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„IMPERIAL LEGACY AND BALKAN NEUROSIS”. FEDERALIST PROJECTS, ROMANIAN REACTIONS

KEY WORDS: imperial legacy, federalist projects, Mitteleuropa, „Pan-Romanism“, „Austro-Romanism“, „Bukovinism“, protochronism

SŁOWA KLUCZE: dziedzictwo imperialne, projekty federalistyczne, Mitteleuropa, „panrumunizm“, „austrorumunizm“, „bukowinizm“, protochronism

Abstract

I am going to speak about federative projects and plans, political initiatives and memoranda, reactions they caused in the Romanian intellectual and political environment, the way they were (or rather were not) included in the historical discourse, and will not tackle the “Central European set of mind” which is so difficult to identify.

It has to be mentioned that, for the Romanian culture, the acquisition of the Central European conscience, the conscience of the middle and its potential conceptualization are doomed to annihilation by the obsessive claim of “insularity”. The imperial legacy is only mentioned in negative contexts, various political and cultural personalities are incriminated for their cosmopolitanism, and for the “pro-Hapsburg”, “pro-German” activity which is equal to being “antinational”. Central Europe becomes a spectre, a bogey man shown every now and then to Romanians in order to reinforce the feeling of being “under siege”, the fear that the country could be dismembered by the “enemies from abroad and enemies within”.

Prologue

I want to start by explaining that I consider “Central Europe” an “umbrella” term attempting to explain various, often contradictory geo-political and cultural projects spreading over the same or along successive time periods. Some of the examples include those relating to the federalisation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (from the Czech František Palacký to the Romanian A.C. Popovici) and Mitteleuropa (Fr. Nau mann), the French plan for the “Danube Federation”, Aristide Briand’s “Memorandum” and, as the extension of these, Coudenhove-Kalergi’s “Pan-Europa”. Without
applying the Jacques Le Rider “semantic archaeology”, or commenting on the “variable geometry” of the Central-European space (a leitmotif in numerous essays), I am going to choose a simpler way of direct naming within a specific historical context.

It has to be mentioned that, for Romanian culture, the acquisition of the Central European conscience of the middle and its potential conceptualization are doomed to annihilation by the obsessive claim of “insularity”. Although Romanian identity is based on the idea that throughout the Middle Ages Romanians represented a “protection wall for Christendom” (just like the Hungarians, Poles and other Slavs1), the position of the Romanian Principalities “between the East and the West” had until the end of the 20th century been a relatively late and not very much discussed topic2. From Școala Ardeleană, through intellectuals of the 19th century3, and until the start of the First World War, the Latin character of the Romanian language acquired a militant dimension. It was invested with a type of guarantee that Romanian culture was part of the Western culture. The phrase “an island of Latinity on the Slavic sea” was used over and over again in history books, literary histories, various essays, journals as well as school books. Its reiteration induced a kind of superiority complex (a counterpart to the traditional self-stigmatization) which made any attempt at exploring and understanding one’s neighbours simply superfluous. The postulated “insularity” allowed the local intelligentsia to transform Romania into a sort of foreign body in the region, excluding it a priori from any kind of regional, Central European configuration. How could Romania join the Slav project of the Central Europe or Mitteleuropa, without abandoning its claimed uniqueness and isolation? Thus, there were no attempts at articulating a political or intellectual project for Central Europe as an area (within specified borders), which would also include territories inhabited by the Romanians. Instead, the geopolitical and cultural Bovarism had developed, where France was seen (despite its true location) as a protecting “neighbour”. The Principalities, and later Romania, thus outlined the imaginary borders, aspiring to the impossible – a transposition to the West.

After the establishment of the communist regime, the Soviet system failed to establish valid links between Romania and the Slavic world, while the Latin West (due to the capitalist system) was rejected and condemned. Ceausescu’s national-communism changed Romanian “insularity” into the governing principle of the country and imposed (with the obvious differences from the Vintilă Brătianu national-liberalism from between the wars4) an “exclusively by our own means” development.


I am going to speak about federal projects and plans, political initiatives and memoranda, and some of the reactions they caused in the Romanian intellectual and political environment, the way they were (or rather were not) included in the historical discourse. In my essay I will not consider the “Central European set of mind” which is so difficult to identify. The reason is that, first of all, I share Krzysztof Pomian’s scepticism, not to treat the notion of Central Europe as a very “powerful idea” for the states in the region. Secondly, because even Mitteleuropa by Jaques Le Rider, a very well informed researcher in the field, claims that the literature produced by the authors from the “peripheral centres” of German language, mainly of Jewish origin, provide the most precious testimony of the “mitteleuropean” spirit. Or else, there is a huge distance between the fictional world of multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic harmony and order, of a superior civilisation of tolerance... and the image of a middle Europe as the place of most fierce chauvinism and anti-Semitism (Ludwig Gumplowicz), of political “hysteries” of “small states”, “the miseries of territorial disputes”, “the disregard of values”, and national “vanities” equalled only by political irresponsibility. (István Bibó). How can I define, therefore, the “Central European” Zeitgeist? I considered Karl Schorske’s approach more appropriate, as he defined it in the 1970s by denouncing the temptation to premise it on an intuitively determined, common denominator and following, first of all, the empirical analysis of multiple and contradictory manifestations.

“Pan-Romanism”, “Austro-Romanism”, “Bukovinism”. Dilemmas and delimitations

After the defeat of “The Spring of Nations”, Wallachian revolutionaries in exile started an intense propaganda for the cause of the Principalities. They were attracted by various federal plans, portraying “oriental Belgium” (D. Brătianu) under the Turkish suzerainty, the “Danube federation” (N. Bălcescu) or a union from the “Baltic to the Black Sea”, under the German authority (I. Maiorescu). Many were seduced by the ide-
as of Giuseppe Mazzini (“Young Europe”)\textsuperscript{11}, as well as by those promoted by the active Polish emigration around Prince Czartoryski\textsuperscript{12}, and they embraced federalism hoping to recreate the “old Dacia” by a unification of all the provinces inhabited by Romanians.

On the other hand, Romanian intellectuals and politicians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire considered the Wallachian “Pan-Romanian” plans (which presumed a simultaneous war against Turkey, Russia and Austria with no army available) as simply phantasmagorical. In 1848, they restated their loyalty to the Emperor\textsuperscript{13} and focused on obtaining rights equal to the other nationalities in the Empire\textsuperscript{14}. In February 1849, after the abdication of Ferdinand V, Andrei Șaguna presented Franz Joseph with a memorandum (signed by the representatives of Romanians in Transylvania, Bukovina and Banat), asking for the Romanian regions to be united within the Empire as an autonomous Great Duchy governed by the Emperor. In April of the same year, together with the Croat and Slovak leaders, he signed a petition for the federalization of the Hapsburg Empire. In spite of the Transylvanian myth of the “good emperor” expressing utmost care for his subjects, the memorandum had been left unanswered. However, this initiative can be remembered as the first assertion of the “Austro-Romanism”. N. Iorga observed that Andrei Șaguna only supported the “reorganization of some “Transylvanian” nations under the restored Hapsburg absolutism. The Nations, however, were meant to collaborate like brothers, beyond strictly national goals”\textsuperscript{15}. Thus, Șaguna became one of the first people to draw the map of the “Great Austria”\textsuperscript{16}.

After the Romanian Principalities united in 1859, and particularly after the establishment of the Romanian Kingdom in 1881, the distance between the vision of intellectuals and politicians in Transylvania and Bukovina (focused on Viennese circles) and that of the Unionists (who were trying to propose Bucharest as the new centre) increased. At its beginning, the Romanian historiography, represented by Mihail Kogălniceanu and Nicolae Bălcescu gradually built the myth of national unity, endowing it with a mystical dimension, as a fulfilment of providential national destiny. And this type of period-specific romantic discourse influenced by Herder became a general and overwhelming perception/belief, leaving no room for an articulate alternative. Even before the 1918 unification, and prior to of political action and reforms for establishing the centralised state in Bucharest, which resulted in the


\textsuperscript{13} Even Nicolae Bălcescu sadly notes, in Mișcarea românilor din Ardeal la 1848, that Romanians did fight at 1848 under Austrian colour “[...] the most infamous, atrocious and obsolete despotism”.


\textsuperscript{15} N. Iorga, Istoria românilor. Volumul IX, Unificatorii, București 2010, p. 189.

detriment of provincial autonomies\textsuperscript{17}, there was a tension between the “unionist” discourse and the voices of those who, claiming their Transylvanian-Hapsburg identity, proposed the development of Romanian-inhabited provinces within the federalised empire. One example is the pro-German Titu Maiorescu, a mentor of “Junimea” and one of the leaders of the Romanian Conservative Party. His father, a Transylvanian Ioan Maiorescu, had supported some of the conservative ideas in 1848, however, for Titu any of these notions they were “monstrous”, and unacceptable for the 19th century Romanian.

The 1892 “Memorandum” addressed to the Emperor was asking for equal political and ethnic rights for Romanians. The trial of the memorandum signatories followed and in consequence, the public conscience imposed the idea – present in most of the 20th century historical and journalistic contributions – that, after 1867, all Romanians opposed Hungary as well as Austro-Hungary. Any other option seemed unconceivable. However, the political life was much more complicated. It was marked by confrontations between the governing parliament representatives, dedicated to the idea of integrating Romanians with the dual state, and the nationalist representatives. Some of the “speeches of Romanian representatives” in the Hungarian Diet at Pesta presented the view that several legalist Romanian delegates held “the interests of our common motherland” above the “claims of the nationalities”\textsuperscript{18}.

In 1892, in Româniî în regatul ungar și politica maghiară\textsuperscript{19}, the author, Ioan Slavici appreciated the improvement in Romanian – Austro-Hungarian relations, considering that the agreement signed in 1883 created an opportunity to solve the Romanian-Hungarian conflict by dialogue. Together with the other intellectuals in the Tribuna circle (whose programme stipulated “the traditional allegiance to the Throne and observance of the laws”); he condemned irredentism, anti-dynasty and any kind of anti-Austrian manifestations. In 1911, the writer (although he had been imprisoned for his convictions) did not change his position. In a leaflet entitled Zbuciumârile politice la românii din Ungaria, he was reticent to the unionist propaganda in the Kingdom of Romania, the declarations (like those of N. Iorga in the Kingdom, made in good faith, but perhaps too easily) which provoked and fed disputes between Romanians of different political allegiances, as well as Romanians and Hungarians, and justified suspicions of the authorities. He pleaded for political realism, and fulfilment of “common interests”, not just those of Romanian nationals. He wanted a rational compromise, the institution of a modus vivendi that should have been bearable for both the Romanians and Hungarians: “It is common sense that we should all give in


\textsuperscript{18} See T.V. Pâcâţian, Cartea de aur sau Luptele politece-naţionale ale românilor de sub Coroana ungară, Sibiu 1906, vol. IV; 1909, vol. V. For example, during the 29 November 1869 session, representative George Ivacicovici declared, against an initiative of the Serbian and Romanian representatives: “[...] here we are not national representatives, we are the representatives of the country”. And Simeon Papp reinforced the former’s statement: “[...] I always place the interests of the country above the claims of nationalities” (vol. IV, p. 773).

\textsuperscript{19} I. Slavici, Româniî în regatul ungar și politica maghiară, Bucureşti 1892.
and support those who still think that Romanians can achieve freedom of development even within the present Hungarian state.” In the foreword to his 1915 collection of articles, *Politica națională română. Articoli scrîși dela 1871 până la 1881*, the author emphasized that “it is in the nature of the thing”, that Romanians in Transylvania can only be “fierce enemies to all the Emperor’s enemies and to the enemies of the Emperor’s house”. They are not, the author insisted, against *all* Hungarians, but only against those who undermine the Empire and its laws.

In 1906, Aurel C. Popovici proposed in *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Groß-Österreich* the transformation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a federation of 15 states, based on the ethnic, and not historical criterion, with the appointment of specific governing bodies. Obviously, his ideas were not new, they had previously been advanced by František Palacký, a supporter of Austro-Slavism, by Franz Schuselka (who saw Austria transformed into a *Völkerreich*), by Johann Caspar Bluntschli (who, in 1878 came with a project to organize a society of European states based on the federal experience of Switzerland) as well as foreshadowed by Andrei Șaguna’s project for a Grand Duchy of the Romanians. A.C. Popovici’s intention was first of all to gain the Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s support for the federalist idea, considered the only solution for saving the empire and solving the problem of the nationalities. Its volume, inspired by the USA Constitution and Swiss constitutional formula – enough known not to need any detailed presentation here – circulated in the political circles of the time. It had even reached the Belvedere circle, but failed to provoke the enthusiasm its author had hoped for. In spite of some success of the book, the federalist project of the “United States of Greater Austria” did not gain support from any Transylvanian political party, nor was it supported by the leaders of the national movement.

A.C. Popovici was critical of the Austro-Hungarian dualism, the hungarisation policies of the authorities in Budapest, but also of the “selfishness of nation-
al points of view” and thus rejected the confusion created by the claim for historical rights. There is only one serious political way” – the author concluded – “for finally solving all these issues, both from the point of view of the imperial power and from the point of view of nationalities, including Germans. The way was to introduce federalism throughout the empire, based on national delimitations in their ethnographic borders.”25. However, the Romanian journals in Transylvania commented on the plan for the federalisation of the empire, as being a kind of intellectual utopia, difficult to achieve26. Some Transylvanians (like Vasile Goldiș) completely discarded the idea of the “Great Austria”, rejecting the notion of any other way to create the Romanian spatial identity within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but to become a union. Within the Romanian Kingdom, Popovici’s book enjoyed a limited, although respectful success. Constantin Stere (in a 1906 commentary in the Viața Românească journal) saw it as a “desperate formula” meant to ensure national rights for Romanians within the empire. Separating himself from the “cause of new Austrianism”, the historian Nicolae Iorga appreciated the polemic tone, the richness of information, but denounced the “weak ideology” of the book27. Both Hungarian and Romanian journals claimed that the “Austro-Romanist” model proposed by A.C. Popovici is considered only a pretext for achieving the “unity of all Romanians” (the view from Bucharest) and for breaking the Dual Monarchy (the view from Budapest)28.

Although he did not propose his own programme, but supported that of A.C. Popovici, we can consider that, in his political activity up to 1918, and his journalism (in Lupta), as well as functioning within his relations in the Viennese circles, Vaida-Voevod became the most important advocate of the “Austro-Romanism” in Transylvania. As we find out from his notes and letters (published after 1990), Vaida-Voevod managed to make contact with close friends of the archduke heir, and the archduke himself, to make it possible for the most important representatives of the Transylvanian intelligentsia to be given a listening ear at the Belvedere. He also kept in contact with Bukovina, looking for political and diplomatic means of making Popovici’s federalist plan more than a dream on paper. In 1919, Vaida-Voevod led the Romanian delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris during extremely complex diplomatic negotiations. After 1918, he became a minister and prime-minister of the Great Romania. Within the context of Romanian political wars, Vaida-Voevod came under attack from his political adversaries, who had started from blaming his “Austrianism” and his loyalty to the Hapsburg dynasty and went as far as accusing him of “national treason”. Without seeing Vaida-Voevod as some immaculate figure29 of local politics,

28 L. Maior, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. Între Belvedere și Versailles..., p. 52.
the vileness of the accusative articles, their ferocity and ways of condemning the pre-
Dual Monarchy federalist vision as anti-Romanian can help us understand that the
“Hapsburg legacy” stood no chance to be accepted in the Great Romania. In 1928, the
historian Silviu Dragomir published three articles in Țara noastră, which were aimed
against Vaida-Voevod\textsuperscript{30}, denouncing, among other things, his “Hapsburg” identity.
In a 1932 leaflet\textsuperscript{31}, another historian, Ion Lupuș, condemns Vaida-Voevod’s relations
with cu Berlin and Vienna as suspect of anti-Romanism. The mentor of traditionalist
journal Gândirea, N. Crainic, and other less important journalists published negative
articles on Vaida in the newspapers of the time.

The head of the National Democrat party in Bukovina, Aurel Onciul, the promot-
er of the “peasant collective” of 1904 (together with the Germans, Jews and Ukrainians
in Bukovina) received even harsher treatment from his contemporaries (and Romani-
an historiography). The political compromise reached by A. Onciul (introducing the re-
forms of elections, communal law and public credit) and which did not involve the no-
tion of ethnic identity, was harshly criticised at the time and considered responsible for
weakening the Romanian national movement, led by Iancu Flondor\textsuperscript{32}. The “Bukovin-
ism” promoted by the A. Onciul’s journal Privitorul (“Bukovina Romanians have been
and will be central Austrians”) had been seen as proof of his “betrayal of his own peo-
dle”, and of undermining the Romanian interests. The reforms proposed (part of them
successful) by the “democrats” of Aurel Onciul, although an obvious progress, were
contested because they only supported the “Bukovina-Austrian” position. Some Aus-
trian historians\textsuperscript{33} appreciated Aurel Onciul for his loyalty and his efforts towards keep-
ingar the identity of Bukovina nationals. He himself declared in the Privitorul – “I am
a good Austrian because I am a good Romanian.” But for his Romanian contemporar-
ies (and for later historians), Aurel Ritter von Onciul has remained a “foreigner lover”,
and “anti-Romanian” in his politics, as well as a “political crook” or, at best, “\textit{just}
a good Austrian”. Admitting my incapacity to appreciate all the intricacies of Bukovina
political wars at the time, or those of A. Onciul’s character\textsuperscript{34}, I shall limit myself to not-
ing the constant hostility of Romanian circles towards Bukowinerthum (from the begin-
ning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and – considering some texts recently published by historians –
until these days). After the Union, in 1918, Ion Nistor wrote: “Bukovinism” is doomed
to disappear; there is no room within the Great Romania for a “homo bucoviniensis”\textsuperscript{35}.
In 1919, Aurel Onciul had a different idea, as he wrote \textit{The Organisation of Great Ro-
mania\textsuperscript{36}: “For now, though, Great Romania forms only a geographical unity, and not a State, as it is made up of scattered items, generally with a different historical evolution, and with separate public organisations”. In 1914, intellectuals and politicians in Transylvania and Bukovina faced a difficult choice. They could not deny their Hapsburg, Central European identity, and could not oppose the unionist ideal. They had supported the rights of Romanians within the Austrian-Hungarian empire, asking for the abolition of the Dual Monarchy, but their principles were in total contradiction to the idea of liberals in the Kingdom (“Union at any cost!”) and with the formula of an organic national state, which had eventually been adopted and left no room for the autonomy dreams of the provinces\textsuperscript{37}.

How does the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Romanian historiography reflect all these events until 1945? We have to consider the fact that Romanian historiography became professional rather late, towards the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and became considerably influenced by the “Junimea’s” critical spirit. But Herder’s romantic model (which was embraced by the whole region during the nation-forming period) was not overcome even in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the 1848 (pro-European) nationalism gradually gave way to local nationalism (as, inter alia, exemplified by Nicolae Iorga), with a mission to claim the uniqueness of Romanian people and the exemplarity of their history. The support structure for historical enterprises is still based on “the noble origin of the Romanian people”, “the continuity of Romanians in Dacia” and “the fulfilment of the unity ideal for all Romanians”, which leads to the retrospective unification of the past. Even the historians standing in opposition to N. Iorga do not deviate from this romantic model, although they claim scientific objectivity, and continue to subject historical research to political and polemical demands of the period. In 1943, C.C. Giurescu described the “Romanian land” as a legacy from Burebista and Decebal, where Romanians have always lived in large numbers, and he established some kind of historical causality between the conquest of the three countries by Mihai Viteazul, in 1600, and the union of 1918\textsuperscript{38}. Ion Lupaş, in Istoria unirii românilor\textsuperscript{39}, clearly rejected any role of negotiations and diplomatic agreements, as well as conflicts and political errors in the achievement of the 1918 union. On a pro domo tone, he asserted that Romania Integra, for which “these people of saints and martyrs had always fought” was “the natural consequence of hundreds of years of historical preparation”. Moreover, whatever Romanians “of adverse thought” might have said, the Almighty did not want Transylvania to be left on the margins, under the foreign rule... In Origines et formation de l’unité roumaine, G.I. Brăîianu tried to present “the invariable basis for our [Romanians’] right to unity”, its immutable reasons, offering “ethnic, linguistic and historical arguments”\textsuperscript{40}.

\textsuperscript{36} A. Onciul, Organizaţia României-Mari, Tipografia H. Czopp, Cernăuţi 1920.
\textsuperscript{38} C.C. Giurescu, Istoria Românilor. Din cele mai vechi timpuri până la moartea regelui Ferdinand I, Bucureşti 1943, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{39} I. Lupaş, Istoria unirii românilor, Bucureşti 1937, p. 8–10.
\textsuperscript{40} G.I. Brăîianu, Origines et formation de l’unité roumaine, Bucharest 1943, p. 12. See also L. Boia, Istorie şi mit în cultura română, Bucureşti 1997, p. 49–55.
Such a historical context, where the romantic-Herder model remains central for Romanian historiography, makes any federative projects and any assertion of regional identity appear as an unwanted and uncomfortable legacy. When they did not simply ignore it, emphasising the “organic quality” of the nation itself and its irreversible historical phases of evolution (N. Iorga), they fought it as heresy or, more subtly, adapted it to the local-nationalist vision, by omissions, euphemisms and various other means of over-interpretation. Selecting only the parts concurring with the dominant discourse from the biography and works of the author, has been quite an obvious solution to support one’s views. For example, in a June 9, 1937 conference, Grigore Nandriş declared “the forgotten” A.C. Popovici, a descendant of Mihai Eminescu, appreciating the endurance of his nationalist ideas. Nandriş presents Popovici only as the author of the Reply... of Romanian students in 1892 (which brought him a conviction by the Hungarian authorities and forced him to live in exile), of a text resembling Chestiunea naţionalităţilor şi modul soluţionii sale în Ungaria (1894). He appreciated the fact that, although a polyglot, Popovici was not perverted by foreign cultures. In „O mărturie”, the foreword to the conference published as a brochure, Simion Mehedinţi also saw A.C. Popovici as the most “ardent” follower of M. Eminescu, and the one who continued Eminescu’s doctrine. And Mehedinţi actually made excuses for Popovici (unexpressly): “It is true that, before 1918, he [A.C. Popovici] had considered the formula of federalisation for the nations within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy” ⁴¹.

Very few writings between the two world wars overcome this pattern, and they were not written by historians. The book Cu privire la Franz Ferdinand Constantin Graur from the year 1935 is quite noteworthy in this respect. Români și ideea federalistă, the 1946 PhD thesis of George Ciorănescu – who lived in exile until the fall of communism – was published in 1996, based on a typed manuscript owned by the family. The discussion on the European organisational plans after 1918 was mainly present in the journals of the time, and the authors included politicians, economists, international law specialists, writers, and only rarely professional historians.

Epilogue

Romanian communist regime confiscated historiography, changing it into a propaganda tool. They started by arresting historians who did not comply, by eliminating their books from libraries as well as black-listing them and continued rewriting history over the next decades⁴². After the initial stage of de-nationalisation, and moving in the direction indicated by the official “historian” Mihail Roller⁴³, the next stage was that of fervent nationalism. Then, the communist regime recovered (i.e. adapted by distorting) a series of previous authors and historical writings. The fact that some

of these writings had been forbidden over the decades following the year 1947, and some of their authors had been persecuted by the communist regime actually prevented the production of any critical discourses. The same happened with other humanities – as a forbidden work was being “rehabilitated”, any critical stand would have seemed tantamount to the support for the Stalinist policy they had just overcome, which no honest researcher would have dared to do. Besides, those who wanted to separate themselves from the communist propaganda were looking towards the period between the wars (which the collective imagination saw as a “golden age” of prosperity and democracy\(^44\)) and found their models among the numerous supporters of localism. Both the ideologists of the communist party as well as the free spirits were looking, then, to the same historiographic “inheritance”, to recover something that could be adapted to the new times. The former wished to build a sort of historical legitimacy for themselves, and the latter created their own view on history and a set of working methods (and secondarily, a compensation for the communist reality by mythologizing the past). All of them brought back the romantic age of history, but the “enlisted historians” used Herder’s model to support scientific materialism. All of them, although with different intentions, resuscitated anti-Europeanism.

The communist “revolutionary romanticism” found its roots in the “The Spring of Nations”, Nicolae Bălcescu became – in the historiography and literature of the time – a kind of proto-communist\(^45\). What historians of the 19th century – who, convinced of their romantic “mission” as founding fathers, sometimes invented “documents” and chronicles to bear witness to the antiquity of the Romanian people – had never dreamt of was achieved by the communist historical propaganda: the Romanian unitary state was 2050 (!) years old, from the times of Burebista. The great historical treaties of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania silenced any other (relatively) independent historiographic initiatives while, at the same time, impressed the new mythology on the public opinion.

Cultural autarchy and protochronism (Romanian pre-eminence in all aspects of life) were accompanied by xenophobic attitudes in historical approaches, displayed by the reinforcement of an anachronistic ethnic pride. Brochures and books published under Ceausescu’s authority vituperate against cosmopolitanism. People who did not “criticise”, or “refute” the Romanian foreign policy between the two world wars were castigated\(^46\). From 1971 to 1989, communist historians dreamt up some of the most fantastic and obedient theories in order to give legitimacy to the “achievements” of the time. I am not going to offer any more examples from the historical writings of the time, even though they now present us with samples of involuntary humour. It may be enough for me to say that, as a consequence of the “cultural revolution”, they are based on “historical necessity” and on an “exclusive historical truth”.


The references to imperial legacy were only negative; various political and cultural personalities were incriminated for their cosmopolitanism, for “pro-Hapsburg”, “pro-German” activity which was equal to “antinational”. Central Europe became a spectre, a bogey man shown every now and then to Romanians in order to reinforce the feeling of being “under siege”, the fear that the country could be dismembered by “enemies from abroad and enemies within”. In the 1980’s, when – under the guidance of the writings of Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, Vaclav Havel and others – Central Europe was rediscovered in the West⁴⁷, and Central European identity became an almost “dissident concept”, Romanian intellectuals in exile had other preferred topics of discussion.

Only in the middle of the 1990s, when the issue of “bringing Romania back into Europe” became of interest to Romanian intellectuals, due to the publication of Adrian Marino’s studies and essays⁴⁸, there was an attempt to define the concept of Central Europe, and a discussion on Romania’s affiliation (in its entirety or only for some regions⁴⁹) to the Central European area. Professional historians, particularly those who started their careers before 1989, were less involved in these debates. Towards the end of the 1990’s, the main theoretical texts on Central Europe had made their way to the Romanian public, in the “A Treia Europă” collection of Polirom Publishing House in Iași. Provincia and Altera, two journals published in Târgu Mureș, focused on topics least discussed in the Romanian media until then: the relationship between the ethnic – national – multinational, civic nationalism, regional reconstruction of Romania, minority cultures and so on.

The nationalists reacted promptly, fortunately not with the same consequences as in the between-the-wars period. The “line which cuts the country in two” agitated the minds during the 1990 election campaign. The most powerful party at the time, whose leader was a former aparatchik, used a map produced by S. Huntington, where the border between Western and Eastern Christianity follows the Carpathian arch. This was enough to reactivate fears of “tearing Transylvania off the motherland”, which led to aggressive declarations against both the political enemies and national minorities⁵⁰. “Federalisation”, but also “autonomy” and “regionalisation” were still, at the end of the 1990’s, expressions capable of triggering hysterical reactions, fear of “the country being split”, and they fed the speeches of both the populist-nationalists and extremist parties⁵¹.

Just as in Romania anticommunism was a post-communist phenomenon, the rediscovery of Central Europe as the “stolen West”⁵² happened here years after the fall

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⁵⁰ The only benefit from such a populist-nationalist power trip is an extremely interesting dialogue between Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals around the “Transylvania issue”. The articles were included in the volume G. Andreescu, G. Molnár (coord.), Problema transilvană…
of the Iron Curtain. When the topic seemed exhausted everywhere else, Romanian intellectuals began to approach it professionally, finally overcoming the journalistic ebullience which reminds us of the interwar period. As in the past, it was usually just a matter of making ideas “from abroad” known to a larger public, in the context of a general effort towards the European integration. However, the bibliography needs to be thoroughly updated.

Romania’s “imperial legacy” – which some consider lost after 1918, whilst others abhor to this day – seems to be haunting the collective subconscious of the Romanian, triggering aggressive reactions to maintain what Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu has termed the “Balkan neurosis”53.

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