

**FRENCH SUPPORT FOR THE
TRANSYLVANIAN CAUSE
UNTIL THE ALBA IULIA UNION
(AUGUST 1916 – DECEMBER 1918)¹**

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Abstract. *The alliance sealed by King Carol I of Romania with the Central Powers became dull over time due to an obstacle known as Transylvania. In fact, in 1867, the Romanians of the Monarchy had been sacrificed by Vienna, on the altar of dualism, to Magyar nationalists. From that time on they were subjected to a forced political assimilation. Rare were the French personalities who concerned themselves at that time with the fate of these populations, even if one can cite a few big names, like that of Ernest Denis, professor at la Sorbonne.*

The war was going to make Transylvania known to the French public, while presenting it, in a very eloquent way, like the Alsace-Lorraine of Romania. Starting from the signing of the agreement on August 17, 1916 – which formally consecrated the alliance between Romania and the Entente – France officially supported the right of Romania to annex Transylvania.

Keywords: *War, Irredentism, Transylvania, Transylvanian Legion in France, Intellectual Mobilization.*

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¹ Translation by Christina Bianchi.

Pol. Sc. Int. Rel., **XIII**, 2, pp. 172–189, Bucharest, 2016.

Starting from the signing of the agreement on August 17, 1916 – which formally consecrated the alliance between Romania and the Entente – France officially supported the right of Romania to annex Transylvania.

Its effect during the conflict assumed three aspects:

- military firstly, with the dispatch of the Berthelot Mission to Romania, the attempt to form a Transylvanian Legion in France, the logistic support granted by those formed in Russia, and, to finish, the liberating effects of the Danube Army;
- diplomacy secondly, with action in favor of Romanian unity, driven continuously by the French minister to Iași, Auguste Beaupoil de Saint-Aulaire, and with business affairs close to the Italian and American Governments in view of obtaining the constitution in these countries with Transylvanian Legions;
- culture lastly, with support of numerous French figures for the Transylvanian cause and the reception of numerous refugees in Paris.

Romania at War

More inspired by heart than reason, the Romanian offensive was anticipating a massive attack on Transylvania (*Hypothesis Z*), with Budapest as the target, while a defensive attitude would be adopted along the Danube. Confident, the soldiers of King Ferdinand penetrated Transylvania on the evening of August 27th, 1916², greeted by the Romanians as liberators. But, simultaneously, a first but already nearly fatal blow, dealt by the German-Bulgarians under the supervision of Marshall Mackensen, hit the southern front. On September 6th, close to 30,000 Romanian soldiers, locked up in a stronghold by an aberration of the Command, were made prisoners in Turtucaia, on the Danube³. The route to the capital and that of Constanța had been opened. The Romanian Staff-Major could only delay the crushing defeat, despite the arrival of a French Mission led by General Berthelot. Russian aid was absent on several occasions. On December 6th, 1916 the Germans entered Bucharest. The ultimate defense organized itself on the Siret⁴. A State reduced to its minimum reconstructed itself in Moldova, with Iași as the capital.

Berthelot was officially given the responsibility of reorganizing the units taken from the front⁵. Therefore the new Romanian army was equipped and trained by France. In the beginning of the summer of 1917, the High Commander had at his disposal a restored tool, even improved on a number of points, as much of equipment as of morale. The offensive of the reconquest, planned since the month of April, was begun on July 23rd, 1917. The Romanians won significant victories at Mărăști, on the Oituz, and above all at Mărășești. However, following the desertion of the Russian troops, the front stabilized itself

² SHD [Service historique de la Défense], Vincennes, 5 N 142. Attaché militaire en Roumanie au ministre de la Guerre, 14/27 août 1916.

³ *Ibid.*, 5 N 142, Légation de Russie en France (Col. Ozonichine) aux Affaires étrangères, 25/7 septembre 1916.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 N 200, Berthelot au ministre de la Guerre, 27-28/9-10 janvier 1917.

⁵ Averescu A., *Notițe zilnice din războiul 1914-1918*, Bucharest, 1937, vol. 2, p. 112.

once again at the end of the summer. In January of 1918, it was obvious that Romania, deprived of every military solution, an island in the middle of a hostile ocean, was going to see itself forced to conclude a separate peace. One of the first German demands was the expulsion of the French Mission, an implicit recognition of its effectiveness. On March 12th, 1918, the departure of the French and other allies caused a moving farewell ceremony.

On May 7th, 1918, the peace of Bucharest, work of the conservative Marghiloman government, officially recognized the Romanian defeat. The country, released from its signature of 1916 and its ties with the Entente, was taken as a protectorate of the Reich, and the peace in Bucharest seemed to sound the death knell of Transylvanian hopes. The acquisition of Bessarabia at the expense of a Russia in full disintegration only appeared as a weak consolation.

The Rise of Irredentism in Transylvania

But the war wasn't finished.

For several months already, among the Transylvanians, the real sentiment of loyalty previously uniting the Habsburg population had run out of steam.

The first and most important symptom of this was the beginning of the decline of the Imperial Army. From 1914 to 1916, the Transylvanians had fought against the Russians and even the Italians without too much emotion. The Romanian intervention had altered these parameters. From the end of April 1916, the Hungarian Minister of the Interior warned about the passage to the enemy of "agitators" who were trying to bring down in their wake the village populations on the border by calling to the uprising: "*The Romanian army is coming!*", "*Long live Romania!*"⁶. During the surging away of the Romanian army of Transylvania, 34,000 young people of age to be called into service under the flag and 2,000 Austrian-Hungarian reserve officers crossed the Carpathians as a result⁷.

Following the protests against internment measures resulting from the return of the Magyar authorities, Tisza declared: "*To say that we threw into chains the mothers and sisters of the heroes of Isonz is impudent slander without precedence in history. We know where thousands of deserters went and anyone who seriously studied the question knows that no one displayed more incredible ingenuity to avoid military service or even less to regularly visit the hospitals, only certain members of Romanian "intelligentsia"*"⁸. The Romanians set out to agree with anyone who would consider the sacrifice of thousands amongst them on the battlefield as insignificant in the last two years. Thus, on October 22nd, 1917, a Transylvanian reserve officer went to the Italians in front of Tolmino, along with one of his Czech comrades, and revealed to his Latin *brothers* the Austrian attack plan. Others were less lucky, like the sub-lieutenant Emiliu Rebreanu, brother of

⁶ Alexandrescu V., Preda D., Prodan C., *La Roumanie et sa guerre pour l'Unité nationale*, Bucharest, 1995, p. 108.

⁷ Seton Watson R. W., *Histoire des Roumains*, Paris, 1937, p. 582.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

the author Liviu Rebreanu, who was taken prisoner when he attempted to cross through the Romanian lines and was shot in Palanca, near the Ghimeş Pass, on May 17th, 1917.

Tisza was entrenched behind the state of exception in order to escalate the repression. Trials under guiltiness of treason multiplied. Between 8,500 and 10,000 Romanians were transferred, for security reasons, to the west of Tisza. 2,000 to 3,000 were deported both to a camp situated near Sopron or in the Austrian region of Burgenland, where they remained until the signature of the Bucharest peace⁹. They also captured orthodox clergy and Roman-Catholics. Even more, the government encouraged Magyar colonization and obstinately refused any electoral reform. In the spring of 1918, Andrassy again spread the idea of concession, and declared in the Diet that the right of peoples to self – determination is “*a dangerous slogan of which the result had been the end of the Hungarian state*”¹⁰. He even ordered the establishment of a special cultural zone along the border. 311 Romanian schools were canceled, and students were deprived of classes while waiting for the Hungarian schools to open. This directive however did not have the time to be enforced¹¹.

The Transylvanian Legions

Like the dictatorial measures of the Germans in Alsace-Lorraine, these Magyar atrocities in Transylvania only increased the dissatisfaction of the population towards its sovereign. For the first time, France found the occasion to directly give its assistance to the liberation of Transylvania. Indeed, a lot of Austrian-Hungarian soldiers of Romanian origin-deserters or prisoners taken by the Allies-were to express the desire to fight on the side of the Entente. They were essentially concentrated in three countries: France, Italy, and Russia.

In every instance, it was servicemen and French diplomats who, attempting to conquer the apathy and reluctance of different concerned authorities, brought substantial support to Transylvanian activists. The results weren't always up to the level of their expectations.

Transylvanians living in France were of diverse origins.

First there were the students or employees of Austrian-Hungarian firms, taken by surprise in France, on August 2nd, 1914, by the declaration of war. A certain few amongst them were requesting to get involved, as did dozens of other foreigners. They had been inspired by a romantic ideal, as an explanation given by one of them to Robert de Flers clearly shows: “*The miracle of France, he said, is that we don't love it only as country: we also love it like a person. She has a face. And this face is so welcoming and so proud, that we even want to die so that it isn't saddened*”¹². But the French government found itself embarrassed

⁹ Haslinger P., *Arad, Novembre 1918*, Vienna, 1993, p. 71, in Ghişa A., «Discussions roumano-hongroises à la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale », *Transylvanian Review*, vol. 5, n° 1, spring 1996, p. 75.

¹⁰ Seton Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

¹¹ *Desăvârşirea unificării statului național român*, Bucharest, 1968, p. 113, in Ghişa, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹² Flers R. de, *Sur les chemins de la guerre*, Paris, 1919, pp. 6-7.

by these nationals in an enemy country. The majority ended up, as the law had planned, in concentration camps. A first circular issued on October 10th, 1914 lessened obligatory internment measures for individuals that were notorious Francophiles and allowed them the freedom to form a party amongst themselves¹³. Then, on June 8th, 1915, the Quay d'Orsay announced the Legation of Romania that the Minister of the Interior had decided to extend favorable treatment to the Austrian-Hungarian Romanian subjects, which included Poles and the Czechs who could also benefit from it. The certificate of the Legation would be equivalent to a formal acknowledgment of Romanian origin for the person concerned¹⁴. Some of the liberated people got involved later in the French Legion.

Captured prisoners of the Voivode Putnik Army in the fall of 1914, who were evacuated following the crushing defeat of Serbia in December 1915, formed another category¹⁵. The third was that of Romanians fallen into French captivity on the Italian border, notably during combat in Monte Tomba in 1917. Finally, there were also Transylvanians belonging to the units that Austria-Hungary had sent to the Western front. Amongst them, Sergeant Teophilu Moraru, who deserted at Douaumont in July 1916, delivering precious information, and who enlisted in the French army, received three citations over the course of the war¹⁶.

From May 5th to May 10th, 1918, during the course of his stay, with permission, in the Bordeaux region, the regional artillery lieutenant Mario Roques – elsewhere deputy – paid visits to Austrian-Hungarian prisoners of Romanian origin who had been gathered into two camps in Bordeaux and in the warehouse of La Pallice. Roques noticed that the majority of these generally seemed to have been treated well, although this did not always extend to men who, although of Romanian origin, were completely Magyarized, and didn't want themselves to be considered Romanians.

Prisoners coming from Serbia were, in general, men having passed their thirtieth birthday, often even their fortieth. Those from Italy were noticeably younger, and in one way generally declared Romanian national sentiments much less distinctly than the others. In contrast, they were less tired and less depressed than those who had had to suffer through the Serbian retreat and the voyage across Albania, where they had lost three quarters of their strength and about which they were only speaking with horror. *"The question I had posed to them, told Roques, was before all that of a possible enlistment, to the service of France, in a Romanian Legion"*. Responses were hardly enthusiastic. One principle objection was virtually found in the mouths of all: *"We have our family in Transylvania. We have parents, a wife and children, and on top of that we have our own little land ownership. If it was known that we were serving France, its not only the sacrifice of our individual persons that we are making, it's all of our family and all we have that we are giving up in retaliation"*.

¹³ Farcy J.-C., *Les Camps de concentration français de la Première Guerre mondiale*, Paris, 1995, p. 24.

¹⁴ Archives of the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry [MAER], File Paris, 579, AE à LRF (Légation de Roumanie en France), 26/8 juin 1915.

¹⁵ Constantinescu M., *Unification of the Romanian national State*, Bucharest, 1971, p. 135, note 1.

¹⁶ Codarcea C. I., *Le Litige roumano-hongrois*, Bucharest, 1973, pp. 20-21.

Roques, accepting this well-founded argument, asked the Minister of War to ensure, for those Romanians who would enlist in the service of France, a civil-state modification similar to the one that was made for those from Alsace-Lorraine. *"It would also be necessary, he added, that their mail was able to follow, in one sense or another, like they were still prisoners in a French camp"*.

In his report, the deputy was still reminded of one objection "obscurely presented by several prisoners, but with a vigor and a remarkable sharpness by the under-officers and by a student who was found mixed with the peasants": *"All of our heart is for France. But it is penetrated by discouragement and sadness, ever since we learned of the declarations made by Mr. Lloyd George and by Mr. President Wilson, on the subject of maintaining Austria. We were always ready for all the sacrifices for our freedom. We are still ready, despite the horrible situation where we are, us and our families. But you broke our will, you plunged us into despair; while thus abandoning us, leaving us officially abandoned by your allies"*. To counter this discouragement, the deputy recommended *"a French declaration putting the rights of Romanians to freedom and national unity on the same plane as the rights of the French in the reformation of France in 1870, and at the same time affirming his will to make the rights of them and others triumph"*.

Finally, only having heard the following reflection, the French officer announced: *"You come too late. If you had come before the peace between Romania and the Central Empires, you would have found us much more resolute. But what to do now, when our Transylvania can't hope for any other help, not from Russia, not even from our brothers of the Kingdom?"*¹⁷

Roques accepted all the same to defend the principle of the constitution of the French Legion, and above all, in Italy. He realized that the obstacles weren't only coming from the prisoners, but equally from the part of the authorities. Indeed Foch gave him a rather unfavorable response: *"From a political point of view, the problem is nothing like the one with that of the Polish, the Czechs, and the Yougo-Slaves"* wrote the general in command *"(...) The Transylvanians don't constitute an ethnic group of good character, they are the Romanian irredentists. Their situation in relation to Romania is the same as that to the inhabitants of Trentin and of Trieste towards Italy. Moreover, the nation that they claim to be representatives of made peace. Its cause is less interesting than that of our allies that have remained faithful. Concerning their aspirations, from now on they should no longer be taken into consideration except in the case where they can be combined with our present or future interests. Now, it is not essential for the Entente that Romania subsequently recover Transylvania. Therefore the constitution of the Transylvanian army can only be considered as a manifestation of moral character, tending to maintain our sympathies regarding a people that unfortunate circumstances forced to conclude a premature peace"*.

Consequently, the generalissimo felt the problem with the Transylvanian contingents *"isn't (wasn't) presenting itself right now"*. *"Concerning the*

¹⁷ SHD, 6 N 218, Rapport du Lt Roques [mai 1918].

Transylvanians in Italy” added Foch “it seemed prudent to not tackle this question at the time when those of the Czech-Slovaks, having been barely determined, those of the Yugo-Slavs remains always to be determined. To sum up, the constitution of a Transylvanian army doesn’t present a real interest, not from a political viewpoint, nor from a military viewpoint. Without doubt it would be impossible owing to the difficulties that there would be to recruit the elements, then transport them”. The French High-Commander had, we see, decided to give absolute priority to the Czech Army Corps. All the same, Foch was leaving a glimmer of hope for Lieutenant Roques: “*The question therefore only seems to be able to be studied within a much more modest framework, and only with the goal of making it apparent until general peace, the Romanian flag flying alongside those of the Entente. For this purpose, first in France, then in Italy, little unit battalions of Transylvanian volunteers could be organized, constituted upon the adopted bases of Russian combat units*”¹⁸. As a consequence, the general inspection of prisoners of war saw itself, under the responsibility of General Alby, Chief of State Major General of the Army, saddled with both an inventory of Transylvanian prisoners detained in France and an inquiry concerning their positions¹⁹. In sight of this goal, Clemenceau gave instruction to the servicemen to act in liaison with General Iliescu, old leader of the Romanian military Mission in France²⁰. But, at the time of the Armistice, not one concrete result had yet been attained.

Let’s see now who were the Romanians of the monarchy detained in Italy upon which Roques founded most of his hopes?

In the spring of 1918, it’s estimated there were about 18,000 of them. Saint-Aulaire too had raised the question of recruitment from within. As Foch had already made it known to Roques, the State Major equally maintained that the moment wasn’t favorable to raise for raising this question to the Italian government, which was already creating difficulties when solving this, more importantly, with the use of prisoners of Czech and Yugo-Slav origins²¹.

At the same time, an identical initiative had been issued by members of the Congress of nationalities oppressed by Austria-Hungary, who were reunited in Rome in April 1918. A commission saw itself charged with the responsibility “*to try to liberate Romanian prisoners in Italy and to form Romanian Legions*”²². Professor S. Mândrescu²³, helped by the French deputy Franklin-Bouillon and socialist Ammunition Minister Albert Thomas, attempted to persuade the Italian government to give its agreement to this project. The difficulties turned out to be very numerous, despite the promises first made by Orlando. But finally, under pressure from the association *Pro Romeni*, which was bringing together

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 N 3024, GQGF (Grand Quartier gal français) – 3^e Bureau [mai 1918].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 N 3024, GQGF – Note pour l’Inspection g^{ale} des prisonniers de guerre, 15/28 mai 1918.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 N 3024, MG (Ministère de la Guerre) à Iliescu, 10/23 juin 1918.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16 N 3024, GQGF – 3^e Bureau [mai 1918].

²² Beneš E., *Souvenirs de guerre et de révolution*, Paris, 1928, vol. 2, p. 108.

²³ Guida F., «Romania 1917-1922, aspirazioni nazionali e conflitti sociali», *Rivoluzione e reazione in Europa 1917-1924*, Perugia, 1978, p. 12.

politicians and Italian intellectuals, the Commission for prisoners of war, under the control of the Minister of War, decided to send, on May 7th, 1918, a certain number of Transylvanian officers into the Città Ducale camp in order to create an embryo of officers for future Legions²⁴.

Clemenceau then decided to make an effort, calling for the leader of the French Mission accredited to the Italian General Headquarters to inquire about the possibility to intercede with “*the Italian government which would be able to be presented with the subject of recruitment of Transylvanian volunteers*”; but precisely, as always, he had to act in such a way that this step/reasoning didn’t carry prejudice “*of a recruitment more interesting than the Czechs or the Yugo-Slavs*”²⁵.

On June 1st, the Italian High-Commander authorized the shipment of Transylvanian officers and soldiers to the front. This brought 1,100 Romanians, who were engaged in the Battle of Piave and later in other operations²⁶. On November 21st, Transylvanian prisoners in Italy took an oath to King Ferdinand at the time of the Albano Loziale assembly²⁷.

The Transylvanian cause had thus gained a little advantage on the Italian, thanks to the good final will of local authorities and to the reasoning in Paris for the wishes of the Romanians.

But the action of French civil and military authorities above all brought fruits in Russia.

At the time the army of King Ferdinand entered the war there were 100 to 150,000 captives of Romanian origin in camps spread over the four corners of the Tsarist Empire²⁸. After the example of the Slavs of the Monarchy, many of them had surrendered at the time of the Broussilov offensive. The Russians gathered around 600 officers in Camp Darnitza, not far from Kiev. These men demanded the reunion of Transylvania with the Kingdom and sent a memoir to the Allies in which they solemnly declared that they would never return until Romania was large and united, an achievement for which they all offered their lives²⁹. The volunteers sent out their own newspaper, *România Mare*³⁰, which campaigned in favor of the Union while arguing about the “*eternal, natural and inexorable laws which give a people the right to exist*”³¹.

Berthelot was sensitive to this support. In June of 1917 a Romanian military Mission went to Kiev. One month later, King Ferdinand, the government, and representatives of the Allies gathered the first Transylvanian battalion in Iași. The ceremony brought together a large crowd in Union Square in front of the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁵ SHD, 16 N 3024, MG à MMFI (Mission militaire française en Italie), 15/28 mai 1918.

²⁶ Guida, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

²⁷ Tuțu D., «Les Actions de l’Armée roumaine en Transylvanie au cours des années 1918-1919», *Revue roumaine d’Histoire*, 1985, n^{os} 1-2, p. 105.

²⁸ Bocu S., *Les Légions roumaines de Transylvanie*, Paris, 1918, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁰ Stan C. I., Neamțu G., “Activity of American Romanians in support of the Great Union, 1918”, *Transylvanian review*, vol. 2, n^o 1, spring 1993, p. 6.

³¹ Constantinescu M., *Unification of the Romanian national State*, Bucharest, 1971, p. 130.

statue of Prince Cuza, and Saint Aulaire wrote: “*I have the impression that it was Transylvania which conquered Romania and not the other way around*”³². On November 17th, after having received the Brătianu Accord, the president of the Council and the Romanian High Commander officially created, in Hârlău, the Transylvanian Corps of Volunteers. Placed under the direction of Transylvanian General Olteanu, it was made up of 374 officers and 8,261 soldiers, to which it was agreed to add 22 officers and 1,460 soldiers charged with the surveillance of Romanian warehouses in Russia. Octavian Goga and Sever Bocu organized this new unit in Iași.

At the time the hostilities ended, it is estimated there were 1,816 volunteer officers and 29,000 under – officers and soldiers. Three regiments, created in November 1917, were baptized *Alba Iulia*, *Avram Iancu* and *Turda*. In Chișinău, a newspaper was published in their honor, first named *Ardealul*, then *România Nouă*³³. In the beginning of March 1918, when it became apparent that the French Mission was going to leave Iași, a party of Transylvanians (in particular officers) let Berthelot know that they desired to join France in order to continue the fight³⁴. Rare were those who reached it. Elsewhere, many changed their mind. On April 16th Berthelot was upset with the fact that only 17 Transylvanian soldiers had accepted enlistment in the Foreign Legion. Those who had were taken to France by the ship *Huntsend*, equally charged with repatriating the last members of the French Mission³⁵.

Just before leaving Iași Berthelot entrusted the others to lieutenant-colonel Donop, and gave him the responsibility of accompanying their retreat to the North to Donetz, so that they could avoid falling back into the hands of the Austrians³⁶. Certain Transylvanians then shared the fate of the Czech army, with whom they mixed along the *Trans Siberian*. On October 16th, Tchéliabinsk groups in central Siberia solemnly threw off Habsburg subjugation and demanded the reunification of Transylvania to Great Romania³⁷. They later followed their route until Vladivostok³⁸. The British Minister to Japan, who was in charge of Romanian interests in the country after the peace of Bucharest, concerned himself devoutly with their repatriation³⁹.

Several Romanians even ended up in the Middle Empire. For example, this was the case of five young people aged 17 to 19, temporarily taken out of the Vladivostok train station by the French consul and who were understanding and following the war in the French army. The Quay d’Orsay asked Lahovari, the Romanian Minister in France, for authorization from his government so that they could sign up for enlistment in the Foreign Legion, in order to join one of the colonial regiments of Tien-Tsin⁴⁰.

³² Bocu, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³³ Seton Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 560-561, note 3.

³⁴ SHD, 3 N 5, Berthelot au MG, 17 février/2 mars 1918.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 N 540, Berthelot au MG, 3/16 avril 1918.

³⁶ Delmas J., *L’État-Major français et le front oriental*, Thèse, Paris, 1965, p. 154.

³⁷ Șeicaru P., *La Roumanie dans la Grande Guerre*, Paris, 1968, p. 431.

³⁸ Bodea C., Seton Watson H., *R. W. Seton Watson și România*, Bucharest, 1988, p. 438.

³⁹ SHD, 7 N 3054, Attaché militaire au Japon au MG, 15 juillet 1920, n° 287.

⁴⁰ AMAER, File Paris, 579, AE à LRF, 14/27 octobre 1917.

Still more unexpected is the case of five Transylvanians, guards of the Austrian Legation in Peking, interned by China at the time of its entrance into the war, on August 14, 1917, and forgotten until February 1920! There again, it was France that was charged with the task of their repatriation, in Port-Saïd and Salonika⁴¹.

Finally, the French government sent its assistance, attempting to form Romanian units in the United States. In 1916, the Romanian and Transylvanian diaspora there comprised around 180,000 people, spread out over different cities, particularly Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit and Youngstown. It was strongly organized, and the organs of the community, like *America* or *Semănătorul*, warmly welcomed the entrance of Romania into the war⁴².

Immediately after, a project of Legions destined to support the Entente war efforts in combat on the French border was also created. Their organization became one of the reasons to be for the Lucaciu Mission, which left Iași on April 23rd, 1917⁴³. These Legions were the only ones formed as a response to the propaganda of the Central Powers, that declared in America that the Transylvanians didn't desire a union with Romania at all, and found themselves very happy at the teat of the Hungarian state. Ioan Moța, priest and journalist in Orăștie, and an Anglophone lieutenant, Vasile Stoica, held the Mission, which reached Washington on June 29th, behind for a period of two months. The welcome of the American authorities turned out to be rather cold, despite the efforts of certain French diplomats. Secretary of State Lansing agreed to meet Father Lucaciu on July 2nd, but only at the insistence of French Minister Jusserand. The French position elsewhere remained ambiguous: Saint-Aulaire had confided in a letter of recommendation to the Transylvanian ecclesiastics, but the French government had him, at the same time, make known "*that it was preferable to reserve the available American tonnage for the transport of American troops*"⁴⁴.

Newton Baker, War Secretary of State, let V. Lucaciu know on July 6th and 7th that the United States would not knowingly accept the formation of national military units on their soil, Wilson seeing the war, on the contrary, as a means of accelerating the *melting pot*. Baker then advised the Romanians to encourage their fellow countrymen to enlist in the American army.

Stoica turned himself towards the French Legation on August 3rd, suggesting that the Legion is raised in the following conditions:

The equipment and training would be carried out in France.

The officers would be French, chosen by the Government.

The enlistments would be subscribed in American and Canadian Ports under the control of French diplomats.

⁴¹ AMAE (Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Paris) – Dossier Z Europe 1918-1940, Roumanie, vol. 18, LRF (Légation de Roumanie en France) aux AE, 13 mars 1920.

⁴² Stan, Neamțu, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, n° 1, printemps 1993, p. 3.

⁴³ PRFR US [Papers relating to the Foreign relations of the U. S.] -1917. *Supplement 2: The World War*, Washington, 1932, Andrews to Lansing, 28 june/11 july 1917.

⁴⁴ SHD, 16 N 3024, GQGF -3^e Bureau [mai 1918].

The volunteers would leave the United States in groups of 100 to 200, accompanied by a delegated official.

To do this, the French Legation would need to receive authorization from American and British Governments.

The soldiers, considered as Romanian citizens, would be used on the French border⁴⁵.

However, for more than a year these suggestions remained a dead letter.

Elsewhere, practical difficulties were added to ideological reluctance. As for General Niessel, leader of the French military Mission in Russia, he was always banking upon the use of Transylvanians on the Eastern border, and on September 30th, 1917, wrote to Berthelot that the Russians were demanding that sea transport be ensured, in addition to the tonnage then predicted between America and Vladivostok⁴⁶.

For his part, like Stoica, Brătianu preferred the use of volunteers on the French border because, as he told Berthelot, they would be risking to be “a little disillusioned to see what happens here”⁴⁷. For the entire duration of the voyage across the Pacific and Siberia, the president of the Romanian Council was fearing “*the congestion of trains and ships, the moral state of these troops of which their mentality is yielding, less apt to the rigors of the fight on the Romanian border, the lack of equipment*”.

Mentioning again another option – that would be the constitution of Romanian Legions, pointed on Salonica⁴⁸.

But none of these projects saw the light of day.

One must strongly postulate and establish that, despite all the efforts of Saint-Aulaire and Berthelot, the Transylvanian troops, because of their circumstances, could hardly act in an effective way in sight of the liberation of their country. The accomplishment of their national dreams couldn't come from external forces.

The Intellectual Mobilization

These allied forces had to form opinions by using propaganda, in order to interest people in the Transylvanian cause. Called upon by numerous nationalities, the governments of the Entente had already expressed, as we saw, their preferences. The Czechs, Masaryk and Beneš in particular, had known how to use to their advantage all the means of communication at their disposal. In this battle, again, genuine patronage from a larger and more powerful nation, such as France, endorsed Romanian claims. France gave asylum to refugees from Ardeal and from the Kingdom, giving them leave to exert their propaganda, starting in Paris. And the French personalities who invited to action and embraced the cause of the Transylvanians were numerous.

⁴⁵ Stan, Neamțu, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ SHD, 17 N 542, Niessel à Berthelot, 17/30 septembre 1917.

⁴⁷ Torrey G. E., *General Henri Berthelot and Romania*, New York, 1987, p. 114 (*Journal*, 4 novembre 1917).

⁴⁸ SHD, 6 N 223, Berthelot au MG, 21 octobre/3 novembre 1917.

A Romanian news office was opened on January 1st, 1918. Elena Văcărescu, D. Drăghicescu, Șerbescu, but also French politicians, Albert Lebrun, Richter, Fagure, and the geographer Emmanuel de Martonne, multiplied the number of articles in favor of Romania. It was all about flooding editorial offices, Ministries, secretariats of deputies and senators, educated, commercial, and industrial societies, French notabilities and allies⁴⁹. A specific organ, the daily newspaper *La Roumanie*, appeared for the first time on January 17th⁵⁰.

On January 24th, 73 politicians and Romanian intellectuals – several of who were professors from the University of Bucharest⁵¹ – were received by the Committee for foreign parliamentary action, led by the old ministers Selves and Franklin-Bouillon. On this occasion, a French-Romanian economic Committee was put on its feet under the patronage of L. Barthou. The same day, the Romanian colony attended a formal meeting of the Chamber at the Bourbon Palace. In the presence of Clemenceau, Paul Deschanel recalled the sacrifices made by Romania for the common cause⁵². Pichon assured Romania of “*the entire friendship and solidarity of the Chamber*”⁵³.

Briand declared to Toma Stelian and Ion Florescu: “*I don’t have any worry. We will be the victors and you will see your national unity: Great Romania ... The sacrifices will not have been in vain ... Tell yourselves that you have helped to save Verdun and ...you are doing nothing of it!*”⁵⁴.

On February 4th, Ernest Lavisse sent a letter of sympathy to the presidents of the Universities of Bucharest and of Iași⁵⁵. Romanian intellectuals and scientists multiplied their presence at conferences in Paris, France and as far as Périgueux. Amongst them was the aviator Traian Vuia⁵⁶. On March 4th, Clemenceau received a delegation of Transylvanian emigrants⁵⁷.

Romanian propaganda intensified during the peace negotiations of Bucharest. It centered on explaining to the French audience the reasons which forced the Romanian army to end combat, all the while protesting against the attitude of the Marghiloman Government. On May 15th, the editors of *La Roumanie* let Pichon know that the journal “*will/would continue the fight for the liberation of its country*”. At the same time, a new magazine, *La Transylvanie*, focused itself on the battle for freedom of the Romanians of the Monarchy⁵⁸.

On May 23rd, the Romanian colony of Paris sent a memo to Clemenceau, in which the peace of Bucharest was declared void and the will to continue the struggle on the side of the Allies was reaffirmed. “*It’s great, honor is intact*” commented the *Tigre*⁵⁹.

⁴⁹ AMAER, File Paris, 62, LRF aux AER, 13/26 janvier 1918.

⁵⁰ Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵¹ Duca I. G., *Memorii*, Bucharest, 1992, vol. 2, p. 163.

⁵² Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁵³ Duca, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 69.

⁵⁴ *La Roumanie nouvelle*, 8^e année, n° 484, mars 1932.

⁵⁵ Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

During the month of July, it was Take Ionescu's turn to come to France⁶⁰, where he was received, in private, by Poincaré⁶¹. The following month, V. Lucaciu also brought himself to Paris⁶².

On September 6th, Ionescu assumed, while still in the French capital, the presidency of the National Council of Romanian Unity, the first organ including and bringing together representatives from Romanian countries abroad. The Council was recognized on October 12th by France, November 5th by the United States, the 11th by Great Britain and the 22nd by Italy⁶³.

Rupture with the Habsburgs

Transylvanian and Romanian exiles who were used to mobilize the Allies in favor of their cause identified more and more the Double Monarchy as the source of all of their troubles. In the spring of 1918, they definitively rejected every solution that would maintain the existence of the latest.

This decision was ratified from April 8th to April 11th by a Congress of Oppressed Nationalities from Austria-Hungary, which was convened in Rome upon the initiative of the Italian senator L. Albertini⁶⁴. The Congress proclaimed “*the right (for each nationality) to constitute their unity for the national State or to complete it reaching its full political and economic independence*”⁶⁵.

Starting at the end of September, the actual collapse of the Turkish-Bulgarian border made the program pass into the sphere of possibilities. Clemenceau chose Berthelot to go to Salonika, take the head of the Army of the Danube, and give rise to Romania. The general went there with the clear goal to succeed in “cleansing the Balkans of Boches and Ostrogoths”⁶⁶.

The Habsburg Empire was already imploding elsewhere.

On October 6th in Iași, the Romanian Committee of Austria-Hungary – emanation of Transylvanian refugees in the Kingdom – announced the Union of the Romanian Countries of the Monarchy, under the Crown of King Ferdinand. Strikes broke out in Arad and Timișoara. On October 12th, the leaders of the Romanian National Party (P. N. R) met in Oradea, in the house of a lawyer named Lazăr, with the clear goal of setting into motion a Declaration of national self-determination, brought before the Parliament of Budapest on October 18th⁶⁷. Goldiș and Vaida-Voevod clearly declared to the archduke Joseph: “*The Romanian nation wants to decide its destiny for itself*”⁶⁸.

⁶⁰ Marghiloman A., *Note politique*, Bucharest, 1927, vol. 3, p. 552.

⁶¹ Poincaré R., *Au service de la France*, Paris, 1933, vol. 10, p. 283.

⁶² Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁶³ Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁶⁵ Sforza Comte, *Pachitch et l'union des Yougoslaves*, Paris, 1938, p. 207; also see: Masaryk T. G., *La résurrection d'un État*, Paris, 1930, pp. 249-250.

⁶⁶ Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 180 (*Lettre à Berthelot, 14 octobre 1918*).

⁶⁷ *Adevărul*, 14^e année, n° 41, 13/26 octobre 1918, in Tuțu, *op. cit.*, p. 104; also see Ghișa, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 119, note 2.

On October 17th, Emperor Charles pulled the ultimate rescue operation. However his *Manifesto*, which announced the creation of an Austrian federal state, remained very vague on the topic of Hungary. And elsewhere, what represented still autonomy for those Transylvanians who counted on France and the United States to help them obtain a pure and simple union with Romania?

The empire collapsed in a few days, according to the prophecy made, at the start of the conflict, by Czernin in the presence of Take Ionescu: “*This war will be a war of extermination. If we are the victors, we will eliminate Romania. If we are defeated, there won’t be an Austria-Hungary*”⁶⁹.

While the Magyar units started to leave the Italian border, the Romanian National Council proclaimed, on October 27th, the breaking of ties with the Monarchy.

On the night between the 30th and 31st of October the revolution triumphed in Budapest. A liberal, Count Károlyi, gain power.

The Separation with the Crow of Saint Stephen

On October 31st, the creation of the Romanian National Council (C. N. R.) by Maniu ratified *de facto* the passage of Transylvania under Romanian administration⁷⁰.

On November 3rd, Austria-Hungary signed the armistice with Italy at la Villa Giusti⁷¹. The text took effect the next day, November 4th, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon⁷². At the same time, Magyar plenipotentiaries presented themselves to Serbian after-posts. The new Hungary, forgetting the imperial signature, asked to initiate negotiations with France and its Balkan allies on its own behalf.

Representatives of the Magyar government met in Arad on the 12th, 13th, and 14th of November with a delegation led by Maniu, Pop, and Goldiș. They offered them nearly complete autonomy and true democratic guarantees. Jászai envisaged the creation of a multicultural Hungary, an *oriental Switzerland*, with, at its heart, a Monarchy with five equal heads: Austria, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, and Illyrian⁷³. But this wasn’t the time for half measures. Maniu rejected all of the propositions as a whole, proclaiming that “*the Romanian nation claims to have the right to its complete independence and doesn’t accept this right reduced by proviso measures*”⁷⁴. The voluntary secession was made clearly apparent in a solemn declaration dated from November 18th⁷⁵.

Temporary borders then became the principal question. The Hungarians attempted to obtain on the side of the French that which had been refused by the Romanian side. Károlyi naively outlined the new government’s position to the

⁶⁹ Ionescu T., *Souvenirs*, Paris, 1919, p. 84.

⁷⁰ 4th of november for Tuțu, *op. cit.*, p. 105; 2^d for Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁷¹ Text in *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre (AFGG)*, t. 8, vol. 3, Annexes, vol. 3, n° 1732, pp. 489-491, GQG à Armée d’Orient, 21 octobre/4 novembre 1918.

⁷² *AFGG*, t. 8, vol. 3, Annexes, vol. 3, n° 1716, MG à AO, 21 octobre/3 novembre 1918.

⁷³ Ghișa, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁷⁴ Șeicaru, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

⁷⁵ Nouzille J., *La Transylvanie*, Strasbourg, 1993, p. 218.

leader of the Allied troops: “*We solemnly declare to not accept any responsibility for the external or internal political acts of the vanished regime (...) From the 1st of November we have stopped being enemies and have become neutral*”. A French officer said the personalities composing the delegation sent to Belgrade gave the impression that they were of the “*Magyars that want freedom for themselves, but they desire to conserve the ring of people they depend on*”⁷⁶.

Franchet d’Espèrey refused a *distingo* between the Hungarians of the day and those of the day before that. However, as if ignoring the secret clauses of the Treaty of August 1916, he traced a demarcation line nearly centered on the old border. Indeed it started in the high valley of Someș, bore towards the south-west in the direction of Bistrița and Marosfalu, towards the Mureș, and followed its course until convergence with the Tisza⁷⁷. This was the work of a military and not that of a politician.

On November 13th, 1918, Béla Linder signed the armistice in the name of the Government of the Hungarian Republic. But there had to be the threat to Budapest of a Franco-British offensive. Article 3 specified that the allied armies had the permanent right to occupy all locations, all strategic points that would be designated by the lead general. They also had the right to passage on any extent of the Hungarian territory⁷⁸. Hungary had eight days to recall their troops. While waiting, the French and Serbian military were satisfied with controlling the passes through the Carpathians⁷⁹.

And yet the Romanians, who returned *in extremis* to the Allied camp on November 10th, were newly made part of the jurisdiction of the Entente, even if Berthelot later wrote: “*It seems that we have kept the resentment of Romania to be returned too late in action, however they did it at the time I set myself. Maybe also one regretted that which had taken place before the Armistice, that which would have permitted to annul the accord from August 17th, 1916*”⁸⁰. All the while waiting to profit from certain clauses in the treaty, the leaders of Iași refused to acknowledge the tracing of the line of separation.

The Romanian army was then constituted, on paper, of about 165,000 men. But it was obvious that the concentration of troops would need a certain atmosphere⁸¹. General Prezan was really optimistic when he anticipated an action in Transylvania, near the valleys of Oituz and Bistrița, starting on the 14th or 15th of November⁸². While waiting, the Romanians rushed to organize national guards to fight against anarchy: “*Each Romanian soldier, free from his oath to the Emperor*” declared Cicio-Pop “*is free to enlist in the Romanian National Military Council and to proudly wear the symbol of his national sovereignty, the tricolor*”⁸³. Indeed deserters of all nationalities ransacked Transylvania, and ethnic clashes started to take place.

⁷⁶ Bernachot Général, *Les Armées allies en Orient*, Paris, 1970, vol. 1, p. 45 (Compte rendu de décembre 1918).

⁷⁷ Macartney C. A., *Hungary and her successors*, Oxford, 1937, p. 267.

⁷⁸ Photiades C., *La Victoire des Alliés en Orient*, Paris, 1920, pp. 214-216.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

⁸⁰ Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 219 (Notes).

⁸¹ Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁸² AFGG, t. 8, vol. 3, Annexes, vol. 3 n° 1874, p. 619, Presan à Berthelot, 29 octobre/11 novembre 1918.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

On November 13th, the first Romanian elements timidly started crossing the Carpathians, already buried under snow – which considerably slowed the soldiers' advance. Their movement sped up starting November 20th⁸⁴. King Ferdinand's troops entered Toplița and Miercurea Ciuc on November 26th⁸⁵ welcomed by the same cries of joy which saluted the French when they were entering Alsace and Lorraine in November 1918. While Jászi attempted to form a Danubian Confederation, where each nationality would find itself on equal footing, the Romanians were feverishly preparing a huge meeting of representatives from all areas in order to approve, with a solemn act, the divorce between Transylvania and the Hungarian State.

On December 1st the National Assembly of Alba Iulia reunited 1,228 delegates coming from all of the Romanian countries, as well as tens of thousands of country men and women, under the Crown of Saint Stephen the Great. In this same place, the idea of unity had taken form in 1848, and 250 years earlier, in 1599, Michael the Brave had been proclaimed Prince of Transylvania. The Union of Romania and Transylvania into one single state was announced amongst "unanimous cheers".

Conclusion

During the weeks that followed the Alba Iulia decision, a period of institutional upheaval and troubles in Transylvania, the Romanian government constantly received assistance from General Berthelot and Saint-Aulaire, who were defending the *Latins of the Orient* cause like they themselves were part of it – nevertheless, this was really the case for Berthelot, named citizen of honor by Romania in June 1917. They had to fight against Hungarian pretensions, but also on occasion against those Serbian *brothers in arms* in Banat. They were subjected to the humors of Franchet d'Espèrey and of Clemenceau, not always well positioned with regard to the *droppers* in Iași. The Transylvanian population knew how to show gratitude to their true friends. At the time of their "*pacification rounds*", made between December 1918 and January 1919, Berthelot received ovations from immense crowds everywhere⁸⁶. On his way home, he wrote to his cousin Claudius: "*It wouldn't be necessary to disillusion those who love us at the advantage of the Hungarians who wouldn't be grateful for us elsewhere, while we would have in the Great Romania the most beautiful French colony in the world...*"⁸⁷. A German officer of neutral loyalty recorded: "*By this cordial reception, the Romanians from Transylvania wanted to show their profound gratitude to the French (...) At the same time, in this manner they wanted to express their confidence that at the Peace Conference France will make Romanian aspirations their own desires*"⁸⁸. Several months later, Saint-Aulaire received the same welcoming.

⁸⁴ Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁸⁵ Tuțu, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-108.

⁸⁶ Private Fund Dubois, Berthelot à C. Dubois, 30 décembre 1918.

⁸⁷ Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 203 (*Lettre à G. Berthelot, 7 janvier 1919*)/Lettre à C. Dubois 7 janvier 1919, n° 48.

⁸⁸ Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 188, note 1.

The two great friends of the day, grief and rejoice, were again the object of a great story of affection in 1930, several months after the death of the General.

On May 28th the same year Berthelot took his seat in Parliament amongst rows of deputies, and under a thunder of applause. In the middle of this intense emotion, his accomplice for the years 1916-1919, the *Old diplomat*, declared: “*In the first place, it is to France and to the Allies and not to my person that your gratitude should go. That which concerns me, living amongst you, I could only say that I love you like the first moment. We suffered together and together we helped to see the realization of your national ideal. How could I not love you?*”⁸⁹.

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⁸⁹ *L'Indépendance roumaine*, 31 mai et 1^{er} juin 1930.

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