

HISTORY UNDER THE SIGN OF THE CENTENNIAL

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Abstract. *The paper recalls the historical times of the Romanians' Union in 1918, both as a historical fact and as a historical experience. It notices that it cannot be said that everything that happened was unexpected, but this historical event was neither well prepared, nor the merit of the politicians. Indeed, there was not enough time for a better understanding of the changes in progress (both by the Romanians and by their neighbors). The pace of history was set in the rhythm of the cannon beatings that were heard from the trenches. The Union was the merit of the people and their ideals and the great majority of those who lived in the Romanian space at the beginning of the 20th century believed that such an event would not happen or that it was to happen much later.*

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Eventually, what do we mean by historical fact? A schematic philosophy of history like that sketched by Hegel drastically simplifies things. According to the German philosopher, we should draw a [separation] line between accidental and necessary facts and deeds. Obviously, only the necessary facts would be historical facts. Kant abandoned this scheme. And not Kant alone had decided this way. For most of Hegel's descendants there are no historical facts, but only historical phenomena. And only they are the object of historical experience. An experience involving a work and an interpreter, as the Italian researcher M. Mastrogregori noticed. Or, as M. Bloch has observed since 1906, finding that the replacement of a historical fact with a historical phenomenon also presupposes the existence of an observer to make this distinction. And this observer can only be the historian, the researcher who builds scientific analysis models without which historical experience does not exist. Such models have also been built by M. Bloch and Lucien Febre. What we observe today is the dissolution of the historical fact in the historiographical experience and the concept of the document in the tentative

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testimony. Regardless of our agreement or disagreement, history seems to be everything. Everything that happens to us is history. And, of course, whatever else gets recorded.

The Romanians' Union in 1918 is both a historical fact and a historical experience. It cannot be said that everything that happened was unexpected. But neither was it well prepared. There was not enough time for a better understanding of the changes in progress (both by the Romanians and by their neighbors). Everything moved in the rhythm of the cannon beatings that were heard from the trenches. Many of those who lived in the Romanian space at the beginning of the 20th century believed that such an event would happen much later. King Carol I told Take Ionescu in November 1901: "We have all the time before us" In the course of the same discussion, Take Ionescu did not see any possibility of enlarging the Romanian space, the fulfillment of the national ideal. He told him that the Danube barrier (thinking of the Aromanian population) and the two Russian and Austrian empires, which had Romanians in their possession, were too big and too powerful states not to forbid any extension. But he had the surprise to hear Carol I say, "Do you think that Austria is eternal and we will never see its dismemberment?" And in front of Take Ionescu's emotion, the King added, "It's not imminent and we have all the time before us." Carol I had this quality to put the realities above the impatience. But the King was not right. Under the circumstances that all people were seeking their settlement as soon as possible in national states, a delay in the attempt to unite the Romanians in their own state was only meant to delay their historical development. The difficulty for the Romanians was different. The Romanian state existent at the time, and we are obviously talking about "Little Romania," was surrounded from all the parts by Romanians, too. Thus, after the union of Moldavia with Wallachia, which of the provinces would have followed the process of unity: with Bessarabia, with Transylvania, with Bukovina or with Banat?

The Bessarabian Constantin Stere arrives in Romania in 1892 as a fighter "consumed not by ambitions, but by ideals." He had read the article signed by Take Ionescu in 1891, in "La Roumanie" defining Romania's foreign policy as the "politics of fear," the fear of Russia, and its intentions in the Balkan area. A policy that the Romanians were forced to carry on after 1792, that is, after the great empire had come close to the Romanian space. Russia and Romania would have to become, from that moment on, "two lives that excluded each other."

C. Stere agreed with Take Ionescu, but found that this was not very visible in Romania's politics, that is, he did not see a Romanian clear option against Russia. And he tells this to Take Ionescu, whom he was keen to see shortly after his arrival in Jassy. He goes to Sinaia, to Take's Cottage at Valea Codrului. He cannot refrain from openly expressing this finding, which determines Take Ionescu's reply: "Somehow do you think we can stand alone against Russia's course in the Balkans? France has left us. It is now the ally of our deadly enemy, your Tsar! Will our new allies defend us for the sake of our eyes? In international politics, my friend, there is no philanthropy." And Stere answered: – "But then, tell us all to our faces, to the Bessarabians, that we have no business here, that in Romania we are still under the Tsarist heel ... Why do you limit the national struggle only to Transylvania?"

C. Stere resumes this subject so preoccupying for him as well in a conversation with Ionel Brătianu. As a solution to the Balkan problem, C. Stere proposes the creation of a Carpathian-Balkan confederation from all nationalities located in the Danube basin. “But in whatever form this political body would be constituted, it would not be indifferent if the Romanians, the most numerous ethnic group in the whole South-East Europe ..., will form a compact mass and a living unity, or whether they will be torn in groups and sub-groups, set astray and alienated!” Brătianu appreciates: “It is very beautiful what you say, but for a Romanian statesman the question is not timely; it is not a matter for today. How do you want, he asks, how do you want a minister of His Majesty the King of Romania to consider as a current problem the transformation of Romania into a republic that can be part of a federal state, similar to Switzerland or to the United States?” “Then the revolution, exclaims Stere? Can you really consider the revolution a matter of current affairs in Romania?”, asks Brătianu. “Not the statesmen, Stere bursts out, make the revolution a topical issue, but history.” Brătianu, putting his hands on his shoulder, said, “Today history has advanced it to us... I’m not the history... Not even you.”

The Romanians who lived at that historical time did not need to be told what they had to do with their lives at the beginning of the 20th century. Their course was historically determined. They could do nothing else but build a state that would be one for all the Romanians. For those belonging to that generation, as well as for those who followed it, history was nothing else but a source of continuous perplexity. And who could ever have imagined, in the Europe of the beginning of the year 1918, that the War would end as it ended?! And who would have dared believe that Little Romania, sunk to rock bottom, at the beginning of 1918, surrounded from all parts of the country by harsh enemies and found seemingly at its most hopeless moment of its existence, will become Greater Romania at the end of that same year?! And during the next year, with its newly recognized borders, who would have imagined that it will live the greatest of its national joys. The defeat of the Central European states, which consecrated the creation of Great Romania, ended the millenary dream of a historic Hungary.

History teaches us the relativity of all that exists. The tactics of the Romanian elite, which were those of political opportunism, were successful. Clemenceau had raised his hat in front of the Romanian people, in front of its remarkable capacity of sacrifice (yet, not in front of Romanian politicians, before whom he had put his hat back on the head). The historian notes that Romanian politicians may not have been at the same height as the people they governed (how many of them are?). But they were merely lucky.