capita appears in the table below (PPP methodology – prices are comparable) (as indicated by Angus Maddison, <http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/maddison-project/home.htm>).

¹ The standard work of reference on this is Peiu, 2017, on which we will rely in the argument below. See also the last chapter of this volume.

The State	GDP/population (international \$) 1990
The territory of present-day Poland	1739
Hungary	2098
Czechoslovakia	2096
Bulgaria	1137
The Future Yugoslavia	973
Romania	1741
Spain	2056
Germany	3648
France	3485
Italy	2301

As the table shows, Romania had a (slightly) better performance than the current territory of Poland; much better than Bulgaria, the future Yugoslavia and Greece; and comparable to that of Hungary, the future Czechoslovakia, Spain, and even Italy. There are, however, significant differences when compared to the strong Western States (Germany and France). The Tsarist Empire lay, on average, far behind Romania (\$1414/per capita).

The Union of 1918 was going to change this picture. Petrisor Peiu's research has shown that, to all intents and purposes, the level of development in the provinces of Transylvania and Bukovina was the same as that of Romania. The big problems were created by the province of the former Tsarist Empire, Bessarabia.

If the economic performance of the Tsarist Empire as a whole had, at the level of the per capita GDP indicator calculated by Agnus Maddison (using the PPP methodology, in 1990 international dollars) a value of 1414 (under the level of Romania, which had 1741 in 1990 international dollars/per capita), the level of the indicator for Bessarabia can be estimated as being around 1000 (1990 international dollars per capita). (*Ibid.*)

In short, the level of economic performance of Bessarabia before the war was half of that of the Kingdom of Romania hence the huge costs needed to bring Bessarabia up to the level of the other provinces.

Add to this the fact that Romania lost a great deal in the Great War. In the balance sheet of loss of life, 16 months of war meant, for Romania, “the death of over 800,000 soldiers and 275,000 civilians”; material losses amounted to “72 billion lei in gold, of which the Allies acknowledged, at the peace conference, only 31 billion, and granted as compensation only 3.1 billion lei”. If we consider the fact that the nominal GDP of Romania in 1921 was 70 billion lei, this shows that Romania had

lost in the War a seventh of its population plus the value of a year's GDP through destruction and confiscation, while also gathering debts (as a result of War) amounting to nearly 40% of GDP, all sacrificed for the unification of the provinces inhabited by Romanians into a single State (*Ibid.*).

In this way did the Romanians pay for the right to have Greater Romania!

To this some other costs need to be added, such as compensation for land owned by Hungarian citizens in Transylvania who preferred to leave for Hungary after 1918 (the so-called “process of optionists”), an amount equivalent to 126% of the country's GDP for that year!

In fact, Petrișor Peiu concludes, the per capita GDP of Romania in 1920 “was 28% lower than that of 1914 in pre-war Romania”. In 1926, the “per capita GDP indicator (calculated in 1990 international dollars) was, in Greater Romania, 1258 (below the pre-war level of 1741)”. Whichever sources are used, all authors calculated a performance indicator of per capita GDP of Greater Romania in the 1920s “far below the level reached before the First World War; and the gap between Central European States and Western European countries had grown a lot”.

After barely managing to assimilate new territories, “the Romanian State was impacted by the global economic crisis of 1929–1933, which dealt it a heavy economic blow”. Despite these facts, as indicated by the figures, overall economic performance improved steadily (*Ibid.*).

Year	Population	GDP (lei)	GDP (pounds)	GDP per capita (pounds)	Import (pounds)	Export (pounds)
1921	15.7 million.	70 billion.	163 mil.	10.4	28.4 million.	19.3 million.
1928	17.4 million.	272 billion.	272 mil.	15.7	31.7 million.	27.1 mil.
1930	18 mil.	287 billion.	280 mil.	15.6	22.6 mil.	27.9 mil.
1935	19.1mil.	188 billion.	306 mil.	16.0	17.6 mil.	27.2 mil.
1936	19.3 mil.	213 billion.	340 mil.	17.6	20.1 mil.	34.6 mil.
1937	19.5 mil.	254 billion.	406 mil.	20.8	32.3 mil.	50.3 mil.
1938	19.75 mil.	255 billion.	411 mil.	20.8	30.2 mil.	34.7 mil.

But there was still much to be recovered. Here is a comparative table of economic performance for selected European states for the year 1938, in 1990 international dollars (*Ibid.*).

State	GDP per capita (1990 international \$)
Poland	2182
Czechoslovakia	2882
Hungary	2655
USSR	2150
Bulgaria	1499
Greece	2677
Yugoslavia	1249
Romania	1242
Italy	2830
Spain	1790
Germany	4994
France	4466
United States	6126

Basically, Romania was in a much weaker position than before the First World War in 1913, comparable only with Yugoslavia (in the region); the level of economic performance had halved compared to that of Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia); it was even exceeded by Bulgaria (by almost 20%). Spain, Italy and Greece were no longer comparable, being at nearly double the level and France and Germany were at levels three times higher (and the USA was six times higher).

It is worth noting, however, that in 1938, 20 years after the Great Union, there were some radical changes and the unified Romania was preparing for take-off: “Romania had balanced growth in added value in the economy, the population had increased by a quarter, the currency was stable, foreign trade registered a surplus (18 million pounds in 1937)” (*Ibid.*). It was time for Romania to reap the benefits of the Union and enter another development cycle.

That was not to be, however. The ill-fated Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the outbreak of World War II were followed by Communist occupation.

The Union – A project of resilience that never came to full fruition

Some remarks must be made to hopefully bring greater clarification to events that took place 100 years ago.

- As shown by the case of interwar Romania, and also of Germany after the fall of Communism, the consequences of accommodating a union or a reunification last about 20 years. It is a period in which political parties are balanced against economic and social forces in order to allow the take-off and the full fruition of unification or reunification. Germany has benefitted enormously from the reunification, becoming today's undisputed political and economic leader in Europe. Although Romania had all it needed to become a leader in the region during the interwar period, it failed to capitalize on the union at just the time all the economic elements allowing it to do so were present.
- In spite of the difficulties encountered after 1918, there were no separatist parties in Romania, not even regional parties based on the geography of the former provinces united with Romania in 1918 (no “Transylvanian” parties, “Bessarabian” parties or “parties from Bukovina”). In reality, the political osmosis was extraordinarily rapid. Parties in new regions united with Romania (the Old Kingdom) were melting into the existing structures or uniting with them to form new parties. This element is extremely important today if we want to understand the legitimacy of the acts that culminated with the December 1, 1918 union. With the exception of marginal and extreme groups (in Bessarabia, where they were supported by Stalin's Soviet Union), there was no challenge to the 1918 Union.
- The Romanian State, formed in 1918, overcame the challenges of history relatively well. There are institutions that have endured to the present day (including historical political parties) in a country diminished by just one-fifth, following the Russian occupation (after World War II, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and Southern Dobruja – the Quadrilateral – were lost by Romania).
- The contemporary Romanian State claims its origins from that national achievement, choosing 1 December as its national day after the fall of Communism.
- Unlike Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the Romanian State has not split and this shows once more that at the level of ethnic, cultural and political cohesion, the Romania founded in 1918 – based on the

unification of the Romanian principalities of 1859 – is today a unitary, relatively uniform, homogeneous body in all respects (in the 2011 Census, 16,792,900 people declared themselves to be Romanian, accounting for 88.9 percent of the total population).

- There is no threat of regional separatism nowadays, despite the fact that a certain type of propaganda talks about such a possibility in the case of Transylvania. It's obviously a case of false statistics and a political aberration. Currently, according to the census of 2011, 1,224,937 Hungarians live in Transylvania, *around 18.915% of the region's population* (6,475,894 people). At the level of the whole country, 1,227,623 ethnic Hungarian inhabitants represent only 6.1% of the total population. The Hungarians are one of the ethnic minorities with a relatively high level of demographic decline.
- Looking back, we find that “the Decision for the Union of Transylvania with Romania”, which was adopted on December 1, 1918, was essentially achieved (Pop, 2018). Among its “fundamental principles for creating the new Unified Romanian State”, the National Assembly established “complete freedom for all cohabiting peoples” and “equal and autonomous justification for full religious liberty for all faiths in the State”. “Complete freedom” was explained clearly, without possible misinterpretation. For the authors of the resolution, it meant that entitled “cohabiting” peoples were able to “train, manage and litigate in their own language”, “to be represented in Romania's legislative bodies”, and to be represented in the governance of the country. The term “autonomous” here is an adjective and refers to “all religious confessions in the State” and not just the minority confessions.
- As noted by academician Ioan-Aurel Pop, nowhere in the text of the resolution is there any reference to the autonomy of any part of Transylvania according to ethnic criteria. Moreover, the “historically autonomous lands” of Transylvania, including “the Saxon lands”, had been dismantled before 1918 by the “dual Austrian-Hungarian State (more precisely, by the Parliament and government in Budapest) in the second half of the 19th century”. Today, Pop continues, the largest minority in Romania, the Hungarians (who account for 6.1% of the country's population), “can benefit from *instruction* in their own language on Romanian territory, from the kindergarten to the University, at undergraduate, Master and PhD levels”. The same Hungarian minority “can *conduct administration* in its own language everywhere where it holds a simple majority and where governing bodies, from mayors up to members of local

councils, county councils, etc. use the Hungarian language”. There is no mixed habitation “in which minorities are not represented, according to their numbers” in Romania. The same Hungarian minority “can be judged in its own language where the conditions required by law are met. Any member of the Hungarian minority can speak in Hungarian in courts of law, making sure to include an appropriate translator, as needed” (Pop, 2018).

- All the Romanian provinces were successfully assimilated, and 20 years after the fall of Communism, the economy is again growing strongly. The Romanian State remains a magnet for all Romanians left outside its borders after 1945, especially for the majority in the Republic of Moldova, who, in a very large proportion, hold Romanian citizenship or have applied for it. It is worth noting that the struggle for the independence of the Republic of Moldova (August 27, 1991) from the USSR was based largely on the Romanian symbolism of the region, which predated the Soviet occupation of 1940: the Romanian language, the Romanian tricolour (red, yellow and blue), the same national hymn as Romania and a common currency (*leu*).

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