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Avram Iancu in the Spring of 1848
Considerations on the Mentality of a Revolutionary

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There are numerous accounts about the life of Avram Iancu (1824–1872), coming from his contemporaries, from memorialists, and then from historians and great writers. There has been a steady flow of studies, articles and monographs, folklore and document collections. The historiography devoted to him has reflected the changes experienced by Romanian society throughout the various eras. No regime, be it authoritarian or liberal, ever sought to cast into oblivion his otherwise meteoric activity, for the simple reason that he was part of the national pantheon. The echoes, or indeed the lingering presence of the year 1848 in the collective conscience, undoubtedly helped to keep alive the extremely compelling ‘myth’ surrounding him. Alongside other Central and Eastern European peoples, it was at that time that the Romanians experienced the first major episode of their affirmation: “The Springtime of Peoples.” This was the chance to join
other Europeans in an attempt to assert an identity and to further the hopes and expectation of an outstanding generation. The development of the national identity was the centerpiece of this troubled middle of the 19th century, and it remained a crucial element until comparatively recently. The combination between the needed social and national reforms led to differences of opinion and violent clashes, prolonging the event and all of its dramatic consequences. Present in those “stormy” years (to quote one of his contemporaries, Nicolae Popea1), familiar with the European ideas of that time, Iancu turned into a constantly evoked symbol, especially in the most trying moments in our history.

Iancu’s situation is different from that of many of his contemporaries, who became the subjects of comprehensive monographs, with analyses seeking to piece together their revolutionary mentality, ideas, and intellectual background. The biography of Iancu is still defined by significant gaps, speculations and assumptions caused by the lack of documents penned by the man himself. Dominant are the behavioral elements, his empathy and his penchant for justice. These have all been taken up in the collective mentality, in the Romanian folklore that celebrates Iancu. The accounts about him come chiefly from memoirists and from the villagers of the Apuseni Mountains, who passed on his myth from one generation to the next. Many of these accounts show him as a representative of “Young Europe.”

Defining for the emergence of his revolutionary mentality are the testimonies of two Hungarian contemporaries. In 1848, the Unitarian priest Mózes Székely travelled to the Apuseni Mountains, where he spent a few days in the company of young Avram Iancu’s family. In his diary, the author expressed his surprise at the fortunate results of education even among the lower classes, as proved by the virtuous conduct, unanimously recognized as such by the estate officials, displayed by the two serfs from Vidra de Sus [Alsóvidra], the brothers Avram and Alisandru2 Iancu. That said, it is my sincere wish that even a small part of the population of our country would come close to their culture, wellbeing, and behavior. This would make for a much happier Hungary.3

Later on, in 1872, an economist and former commerce minister also wrote about Iancu. Béla Lukács had learned about him during his internship in Târgu Mureș (Neumarkt am Mieresch, Marosvásárhely) where, in the youth circles largely consisting of the future leaders of the Revolution, the young law clerk was known as “Abi.” Born in the Apuseni Mountains, this romantic region had left a significant imprint upon the mind of the child. He was blessed with a focused and piercing intellect. Soon his parents sent him to school. The
little Abi studied diligently and quite soon began to think for himself. The events and phenomena occurring around him drew his attention.

And Lukács continued: “Graduating with the highest marks possible, he went to Cluj [Klausenburg, Kolozsvár], where the seat of the Gubernium was.”

These two accounts only come to confirm what is already known about the schools attended by Iancu and their outstanding albeit non-Romanian teachers. This is where he began to learn Hungarian, German, and Latin. Romanian, not so much. To satisfy his interest in Romanian history, he read the works of Gheroghe Șincai and Petru Maior, also attending the meetings hosted by the Piarist College of Cluj which, since 1845, had been hosting an Academic Society whose honorary chairman was the young lawyer Alexandru Bohățiel, while Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and Nicolae Popea were the editors of the weekly publication called Diorile pentru minte și inimă (The dawn of minds and hearts). Worth mentioning in this context is also his family’s subscription to Gazeta de Transilvania (The Transylvanian gazette).

In 1847, while in Cluj, he attended the debates of the Transylvanian Diet on the urbarium. It was at this time that he formulated the famous position, defining for his mentality: “Tyrants are not swayed by philosophical and humanitarian arguments, but by pikes, as shown by Horea.” Such statements on the crucial social questions of the day were to be reiterated at the time of the Revolution, in 1850–1852.

The schools attended by Avram Iancu and by most members of his generation, and the socialization they made possible, led to the creation of a Transylvanian elite much more attuned to the ideas of that time—to what we usually call “Young Europe”—than we tend to accept. In Zlatna (Klein-Schlatten, Zalatna) and Cluj he studied the “higher humanities” (1841) and then, for two years, he attended courses in philosophy, finally deciding to study law (1844–1846). His classical background was utterly remarkable. He demonstrated this during the Revolution, when he served as prefect and commander of the Auranția Gemina Legion, organized and run in keeping with the model of ancient Rome. Recently published documents come to confirm his modern adaptation of the Roman formula, passed on by his “teacher” Simion Bărnuțiu, by Timotei Cipariu, and by George Barățiu. For the generation of 1848, public natural rights and the rights of peoples, taken from Bărnuțiu’s philosophy, as well the articles published in the two newspapers edited in Blaj (Blasendorf, Balázsfalva) by Cipariu—Organul luminărei (The Organ of enlightenment) and Învățătorul poporului (The teacher of the people)—and in the periodicals of Brașov (Kronstadt, Brassó) were “an attempt to reconcile nationalism and historicism within a new synthesis, which rejects historical rights” in favor of the rights of man and
of nations. Besides, the young Transylvanians were familiar with the ideas of Lamennais, Lamartine, Michelet, Guizot, and Thiers.

Thus, in Iancu’s speeches we find constant references to human rights, to the famous slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity.” The short-lived “Romanian Land” of Transylvania (from the fall of 1848 to the summer of 1849) was grounded in the democratic ideas of the time, and the aforementioned slogans were commonplace. Iancu stimulated and encouraged the cohabitation with the denizens of the mountain regions that were of a different nationality, punished those responsible for looting and abuse, insistently demanded that all procurement by the new authorities be accompanied by proper paperwork, etc. He was determined to fight corruption and nepotism, and issued decisions in the new spirit of the time. Quite impressive is his order against any torturing of prisoners. It is easy to understand why he chose to become a lawyer. His intention was to restore the rights and the properties taken from his fellow villagers throughout the centuries using legal, rather than violent means. The years of the Revolution made him change his approach, in keeping with the priorities of his nation. The traumatic year 1848, followed by months of confrontations, shows him as an advocate of change, of that “justice” permanently invoked alongside the other principles of the European generation of 1848. Quite early on, the assemblies and the preservation—in keeping with the new principles—of the liberty and autonomy of Transylvania became the fundamental components of his revolutionary mentality.

The news of the events occurred in both Vienna and Pest created a stir in Târgu Mureș, where Iancu was practicing law. Later on, Barițiu would describe the agitation in the city:

*Regardless of their number, practically all the Romanians who were educated or at least blessed with a sound mind began to wonder about the future of our nation, in light of those events. From one region to the next, they exchanged letters and made inquiries, seeking to find out what others felt or thought about this. From the very outset, the more intelligent ones became suspicious of this new Hungarian freedom, expressed in the 12 points of Pest and largely enacted on 11 April 1848. After lengthy polemical exchanges in the press and among the memoirists of the 19th century concerning the causes behind the Transylvanian Revolution, the same scholar and outstanding historian highlighted the issue of identity, defining for the mentality of Avram Iancu, alongside the social desiderata:*

*The most burning and painful wound, festering for centuries without any prospect of cleansing, healing, or recovery, was that spiritual serfdom, the despicable laws*
that had forcefully declared the majority population to be alien and completely subjected to the whims of the other inhabitants, the minority population.\textsuperscript{9}

In their turn, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and the young Romanian intelligentsia of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), Cluj, Blaj, or Brașov—people like Simion Bărnuțiu, Aron Pumnul, etc.—drew on the concepts of their time in order to express their fervent support for the ideas of the European revolution. August Treboniu Laurian, Axente Sever, Constantin Romanu Vivu, Ioan Maiorescu, etc., who resided in Wallachia, stayed in contact with their Transylvanian counterparts and offered their opinions on the future programmatic priorities and in regard to the complex Central and Eastern European context. Quite prevalent is the call to immediate action, to the adoption of the program by the Romanian groups in the towns and cities of the Principality, as well as to a total commitment in support of the socio-political desiderata. Most of the Romanian youths in Târgu Mureș were fluent in Hungarian and did not shy away from attending the meetings and even contributing to the manifestos of their Hungarian colleagues. This is the environment in which the young Avram Iancu began his ascent. He was far from a passive witness to the events unfolding around him. Naturally, his revolutionary mindset drove him closer to those who saw things the same way he did.

The March manifestos, especially Bărnuțiu’s \textit{Provoacțiune} (Challenge), had a decisive contribution to the establishment of his future priorities. A few years later, one of his contemporaries, the historian László Kőváry, would quote a public statement made by Iancu in Târgu Mureș: “Eternal redemption for no reward, or death,” which was essentially his response to the March program of the Hungarian revolution.\textsuperscript{10} Iancu’s endorsement of Bărnuțiu’s manifesto entailed the priority objective of securing the recognition of the Romanians as a “political nation,” together with the abolition of serfdom. The merger between the two objectives, national and social, was confirmed by the witnesses interviewed by the Kozma Inquiry Commission. On the emperor’s birthday, in the town of Câmpeni (Topesdorf, Topánfalva), “The crowd sang \textit{Gott erhalte}, and the young Iancu shouted ‘Long live Bărnuțiu, the liberator of the Romanians!’ when they sang \textit{Unser Kaiser}.” And the witness continued: “The crowd responded to the ovations.” Bărnuțiu, the author of the \textit{Provoacțiune}, was indeed Iancu’s mentor.\textsuperscript{11}

The gatherings held in the Apuseni Mountains, as well as throughout the rest of Transylvania, highlighted the desire of the Transylvanian Romanians to take concrete action as well as the need for them to get organized, with all the consequences thereof: the definition and justification of the revolutionary path, the endorsement of the leadership and of the priorities of the early days of the
Revolution, as well as the adoption of a discourse which now brought together the social and the political-national issues.

The local inhabitants got organized more quickly on account of the very specificity of their mountain region, of their occupations and status. The Sundays and the religious holidays, the weekly or monthly fairs had traditionally been a time of socialization and dialogue. The documents of that time show the early signs of unrest, the fears about their shared future, the anxiety caused by the rapidly circulating rumors. In this context, the young students, as well as the young intern Avram Iancu, went back to their villages. This is where they began to discuss the latest accounts and especially the events likely to take place in the empire, without forgetting the early iterations of the program of the radical Hungarians.

The documentary sources, essentially memoirs, describe the contacts that Iancu and his fellow militants had with the local villagers during the gatherings. Iancu was one of the most active militants, alongside Ioan Buteanu, Petru Dobră, Nicolae Corcheș, Ion Ciurileanu, and others. Simion Balint wrote about the visits he and Iancu made to the villages located in the vicinity of the town of Câmpeni, the meetings they had with the local inhabitants, the Motzen, who were first quite reserved, but then became enthusiastic:

*Come now, Father, do you perchance seek to deceive us? Were you sent here by the deputy guv’nor or by his superintendent? I replied: no. Despite that, they remained deeply suspicious. However, Iancu managed to become increasingly popular, bringing compelling arguments in any debate. The natural caution manifest during the month of March apparently had to do with his family.*

Another one of his contemporaries, an active participant in the gatherings held in the impoverished area of the Apuseni Mountains, wrote about the speech Iancu delivered before the townsmen of Câmpeni, a testimony to his revolutionary mentality: “The whole of Europe is taking up arms in pursuit of freedom. The Romanians are following suit, for the time has come for them to be free as well.” The reaction of the audience is quite noteworthy: “Vivat Iancu! Vivat the Romanian nation! To arms!” It was at this time that he began to draw the attention of the authorities, increasingly alarmed by his rising popularity and by the ideas instilled in those who attended the gatherings. Barițiu would also make reference to the plain language he used when he wanted to convey a message to the common people. George Barițiu managed to wonderfully describe Iancu’s charisma:

*only extraordinary times can produce extraordinary people . . . In normal times or when everyone is submissive and oblivious, men of action serve no purpose; they
are born, live and die just like a million others, with history paying no attention to them whatsoever.\textsuperscript{14}

The days and weeks of late March and early April, the time of the gatherings, increasingly brought Iancu into contact with the crowds. György Lázár, in his deposition to the Kozma Commission, provided one of the most eloquent descriptions of the gatherings of March–June 1848:

They were convened by the young Avram Iancu of Vidra de Sus, and they were held not only in the town square and in the streets, but also in the Brotherhood Chamber and on the royal estates, at nighttime. Since the state of emergency was declared, the young Avram Iancu has played the most important role on the [royal] estate of Câmpeni, convening large gatherings and inciting the masses, telling them: “Fear not, for the martial law was only meant to scare you, it’s just an attempt to deceive you.”\textsuperscript{15}

In the local gatherings held after 3/15 May, his radicalized message included a call to arms, a plea to fight fire with fire.

Relentless, he visited more and more towns and villages in the Apuseni Mountains, and the official reports of the authorities frequently mention him as the “organizer.” On 6 April, in Bistra (Bistrau, Bisztra),

the aforementioned gathering was also attended by the young chancellery clerk, Avram Iancu of Vidra de Sus. In the evening of 5 April, he showed up in Câmpeni, coming from parts unknown. I was not informed of any suspicious speeches or actions on his part.\textsuperscript{16}

Chief magistrate József Bisztray concluded his report to the supreme count of Lower Alba with a proposal to have Iancu recalled to Târgu Mureș. He feared the popularity gained by him and the other youths who had returned to the mountains: “I dare not touch any of these leaders for fear of causing a revolt and putting myself in danger.”\textsuperscript{17} A few days after the mountain gatherings, Miklós Bánffy, the supreme count of Lower Alba, wrote to Governor József Teleki:

You were kind enough to inform me that you took measures to ban Father Simion Balint of Roșia Montană, lawyer Ioan Buteanu of Abrud, and law clerk Avram Iancu of the Royal Table [\textit{Tabula Regia}, the appeal court in Transylvania] from attending popular gatherings and from stirring up the people.\textsuperscript{18}

The measures had come too late.
The Local Council of Abrud (Großschlatten, Abrudbánya) also paid attention to the events unfolding in Câmpeni. They identified the same Iancu as the man behind the gatherings:

**Presented herein is the seditious message of the young Avram Iancu, voiced at Câmpeni and in the surrounding areas; therefore [the report of the Abrud Council] shall be sent forth to allow for an expansion of the inquiry, proposing a solution similar to what has been done before: “measures of utmost urgency for the arrest of said instigator.”**

Between the June gathering at Câmpeni, probably second in importance only to the one held in Blaj, and until September, Iancu came to change his position on the relations with the authorities, deciding to resort to armed struggle and proceeding to organize the groups of mountain people. The reason behind this change was the incident occurred at Mihalț (Michelsdorf, Mihálcfalva), during the summer. In a letter to Simion Bărnuțiu, in which he described to his “brother” the decision to organize and conditionally arm the people, Iancu stated:

*Let us arm ourselves with the weapons of the mind, to prove our rights, but not with cudgels, lest they bring soldiers to their defense, as we could easily cause them a lot of trouble.*

We can see that Iancu was not envisaging an armed offensive. What he wanted was to ensure the safety of the mountain villages. During an ad-hoc gathering at the fair in Câmpeni, he called the people to arms:

*Know this, my good men: given all the terrible news, you can only take up arms, by which I mean make pikes and straighten your scythes.*

He never gave up on the idea of public consultation. We have a wealth of information about the gatherings. The witnesses interviewed by the Kozma Commission unanimously pointed out Iancu as the organizer, and their accounts show what kind of influence he exerted over the masses. Shortly after his return to the mountains, following his visit to Blaj, he participated in the collective taking of the Oath originally formulated on Liberty Field. Even if witness testimonies tend to be rather succinct, we can piece together his speech, in light of the objectives set in the early days of the Revolution: recognition of the Romanian nation, rejection of the “union,” and the return of the ancestral assets abusively seized by the powers that be. “This
young man, Avram Iancu, stirs and instigates the people. His influence is such that, were God to descend from the Heavens, the people would listen and obey Him less than Iancu,” confessed János Baranyi.22

The impact of the Câmpeni gathering came as a shock for the authorities. The unrest spread to the surrounding villages, as indicated by the statements of the witnesses. “If necessary, we shall rise up and teach the Hungarians a lesson,” stated Sándor Botar of Roșia Montană (Goldbach, Verespatak).23 Another witness, Nicolae Morar, declared: “This young man, Avram Iancu, who chaired the meeting, urged the people to take up arms. . . . He is the root of all evil. The people should not have listened to him.”24 The influence of Bărnuțiu can be seen in his attempts to explain the situation in a plain language that the common people could understand:

The young Avram Iancu pointed out to the people that such a thing would deprive the Romanian nation of its own language, alongside the land they were willing to give up,

as stated by a forester from Zlatna.25 Iancu considered the preservation of the Romanian language of paramount importance, and his speech of 2 May had a significant impact. He ended that speech by saying: “May God watch over Bărnuțiu and smite those who want to turn the Romanians into Hungarians.”26

Gradually, his discourse came to highlight the pressing issue of Romanian-Hungarian relations. The “union” programmaticaly formulated and passionately endorsed by the radical young Hungarian revolutionaries rapidly caused the Romanian law clerks in Târgu Mureș to change their approach, even if some were reluctant to reject it outright, in the absence of a collective decision. The discussions within Iancu’s “cartel,” as reported by some participants to these small meetings, indicate the existence of an initiative in this regard, confirmed and later supported by Bărnuțiu’s well-known Challenge. The contacts with the other groups located in Blaj, Cluj, and Sibiu, stimulated by Bărnuțiu’s manifesto and by the public position taken by Papiu Ilarian and by the Romanian group at the Royal Table, led to its rapid acceptance.

Upon his return home to the Apuseni Mountains, together with Simion Balint and Ioan Buteanu, Iancu proceeded to organize the gatherings:

Presently, the Romanians had before them several political points, formulated in the spirit of the nation’s entreaty of 1791. However, this was no humble supplication, but rather a firm request coming from people who believed in the justness of their cause.27
In late March, Iancu appears to be highly aware of the importance of the gatherings, of a public consultation, as the indecision and the confusion surrounding the planned “union” had to be replaced by a firm and persuasive response along the lines suggested by Bărunțiu.

Iancu devoted considerable energy to the organization of the first “National Congress,” scheduled to take place in Blaj on the Sunday of St. Thomas. In this regard, the appeal formulated by Aron Pumnul gave new impetus to the summons addressed to the revolutionary groups present throughout Transylvania. Contemporary accounts speak about Iancu in the days preceding his return to the mountains:

Having reached the sanctuary of civilization, this young man had come to understand the harsh reality of the disregard shown to his nation and, filled with the spirit of the century, he had assimilated the leading ideas of the time feeling, from the bottom of his heart, deep concern for the fate of the Romanian people.²⁸

During one of the frequent meetings held at that time, he told his Hungarian colleagues:

Your actions are just, but your judgment is biased. You know only too well that time has long broken those iron chains that you want to preserve, with all their weight, to the detriment of our own country.²⁹

He then openly and candidly stated his endorsement of the modern concept of human rights: “It is my opinion that historical rights cannot take precedence over human rights.”³⁰

Having become the topical issue of the day, the various proposals aimed at the actual achievement of the planned “union” stirred notable reactions. I believe that there is another reason why the shock created by this proposal led to its rejection. The concerns of Aulic Chancellor Sámuel Jósika were confirmed by the press campaign, by the public gatherings and by some decisions made by the authorities, which remained unchanged during the early days of the Hungarian Revolution: “I can barely wait to hear the news from Transylvania. I am most worried by the effects that the spurious claims of the newspapers may have there.”³¹ The exaggerations of the press of that time, the radical perception of the practical implementation of the “union,” caused fear and anxiety among Romanians and Hungarians alike. The worrisome rumors affected all the inhabitants of Transylvania, who feared

the disappearance of Transylvania as a country and its incorporation into a powerful Greater Hungary, the obliteration of the nationalities and their transforma-
tion into Hungarians and, finally, the full independence of the Hungarian state following the break with the Monarchy.32

A rather surprising “anti-Transylvanianism” spread like wildfire immediately after 15 March, engulfing the cities, especially Cluj and Târgu Mureș. These concerns, also fueled by the so-called “conservative party” of Transylvania, or indeed the “fossilized party,”33 reminded Iancu of those who had fairly recently endorsed the urbarium (1847). Important counties like Cluj (Kolozs) and Lower Alba responded by declaring their “secession” from Transylvania until the summoning of a unionist Diet, and the newspapers supported the campaign:

We shall erase the name of this country, we shall burn the map the shows the dividing line. I have expunged the name of this unfortunate country from my mind, and its days are numbered . . . Call it whatever you want, I do not care, call it political Sodom, just do not call it Transylvania.

The opponents of the “union” were exposed and deemed traitors to their country: “Let us enact the crime of treason for those who write down the name Transylvania.”34 Such statements were made on an almost daily basis, causing justifiable concern and making necessary a clear-cut reaction. The central authorities, as well as the local ones, waited to see how the Romanians would respond. They would not have to wait for long, as demonstrated by the local gatherings and then by those held in Blaj.

The anti-Transylvanianism fervently promoted in March–June 1848 affected the whole revolutionary process. The indecision manifest among the Hungarians, Romanians, and Transylvanian Saxons led to divided communities, to changing priorities and designs. The deeply significant social component could not be separated from the issue of identity. The pressure was mounting. Aulic Chancellor Jósika resigned starting with 8 April, given the Imperial Court’s decision to summon a Transylvanian Diet with an ethnic composition little affected by the revolutionary changes. The main objective of the institution that embodied the autonomy of the Principality was the vote on the “union” with Hungary:

The union has been set as their main task, but how is it to be done? With the disappearance of Transylvania, as advocated in today’s issue of Híradó [News]? Can a reasonable person believe that such a thing would not trigger a significant reaction? Going along this path would mean the destruction of the country.35

As his position stood in contrast to both the conservatives and the supporters of the “union,” Professor Farkas Bolyai disappointed the Hungarian law clerks from Târgu Mureș who had come to his house:
Do you realize what you have done? By the light of torches, you have buried the freedom of the Hungarian nation, and only God knows when it will be resurrected.\textsuperscript{36}

The preservation of a system centered around the nobility remained, after 15 March, a constant concern of the Hungarian aristocracy, also shared by the Saxons and even by the Szeklers. The reluctance towards article 12, which concerned the “union,” largely had to do with the fears of a possible Romanian reaction. Bertalan Szemere expressed the hesitation showed by some members of the government newly installed in Pest at the thought of a Romanian response. A major fracture appeared even in the early days of the Revolution, and the solidarity between the ethnic groups became an illusion.

In the days following the announcement of the Pest plan, the counties of Crasna (Kraszna), Middle Szolnok (Közep-Szolnok), and Zarand, as well as the district of Chioar (Kővár), decided to unite with Hungary without taking into account the position of the Romanians. A similar event took place in Timişoara (Temeswar, Temesvár) (18 March). A rally ended in a \textit{Proclamation} whereby the participants endorsed the twelve points. Among its signatories there were also some Romanians. In other towns, including those in Banat, many people decided not to oppose the “union” for fear of upsetting the “order”: “Today, state compensation is thrown like a bone to a dog,” wrote Count Apor’s nephew, “if the assets are not secure, there is no hope for a peaceful transformation.” He brought forth an additional argument: “Therefore, I would like them to reject the ‘union,’ lest they be caught in a maelstrom with no escape other than a \textit{republic}.”\textsuperscript{37}

The annexation of the region known as Partium increased the fears of the Romanians. At that time, Imre Teleki wrote to the governor:

\textit{The reckless petition of [Miklós] Wesselényi, who wants to separate Partium from Transylvania against the wishes of the country, gave renewed impetus to the Romanian reformers. Every day they hold gatherings or visit each other.}\textsuperscript{38}

The Romanian reaction was quite prompt. The confusion among the Romanians lasted less than one would have expected. The conditioning of the “union,” the vacillations in the Romanian discourse witnessed in Brașov, Sibiu, Blaj, or Cluj had to do with the enticing elements of the Hungarian revolutionary program, related to the social component but also to the political, democratic one. Initially, Avram Iancu went along the same lines, even if he insistently sought to form his own opinion, in keeping with the general sentiment. It was easy to clamor for a rejection of the “union.” It was more difficult to suggest a way ahead, to bring about the long-awaited change in the status of the Romanians, which clearly depended on the fate of the whole of Transylvania.
The manifestos of March and April, the gatherings, Bărnuțiu’s *Challenge* and his speech in the Blaj Cathedral, the popular support that exceeded all expectations, all combined to facilitate the firm rejection of the “union.” “The party of Mr. Bărnuț” was gaining more and more ground. This is indicated by Iancu’s concern for the organization of the First Blaj Gathering. Petre Dunca explained the reasons behind his involvement alongside the students:

*We do not want to hear about any union until the three other nations recognize us as the fourth; only when this is done shall we decide whether we want it or not.*

The Gathering on the Sunday of St. Thomas, the preparations for the one planned for 3/15 May in Blaj, the adoption of the Romanian response to the program of 15 March, the weakening of the early leadership structures of the Revolution, all came to place Iancu definitively alongside the elite group determined to pursue the Romanian design of a different Transylvania, grounded in the concepts circulating at European level. The Romanians understood that they would have to defend and reorganize the principality. A new “Romanian Land” was beginning to emerge, despite all difficulties and the confrontations stirred by the Diet of Cluj, a confirmation of the Romanian fears voiced in the early days of the Revolution.

Shortly afterwards, this Romanian “counterproposal” to the “union” was presented by Iancu in the discussions with the representatives of the Pest youth who were present in Transylvania. The Kozma Commission interviewed a young man, 23 years of age (witness 162), honorary assessor at Câmpeni, who offered the most valuable information on Avram Iancu. József Lázár declared:

*The following week I heard about the return of Balint, Buteanu, and the young Avram Iancu, who convened a great gathering at the Orthodox church; after that, the previously peaceful population began to show signs of unrest.*

He explained why he believed that Iancu was one of the main “instigators of the people,” blaming him for the violent reaction of the Romanians: “I had several conversations with the young Avram Iancu and all I heard from him was that the Hungarians have been oppressing the Romanian nation.” He personally witnessed one of the gatherings held in the town square, asking Iancu to “no longer malign the Hungarians, refrain from stirring the people against them,” and stop criticizing Greek Catholic Bishop Ioan Lemeni, known for his opinions rejected by the youth of Blaj and of the Apuseni Mountains. There is another piece of valuable information in his statement, namely, that Iancu urged the Romanians to take up arms.
The same witness reported on the position expressed by Iancu during a meeting with “some youths from Pest,” held in his parents’ house. One of them, Cseresnyéš, asked Iancu, in his own home, why he was stirring the people against a “union” that his majesty King Ferdinand V of Hungary had already confirmed. Iancu’s reply is a testimony to his character and to the strength of his beliefs. Iancu “stated that it had never been his intention to stir up anyone and that he is in the habit of supporting justice.” His rejection of the “union” reflected the position of “the Romanian nation in Transylvania, actually expressed [by the Romanian nation] at the National Gathering of Blaj.” The same argument was brought forth in the spring of that year, in all the manifestos issued during that period:

>This “union” will never be accepted until the Romanians are recognized as the fourth nation and, by way of their delegates, are represented in parliament, being thus able to have a say and make decisions.

In regards to a possible legislative enactment of the “union,” he believed that the only acceptable solution was federalization: “Transylvania must have its own king and its own government.” According to Iancu, this was the only way to ensure the preservation of the Romanian language, by making it an official language in the administration of Transylvania: “No argument could divert him [Avram Iancu] from his principles, as he had taken them up from the Romanian-Saxon Committee of Sibiu.”

For Avram Iancu, the period between March and July of 1848 brought renewed hope for the whole of Transylvania. He focused his message on the need for unity within the national community, encouraging the resistance to the abuse of the authorities by any means possible. Last but not least, he pleaded for a rejection of the “union” with Hungary, which essentially entailed the loss of Transylvania’s individuality, including the other groups alongside the Romanians. He and his supporters, who overwhelmingly came from the rural environment, deserve recognition for having turned a spontaneous reaction into a clear approach, accepted by the people attending the peaceful gatherings. He did not advocate violence, but he asked the inhabitants of the mountains to rally in support of the Romanian revolutionary agenda. The gatherings brought together intellectuals and peasants in support of the national program, helping to clarify the options and thus set the priorities. In clear succession, the gatherings gave the people a sense of security and facilitated the emergence of the future leaders. Also, we must not forget that the far-reaching European Revolution insistently promoted the defining concepts of a world in the making. “Liberty,
equality, and fraternity” were the concepts underpinning the revolutionaries’ hope and their attempt to shape the future. In those days, the imaginary was but a combination of fear and hope.41

The gatherings and the discourse cultivated by Avram Iancu in the spring of that year, after the Gathering of 3/15 May, bear the imprint of his revolutionary mentality. The accounts of that time allow us to piece together the reaction of the authorities, who rapidly labelled him a “dangerous” individual. This is an indication of his desire to consult with those he constantly referred to as “the people” or “the nation,” to reinforce his belief in the righteousness of the path he had chosen and never abandoned. Because of Iancu and of his supporters, the solidarity experienced by the rural population at times of external threat became a challenge against the established order, against the powers that be. It was socialization that fueled his revolutionary mentality, his decisions, his attachment to the ideas of the European Revolution. He rejected the “union” but, whenever he was given the opportunity, he did not refuse a dialogue with the representatives of the Hungarian government. His hopes, his dedication and his empathy, as well as his faith in the future were the defining coordinates of his revolutionary mentality. The last part of his life, however, was marked by the crushing disappointment experienced in the wake of the Revolution.

Notes

2. Error in the document: Alisandru Iancu (1787–1855) was the father of Avram Iancu, and his brother was Ioan Iancu (1822–1871).
27. Barițiu, 2: 84.
29. Ranca, 62.
30. Ranca, 63.
Abstract

Avram Iancu in the Spring of 1848: Considerations on the Mentality of a Revolutionary

There are many outstanding biographies of Avram Iancu (1824–1872), as the revolutionary fighter holds an important place in the Romanian ‘Pantheon,’ the latest being Silviu Dragomir’s book of 1965. However, the attempts to approach his personality from the perspective of the history of mentalities have been conspicuously missing. This is precisely the approach chosen for the present study, which is based on the document collections published in the last half century (especially Documente privind Revoluția de la 1848 în Țările Române. C. Transilvania, including the fabulous volume 10, dedicated to Ancheta Kozma în Munții Apuseni, 2012). The testimonies of Iancu’s contemporaries, as well as the rich folklore, reveal an unknown facet of the hero, not only providing additional information on the events of the 1848–1849 Revolution, but also highlighting the revolutionary’s ideology, inner motivations and intimate drives.

Keywords

Avram Iancu, Transylvanian Revolution of 1848–1849, Apuseni Mountains, gatherings, revolutionary mentality
Although during the last one hundred and fifty years several historians have written about the overwhelming personality of national hero Avram Iancu (1824–1872), Silviu Dragomir’s study, posthumously published in 1965, is still considered a novelty on account of its interpretation and documentation, which distinguishes it from the works of other historians. Silviu Dragomir (1888–1962) pieced together the biography of the leader of the Motzen (the Romanian inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains) fully aware of the fact that an objective presentation of Avram Iancu’s actions from 1848 to 1849 required the identification of his background. Already in 1924, George Bogdan Duică (1866–1934) had indicated that it was necessary to study Iancu’s entire life in order to have an objective overview. In his 1924 monograph, Silviu

There was a huge difference between Avram Iancu the revolutionary, who had led the administration of the Apuseni Mountains, and the post-revolutionary Avram Iancu, the disillusioned wanderer.

Parts of this article were already published by the authors in the introduction to the 2022 edition: Silviu Dragomir, Avram Iancu: O viață de erou, edited with an introductory study and notes by Ioan Bolovan and Sorin Șipoș (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2022), 15–72.
Dragomir went as far as the year 1852 with his research. Up to that moment the hero’s life had been pretty normal. A certain shyness, a certain timidity and, at the same time, the respect for what Iancu represented in the national movement in the 1850s prevented the historian from going further. In time, successfully overcoming the complex of the hero defeated by destiny, the author also pieced together the last years of Avram Iancu’s life. It is really exceptional that Dragomir also tried to explain Iancu’s behavior during Emperor Franz Joseph’s visit to the Apuseni Mountains to the extent that the culture of the time allowed it.

We must make it very clear that in Romanian historiography there are few specialists who dared to investigate Iancu’s life after 1852. For numerous historians, such as Silviu Dragomir, “Iancu’s story ends here [in 1852] although his life will only end two decades later.” Still, in a monograph, the researcher must investigate the hero’s life up to his physical disappearance, regardless of its coordinates. Over the years, in Romanian historiography there emerged two points of view about Iancu’s last years, namely, the period between 1852, when the emperor visited the Apuseni Mountains, and 1872, when Iancu died. For Dragomir, the behavior of the leader of the Motzen after 1852 can be explained by a neuro-psychic disease caused by the stress experienced during the Revolution, the great responsibilities he took, and by the Austrians’ undignified treatment of the Motzen and their leaders after the Revolution.¹ According to Dragomir, Iancu’s attitude during the emperor’s visit and the hero’s behavior up to his death are in close connection. Most historians considered the refusal of the leader of the Motzen to meet the emperor the first sign of his disease. But it is far from certain that Iancu really was ill. If we accept the hypothesis that he was, we must identify the nature of his disease. Silviu Dragomir based his theory about Iancu’s malady on the testimonies of Iancu’s collaborators during the Revolution. What evidence do these testimonies contain and who are these witnesses? Generally, the testimonies refer to the period when Iancu was in custody in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) and an officer slapped him. According to Dragomir’s research, up to that moment there had been no indication of illness in Iancu’s biography. Although the historian mentions some tense moments in the hero’s life, such as his tough attitude during the meeting of the Consistory in Sibiu, the events at Mihalţ (Michelsdorf, Mihálcfalva), as well as his excessive enthusiasm during the third Assembly of Blaj (Blasendorf, Balázsfalva), they are explained by Iancu’s youth and temperament. Dragomir did not discover any proof that the hero’s ancestors might have suffered from mental disorders and, consequently, he excluded the possibility of a genetic transmission. Then, although there are reports about Iancu’s affairs with some young women from the Apuseni Mountains,² the author excludes the possibility of a venereal dis-
ease. There are numerous accounts about the periods of time during which Iancu left his home, wandering all over the mountains and stopping over at his former collaborators or in the homes of ordinary Motzen. Dressed in shabby clothes, he was often seen playing the flute. Silent and pensive, he answered those who asked him about the Revolution using parables and ironies. Many of his contemporaries never understood his attitude and thought he was mad. Of course, there was a huge difference between Avram Iancu the revolutionary, who had led the administration of the Apuseni Mountains, and the post-revolutionary Avram Iancu, the disillusioned wanderer. Most of his contemporaries must have judged him superficially, and they embraced and passed on the image of a sick Avram Iancu, which later became generalized.

Relying on the explanations of George Bariţiu, Silviu Dragomir considered that the disease started as a consequence of several unpleasant events. Heavy drinking worsened Iancu’s condition. The historian considers that, as the ideal for which Iancu had fought with utmost dedication was fading away, slowly but surely Iancu’s life became more and more unbalanced and his addiction to alcohol worsened. In conclusion, Dragomir does not explicitly talk about Avram Iancu’s madness, he only mentions the disease the leader of the Motzen suffered from. Although Dragomir never used the word madness, in his study there are passages where he hints that this is the disease he was referring to.

However, there are also testimonies that deny Iancu’s madness. Quite inexplicably for a critical historian such as Silviu Dragomir, the testimonies that vehemently denied Iancu’s disease are not even mentioned. This is a study on the history of historiography, and we do not try to investigate Iancu’s life from 1852 to 1872, but we cannot fail to notice that the analysis of the abovementioned temporal segment does not abide by the critical method. The historian does not mention the point of view and the arguments of those who considered Iancu sane. Then, we also notice that most of those who considered him insane were either well-off Motzen or Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania. It is also interesting that the idea about Iancu’s madness appeared for the first time after his refusal to meet the emperor. His attitude during the emperor’s visit certainly dissatisfied especially the well-off Motzen who hoped to benefit from the sovereign’s goodwill. Then, we notice that, unlike most of his former collaborators during the Revolution, Iancu always refused the material advantages offered by the imperials. He accepted no benefit from the imperial authorities, asking instead that the promises made to the ordinary Motzen be honored. We wonder how the elite of the Apuseni Mountains and most of the Transylvanian authorities regarded Iancu’s constant and repeated
refusals of the offers made by the authorities. Then, even his family cut ties with him because he had turned down the benefits offered by the authorities. New documents, recently interpreted and published by Ela Cosma, show without any doubt the bizarre attitude of Avram Iancu’s father, who refused to mention him in the will he made in Vidra de Sus (Alsóvidra), on 26 June 1855, because the hero was, supposedly, “of unsound mind and a spendthrift.” He also asked the State Court to appoint a guardian “who should supervise Avram Iancu lest he wastes his father’s fortune.” Therefore, there are numerous problems in connection with Avram Iancu’s disease and the attitude of his family which are not even mentioned by Silviu Dragomir. This would have been enough if the author had focused on the behavior of the leader of Motzen, which was sincere and idealist, and he could have concluded that Iancu never changed his attitude. Could a madman have such noble thoughts? Even some representatives of the Hungarians in Transylvania, who had all the reasons to label Avram Iancu mad, judged the Romanian leader in a balanced and correct manner. For instance, the schoolteacher Sámuel Borbély, the headmaster of the Normal School in Zalău (Zillenmarkt, Zilah), who personally met Iancu, wrote on 19 December 1864:

After the tragedy of 1848–1849 was over and the Prince of the Mountains realized that he and his people had been deceived, he experienced deep sadness, or indeed melancholy. And lest he should feel this pain too deeply, he started drinking wine, spirits, anything, without any restraint . . . But one could not say that he was mad, for when he was sober he spoke German, Hungarian, Romanian, Latin, intelligibly but very little?

Recent interdisciplinary researches conducted by a historian and a psychologist have submitted to a rigorous analysis the testimonies from Avram Iancu’s last two decades of life. As the authors very convincingly argue, during that time as well as nowadays, most of the people who had no training in psychiatry and psychology often used the notion of “madness” in everyday language in order to cover a wide spectrum of manifestations and behaviors, which practically means any deviation from one’s normal psychological health. Of course, this ‘normality’ was assessed according to the social norms of the time. Analyzing the letters and the accounts about the Prince of the Mountains also implied carefully selecting the most relevant ones, namely, those which contained information useful from a scientific point of view. The authors used the stress-vulnerability model proposed in 1977 by Joseph Zubin and Bonnie Spring and tried to identify the mental disorders Avram Iancu might have suffered from.
Vulnerability is the element which raises or decreases a person’s chances to develop certain disorders when he/she is confronted with certain stressors. This component can include genetic, biologic, physiologic, cognitive or personality factors.

Stress can be defined from a clinical point of view as an interaction between an activating event (stimulus) and our cognitive system, an interaction which, through the demands it imposes on our system, overtaxes the organism’s resources. Some stressors are related with daily problems, as we shall see, also in the case of Avram Iancu. . . . We will describe the stressors in his life, as they are presented by the sources. . . . These factors will be grouped into three categories in chronological order: factors before the 1848 Revolution, those that manifested themselves during the events that happened in 1848 and 1849, and factors that followed the revolution.9

Indeed, not only Silviu Dragomir, but also other historians who investigated the pre-revolutionary period, the years 1848–1849, and then the situation of the Transylvanian Romanians in the post-revolutionary decades, could identify the numerous events and factors that caused Avram Iancu’s constant stress (from the stormy debates on the urbarium problem during the session of the Diet of Transylvania held in Cluj in 1847, to the complex problems during the revolutionary years, the humiliation of the Romanian delegations in Vienna from 1849 to 1851, and the actual failure of the national program decided at Blaj on short and medium term). The authors concluded that the signs and the symptoms presented in the documents they had researched describe certain mental disorders, but a precise diagnosis cannot be retrospectively given to Avram Iancu. This impossibility can be explained by the fact that the information about his state covers several years, and a precise diagnosis presupposes precision in terms of symptoms and the time necessary for a psychological evaluation. The sources talk about maladaptive behaviors, such as alcohol consumption and shabby clothes, but also about dysfunctional cognitive and emotional patterns, such as depression, anxiety, sadness, or lack of hope.

These reports are from various moments and, unfortunately, they do not allow for a precise diagnosis. The last decades in the Prince of the Mountains’ life were marked by intense suffering which cannot be completely explained even today, but which is certainly connected to the short-term failure of the revolutionary program. Unlike his contemporaries George Baritiu, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, or Axente Sever, Avram Iancu could not overcome his disappointment with the Habsburgs’ neo-absolutist regime and the authorities’ lack of will to contribute actively to the emancipation of the Romanian nation.10
In agreement with Andrei Sabin Faur and Andrada Lavinia Jucan’s interdisciplinary research, we consider that Iancu’s “disorders” from 1852 to 1872, as referred to by his contemporaries, are in fact more or less profound bouts of depression lasting shorter or longer spans of time. Avram Iancu’s fits of depression are not different from any such experiences that most humans have. Nowadays, unlike in the past, we are tempted to overlook much more easily the apparently “strange” behaviors, whether they belong to us or to those around us. These behaviors are caused by the numerous instances of depression we experience almost every day (failures in love, family, profession, our favorite team loses an important match, our favorite party/candidate loses the elections, etc.). Not all individuals who experience fits of depression have identical exterior manifestations, as these depend on each individual’s structure. Of course, alcohol consumption, which is very well documented in the testimonies of the time in Iancu’s case (as well), influences behaviors and can defer the individual’s overcoming depression, or in some cases it can generate episodes of verbal and/or physical violence. Consequently, to label Avram Iancu “a madman” nowadays, as well as in the past, is doing a huge injustice to the memory of an exemplary leader, and this injustice has to be urgently corrected in historiography and in the public conscience.

This is why the letter sent by Avram Iancu to the editor-in-chief of Gazeta de Transilvania (The Transylvanian gazette) on 23 June 1871, the last document written by the hero, must be read as the gesture of a sane man responsible for the destiny of his nation.

These past few weeks, not only the vegetation but also the human denizens have put on mourning clothes. But the gods above turn both of them towards joy and calm down the blizzards of time. Therefore, foreseeing a year better than what we initially expected, we mountaineers wish our joy to spread to the plains and bring the people’s efforts to fruition, and then for any nation to be resurrected and provided with what is missing, the nations with a strong culture giving each other a helping hand. This should also occur in the case of the Romanians; they should help one another to progress just like and together with the other nations.

According to Silviu Dragomir, the ideas develop logically, which shows that the author is a person preoccupied with the revival of his nation and the solidarity between its sons. Avram Iancu signs this letter as “lawyer, and general, and prefect of Auraria Gemina Legion.”

“The diagnosis” established by the eminent specialist in psychiatry, Prof. Mircea A. Birț, MD, is more than relevant for the need to correct those who are
still tempted to ascribe madness to Iancu in order to explain his less than normal behaviors from 1852 to 1872.

Avram Iancu was under intense and longtime stress, which led to the appearance of psycho-pathological manifestations, such as alcoholism, depression, or fits of persecution. . . . His behavior and the way he appeared in public during the last years of his life, his vital sadness associated with his existential disinterest, which included neglecting his own person (even his personal hygiene), the refuge into the nostalgic music of the doinas (mostly) prove the existence of a chronic depression that could have been precipitated and maintained by political pressure. In this context, the excessive and chronic consumption of alcohol could have been caused by depression and may be interpreted as a depressive, self-destructive, autolytic equivalent. It is obvious that depression and alcohol consumption negatively influenced his sparkling personality during the last years of his life.¹²

In Silviu Dragomir’s book, the image of Iancu is everywhere, it is given even more prominence than in the interwar monograph. Whether the author talks about the battles in the Apuseni Mountains,¹³ or in the chapter about the organization of the army, the relationships with the Hungarians and with the imperials, Iancu is always at the forefront, in the middle of the events. His honesty, courage, wisdom, and good looks made Iancu beloved and obeyed by the army of the Motzen, by the tribunes and the prefects from the mountains. In spite of all these, he was not spared serious accusations. Some less than kind contemporaries, especially Hungarians and also numerous officers of the Austrian army, accused him of ordering the destruction of Hungarian villages during the military operations, of having contributed to the destruction of the imperial offices in the mountain areas, of failing to collaborate enough with the imperial army, and, most seriously, of having negotiated with the Hungarian revolutionaries and the Romanians from Wallachia. But we must emphasize that most Hungarians and Saxons did not view Iancu through the lens of his detractors. His fame among all of them was so great that in the spring of 1850, when Iancu crossed Oradea (Großwardein, Nagyvárad) on his way to Vienna, the population of the town, Romanians and Hungarians alike, took to the streets to see this extraordinary man. Ioan Puşcariu (1824–1911) wrote about the exceptional welcome Iancu had received in Oradea:

while he was at the house of the citadel, the people gathered as if by magic and, as he exchanged some words with the magistrates and the guests that kept entering, when he got out of the house of the citadel, the crowd had increased tenfold. Somebody even said: ‘Az a havasi Király’ (This is the Prince of the Mountains) . . . Mister
Iancu embraced them, full of joy and friendship, and how happy they were, even more so when he told them that he had come as a friend and advised them to live like brothers alongside the Romanians. The people followed him like a flock and Iancu was obliged to get out of the house and greet them; and when he went on his way, the people still followed him to see him and they blessed him.¹⁴

For the Motzen, for the commoners, Iancu was always, until his death, the Prince of the Mountains, a truly legendary figure.¹⁵

The Romanian elites of Iancu’s time did not hesitate to present him as one of the most important leaders of the time, attached to the social and national ideals. One of them was Iosif Vulcan (1841–1907), the author of Panteonul român: Portretele și biografiei celebrităților române (The Romanian pantheon: Portraits and biographies of the Romanian celebrities), published in 1869, who included Avram Iancu among the 31 personalities worth appearing in the national Romanian pantheon.

Iancu is still alive and his memory will live eternally for the Romanian people. The songs created for the glorification of his deeds will always resonate across the plains and in the mountains of Transylvania and, from one generation to the next, the tradition will speak, with admiration, to our great-great-children, about the Hero of the Mountains of 1848.¹⁶

In 1856, the Greek Catholic Metropolitan Alexandru Sterca Șuluțiu (1794–1867) wrote about his visit to the Apuseni Mountains, including to Avram Iancu’s house, where he met the Motzen leader who had already become a myth: “Never before in history has a people or an army given his leader so much trust and such sincere dedication as the mountaineers have given to Iancu.”¹⁷ It was natural that, only a few years after the revolution, Iancu’s personality achieved such notoriety not only in the “fortress” of the Apuseni Mountains, whose independence he succeeded in maintaining during the civil war in Transylvania, but also among other Romanians from the province and not only.

Ever since the revolutionary events, Avram Iancu’s personality had gained prominence among the other leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians. His total and disinterested involvement, his empathy for the oppressed, were quickly and accurately perceived firstly in the area of the Apuseni Mountains, and then all over Transylvania. Ever since the spring of 1848, Avram Iancu’s role in organizing and leading the Motzen of the Apuseni Mountains increased, especially after the bloody events of Mihalț, at the beginning of June.¹⁸ It is no accident that many testimonies from the Kozma inquiry in the Apuseni Mountains (June–
July 1848) talk about the image of Iancu the savior, whom the masses trusted completely. For instance, Witness 158, Gheorghe Miheț from Sohodol (Aran-yosszhodol), considers that the people obey Avram Iancu “so much that even Jesus Christ would not have so many followers.” The stimuli suggesting to the crowd that Iancu would be the providential leader, the savior whom history appointed to fulfil their wishes, come even from Iancu’s gestures and deeds. For instance, according to the deposition of the female innkeeper Krisztina Szántó, Witness 31 in the Kozma Inquiry, a customer at her inn said that during an assembly in Câmpeni, in mid–June 1848, Avram Iancu “made the people believe that he had a huge golden cross on his chest.” The association of the Christian symbol is not accidental, as the cross had to increase the savior’s power to eradicate evil, it was a symbol of the light defeating the darkness and reinforcing the image of a providential Avram Iancu.

Notes

1. “The unexpected attitude of the imperial government, tantamount to a defeat for his nation, the endless discussions in Vienna, the scandal around the medals, the expulsion from the capital, the economic disaster in the afflicted areas of the mountains and the conflict regarding the forests increasingly drove him to despair. The expulsion from Vienna came as a particularly shattering blow. Afterwards, following his return from the imperial capital, he began to drink more and more. The new disappointments fed his unfortunate addiction, which would destroy his nervous system and crush his will. Considered from the perspective of his disease, his behavior during the imperial visit begins to make sense” (Dragomir, Avram Iancu 2022, 288).

2. This topic is tackled in the older articles by Ioan Lupaș, E. Hodoș and G. Bogdan Duică, as well as in Sorin Mitu, “Iubitele maghiare ale lui Avram Iancu,” in Sorin Mitu, Imagini europene și mentalități românești din Transilvania la începutul epocii moderne (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000), 247 sqq.

3. “Iancu did not suddenly experience a spiritual apathy, but was gradually taken in this direction by several measures that narrowed his range of motion, mistreated his people and sought to deny a future to his nation. From what I have been able to find out, I tend to believe that Iancu’s unhappiness did not stem from a single event of great impact. Instead, as in the case of many individuals possessed of a powerful intellect, Iancu was brought down by several mental causes that operated in conjunction over an extended period of time. Accustomed to giving orders and to being obeyed by an entire nation, coming to believe that the sacrifices and the extraordinary devotion of the people would ultimately bear fruit, as promised by Iancu himself on behalf of the state and of the emperor every time he brought them under the fire of the Hungarian cannons, Iancu ended up either surrounded by gendarmes, or threatened by people who once
begged to be received by him, and the rights of the people were once again trampled and their devotion was rewarded with a handful of medals” (Dragomir, *Avram Iancu* 2022, 289).


5. “But who was talking about the madness of Avram Iancu, who thought him mad? No foreigner who actually knew him or, indeed, no one but those who relied on statements made by the bourgeois circles of Transylvania. This is the truth! Some of his contemporaries, of course, not his close friends, and some historians thought that he was mad.” Horia Ursu, *Avram Iancu* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1966), 236. See also Radu Măreș, afterword to Silviu Dragomir, *Avram Iancu* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1998), 193–203.


12. Qtd. in Neamțu, “Fluierul lui Avram Iancu,” 114.

13. In comparison with Silviu Dragomir, more details about these battles can be found in Nicolae Bocșan and Rudolf Gräf, *Revoluția de la 1848 în Munții Apuseni: Memorialistică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003).


20. Bocșan and Gräf, 42.
Abstract
Avram Iancu, the National Hero: Controversial Aspects

In Romanian historiography, few specialists have investigated Iancu’s life after 1852. Even Silviu Dragomir, in his 1924 monograph, went only as far as the year 1852 with his research. In time, however, two points of view emerged about Iancu’s last years (between 1852, when the emperor visited the Apuseni Mountains, and 1872, when Iancu died). For Silviu Dragomir, the behaviour of the leader of the Motzen after 1852 can be explained by a neuro-psychic disease caused by the pressure experienced during the Revolution, the great responsibilities he took, and the treatment of the Motzen and their leaders by the Austrians after the Revolution. Most historians considered the refusal of the leader of the Motzen to meet the emperor the first sign of a mental disease, but there are also testimonies that rule out madness. It is our contention that Iancu’s “disorders” from 1852 to 1872 which his contemporaries talk about are in fact more or less serious bouts of depression, lasting shorter or longer spans of time, and therefore to label Avram Iancu “a madman” nowadays, as well as in the past, is doing a huge injustice to the memory of an exemplary leader.

Keywords
Transylvania, Romanians, Avram Iancu’s last two decades
Silviu Dragomir
Historian of the Romanian 1848

I. Introduction

2024 marks two hundred years since the birth of Avram Iancu, “Crăișorul Munților” (The Prince of the Mountains) and the hero of the Transylvanian 1848. When we think of Avram Iancu and the Romanian 1848, the name of Silviu Dragomir automatically comes up since—in spite of his deep scholarly involvement with numerous other important aspects of Romanian history—Silviu Dragomir was the preeminent historian of the Romanian 1848. What follows has two purposes: firstly, to provide an overview of Silviu Dragomir’s life and scholarly work, followed by, secondly, a brief introduction to his writings dealing with Avram Iancu and the Revolution of 1848.¹

II. Silviu Dragomir, 1888–1962: Life and Work²

A. Life, 1888–1918

Silviu Dragomir was born 13 March 1888 in Gurasada, Hunyad (Hunedoara) County. After
a local primary education, though Dragomir was a deeply-devout Romanian Orthodox, he was sent to the Greek Catholic Romanian Gymnasium in Blaj (Blasendorf, Balázsfalva) from 1897 to 1903. This was precisely because Blaj was the recognized center of Romanian education and national spirit in Transylvania. This was followed by two years at the Serbian Orthodox National Gymnasium in Novi Sad between 1903 and 1905, specifically to study Slavic languages, a striking aptitude identified early on by his teachers.

From 1905 to 1909, Dragomir was a student at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Cernăuți (Chernivtsi, Czernowitz), where he studied history, theology, and philology. The Faculty of Theology in Austrian Bukovina was an especially inviting destination for young Romanian scholars since the majority of professors were Romanians and the city was a center of growing Romanian national affirmation. This was centered on the Junimea (The Youth) Academic Society which numbered among its founders in 1878 the historian Dimitre Onciul (1856–1923). Silviu Dragomir was a very active participant in Junimea, and gave numerous lectures at Junimea-sponsored events.

As already remarked, the youthful Dragomir was an assiduous student of languages, eventually mastering Latin, Hungarian, German, Greek, Serbian, Russian, Ruthenian, and Polish. At Cernăuți, his rigorous study of philology not only facilitated language study but also brought him into contact with linguist and philologist Sextil Pușcariu (1877–1948), who had begun to teach there in 1906 and was a preeminent inspiration to Bukovinian and Transylvanian nationalist youth. Dragomir also mastered Slavic paleography. All of this opened up to him an unparalleled cornucopia of published and unpublished sources. Pușcariu later wrote of Dragomir in his memoirs:

Dr. Silviu Dragomir is developing more and more, and promises to become one of our great historians in the future, combining as he does his superior knowledge of Slavic languages with the excellent scientific method of Professor Jireček.

He obtained the doctorate in history from Cernăuți in 1910. From 1909 to 1911, he studied at the University of Vienna with Professor Konstantin Jireček, and did archival work in Vienna, Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci), Belgrade, and Moscow. He also studied at N. Iorga’s summer school in Vălenii de Munte in 1909, 1910, and 1911.

In 1911, at the age of 23, Silviu Dragomir became a professor of history at the Theological–Pedagogical Institute in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), where he taught until 1919. There he joined an outstanding didactic corps assembled by the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Ioan Mețianu (1899–1916), including Aurel Crăciunescu (1877–1944), Ioan Lupaș (1880–1967), Nicolae

B. Scholarship 1888–1917

Despite a heavy teaching load, Silviu Dragomir was early on a productive scholar. Most noteworthy, prior to World War I, were two fundamental articles on Russian relations with the Transylvanian Romanian Orthodox Church as well as numerous other pieces both popular and academic, including his first approach to the Uniate question. Dragomir’s scholarly work was so promising that in 1916 he was elected a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy. At the same time, he was deeply involved in the Romanian Orthodox Church, being elected to the Archdiocesan Synod, 1915–1917, and serving as secretary of the Synod in 1915–1916. While in Sibiu, Dragomir also became member of the Historical Section of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA) and became a mainstay of the Association’s activities.

When the Kingdom of Romania entered the World War in August 1916, against Austria-Hungary and Germany, the Hungarian authorities forcibly moved part of the Sibiu Institute to Oradea (Großwardein, Nagyvárad) and part to Arad. This unhappy event brought Silviu Dragomir to Arad where he taught during the 1916–1917 academic year. An unintended effect of this was to bring him into the sphere of influence of one of the leading lights of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania, Vasile Goldiș (1862–1934). Dragomir now became even more of a radicalized nationalist activist for the unification of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania. This was solidified by his marriage to Goldiș’s niece in early 1917.

C. Life, 1918–1947

Returning to Sibiu, in 1918 Dragomir became the editor, along with Ștefan Popp, Nicolae Bălan and Ioan Broșu (1886–1943), of the militant nationalist newspaper Gazeta Poporului (The people’s gazette). This led to his selection as a delegate in the Grand National Assembly in Alba Iulia (Karlsburg, Gyulafehérvár) on 1 December 1918 which proclaimed the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania. Dragomir served as one
of the secretaries of the Assembly, and subsequently in 1918–1919 as secretary-
general of the press bureau of the Ruling Council, the Romanian interim gov-
ernment in Transylvania.17

From 1918 to 1920, Silviu Dragomir was the Ruling Council director of
higher education. As such, he played a major role in the creation of the new Ro-
anian University of Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár).18 In 1919, he was named
professor of Southeast European history there and tenured in 1923. He held
this position along with the directorship of its associated South-East European
Studies Seminary until he was illegally pensioned in 1947. He was also director
of the Institute of World History (1923–1924), dean (1925–1926) and vice-
dean (1926–1927) of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. In addition, under
the auspices of astra, Dragomir was founder and director (1934–1944) of the
Revue de Transylvanie, a leading voice for the Romanian case in Transylvania,
tasked with “informing readers in the West concerning the diverse aspects of life
in an important province of the new Romania . . . ”19

In yet another important and time-consuming extra-mural activity, Silviu
Dragomir was a founding member and active in an outreach program called the
University Extension which was designed to do programming for the general
public.20 Begun in 1924 by Professor Virgil I. Bărbat (1879–1931) as part of
the Cluj University’s “duty to the nation,” the Extension partnered with astra
and sponsored over 1,400 lectures in 50 towns and villages. Unfortunately, the
economic depression of 1930 forced the University to suspend the program.21

In 1928, Silviu Dragomir, at the age of 40, was elected a full member of the
Romanian Academy, filling a vacancy created by the death of the historian and
archeologist Vasile Pârvan. His reception lecture was on the 1848er Constantin
Romanul Vivu (1821–1843).22 In the same year, he had published a monograph
on another 48er, Ioan Buteanu (1821–1849).23 And in 1930, he produced one
additional noteworthy 1848-related study, “N. Bălcescu in Ardeal” (N. Bălcescu
in Transylvania).24 These were indications that the history of the Romanian 1848
was alive and growing in Dragomir’s eyes as it was among his countrymen.

Dragomir’s political activities and profile began to enlarge in this era.25 He
was a founding member of the Romanian Antirevisionist League in 1933, orga-
nized to combat the growing sentiment in Hungary, Germany, Russia, and Italy
for a change or revision of the Paris Peace treaties that had ended World War
I. As one of the principal beneficiaries of these treaties, revisionism was anath-
ema to Romanians and would have spelled disaster for the Romanian state.26 In
1939, he was elected to its governing committee. His work with the Revue de
Transylvanie was another aspect of growing Romanian concern with the break-
down of the French System in Central Europe and the flourishing of revision-
ism now powered by the ascendancy of Hitler to control in Germany and the floundering of the French *cordon sanitaire*.\(^\text{27}\)

Initially, Dragomir was active in General Alexandru Averescu’s People’s Party and was elected to parliament in 1926. Leaving Averescu’s group, he was a leader of the newly-founded Octavian Goga’s National Agrarian Party, where he was joined by Vasile Goldiș. In 1935 this party fused with A. C. Cuza’s National-Christian Defense League to become the National-Christian Party, which supported the authoritarian monarchy of Carol (Charles) II.\(^\text{28}\)

Following one of the most controversial elections in Romanian history in 1937, Silviu Dragomir became a minister and sub-secretary of state in the mercifully short-lived Goga–Cuza party government of 29 December 1937–10 February 1938, which was the most extremist constitutional regime in Romanian history. In the merry-go-round of governments that followed, he was minister of state for Minorities under Miron Cristea (1939), Armand Călinescu (1939), General Gheorghe Argeșanu (1939), Constantin Argetoianu (1939), and Gheorghe Tătărescu (1939–1940). He was also secretary-general for intellectual activities of Carol II’s National Renaissance Front, in 1939.\(^\text{29}\)

With the formal establishment of the Royal Crown Councils in 1939, Dragomir became a royal counselor and was frequently involved in the major events involving Romania in the disastrous period of the royal dictatorship (1938–1940). He was one of only six voting “No” on accepting the Soviet ultimatum demanding Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina at the 27 June 1940 Crown Council\(^\text{30}\) and one of eleven intransigent “No” votes at the 30–31 August 1940 Crown Council dealing with the Vienna Diktat (Second Vienna Award) that ceded Northern Transylvania to Hungary; twenty-one others voted to accept it.\(^\text{31}\)

The implementation of the Vienna Diktat meant that the University of Cluj had to be hastily evacuated to Sibiu.\(^\text{32}\) There, the administration stressed the duty of the exiled university to promote the “affirmation of Romanian spirituality on the lands that saw the birth of our nation” and carry out “scientific activity useful to the nation and thus contribute to the historic mission of our national development.” This included restarting the University Extension program, which was seen as more essential than ever in the chaotic years of the Second World War. Silviu Dragomir was chosen as the new leader of the program when it was revived in 1941. This program was run in tandem with ASTRA’s myriad organizations and outreaches and demonstrated that while the Romanian cause was down, it was not out. During this period, Dragomir also took the lead in other activities. Working under dire conditions in Sibiu, he became the founder and director (1942 to 1947) of the Study and Research Center
D. Scholarship, 1918–1947

Turning now to the scholarly side of Silviu Dragomir’s work, we find that he published extensively and widely between 1918 and 1947. The present essay is simply an overview of that activity. Conveniently, those who want a fuller analysis can find all that is needed in Sorin Șipoș’ comprehensive study Silviu Dragomir—Istoric (Silviu Dragomir—historian) (2008). Șipoș has conveniently organized Dragomir’s inquiries into three basic categories: 1. historian of the Middle Ages (Ch. III, pp. 150 ff.); 2. historian of Romanian religious union (Ch. IV, pp. 275 ff.); and, 3. historian of the Revolution of 1848 (Ch. V, pp. 372 ff.). I would suggest we need a fourth category, namely, 4. “historian militant,” which would include, for example, advocacy works such as his 1934 La Transylvanie roumaine et ses minorités ethniques or much of the materials in the Revue de Transylvanie. It should also be noted that some items could easily fit into more than one of these categories.

In 1920, Silviu Dragomir published the first volume of his massive religious study, Istoria desrobirei religioase a Românilor din Ardeal în secolul XVIII (The history of religious disenslavement of the Transylvanian Romanians in 18th century). This pathbreaking book was awarded the Adamachi Prize by the Romanian Academy. His investigation was completed with the appearance of vol. 2 in 1930. This book not only had an impact at the time, but also in post–1989 historiography, especially because of its massive documentation.

1924 saw the publication of the biography of Dragomir’s Avram Iancu, the first of its kind. This modest volume (138 pages) was published on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of Iancu’s birth and owed a good deal to the circumstances of the context in which Dragomir lived and worked. 1924 also saw the publication of Vlahii și morlacii: Studiu din istoria românismului balcanic (The Vlachs and the Morlachs: Study from the history of Balkan Romanianism), opening yet another fruitful chapter in Southeast European studies. He later expanded on this in 1959, though in circumstances that may have limited the scope of his analysis. He returned to the Romanian-Russian issue in 1944 with “La Politique religieuse des Habsbourg et les interventions russes au XVIII-e siècle.”

In 1927, as more and more of his work took on a militant anti-revisionist emphasis, Dragomir published a study entitled The Ethnical Minorities in Transylvania. A similar but much longer volume appeared in 1934 under the title...
La Transylvanie roumaine et ses minorités ethniques. Other examples of his militant historiographical efforts included his work with the Revue de Transylvanie (1934–1944) and pamphlets on the Vienna Diktat in 1943 and on the Banat in 1944.49

In 1944–1946, Dragomir’s Studii și documente privitoare la Revoluția Românilor din Transilvania în anii 1848–49 (Studies and documents concerning the Transylvanian Romanians Revolution in the years 1848–49) (3 vols.)50 appeared, as did his beginnings of his Istoria Revoluției. Partea întâia: În ajunul Revoluției. Primăvara libertății. Mișcarea politică la Românii din Banat și Ungaria până în toamna anului 1848 (The history of Revolution. Part 1: In the eve of Revolution. The spring of freedom. The political movement of the Romanians from Banat and Hungary until the fall of 1848), which appeared as volume 5 of the Studii și documente series.51 Dragomir’s last book to appear before 1948 was La Transylvanie,52 prepared to advance the Romanian cause at the post-World War II peace talks. In addition, between 1918 and 1947, he published significant articles in Dacoromania, the Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională, Revoir de Transylvanie, Balcania and the Analele Academiei Române: Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice, on a variety of subjects, as well as in publications aimed at wider audiences. In addition, he was also the head of the Romanian Academy’s Historical Section from 1945 to 1948.

E. Life, 1948–1962

Forcibly pensioned in September 1947 at the age of 59, things went from bad to worse for Silviu Dragomir after 1947.53 In 1948, he was expelled from the Romanian Academy (he was restored in 1990). In 1948, he was also brought to trial on false charges of abusing his position as a member of council of the Agrarian Bank of Cluj. Following a six-month prison sentence at Caransebeș, he was arrested in 1950 as part of the communist regime’s general liquidation of pre–1948 political and cultural luminaries.54 Dragomir’s record in politics, church affairs, and as a pillar of pre–1948 Romanian culture placed him high on the new regime’s black list. Though arrested, no formal charges were brought against him. Nevertheless, he was sent to the infamous gulag at Sighet.55

Tall and of imposing physical stature, when he was released in July 1955, Silviu Dragomir had lost all of his teeth and his health was broken. In addition, he returned to find that his home had been confiscated by the regime and he had no pension. Remarkably, he thrived by returning to his scholarly preoccupations. Allowed to function at first as an “external” worker at the Institute of
History and Archeology in Cluj through the good will of historians Constantin Daicoviciu (1898–1973) and Andrei Oțetea, he became a full-time researcher in 1957, joining working groups on the Revolution of 1848 and on Church Union (this included Dragomir, Ioan Lupaș, Ștefan Meteș, Pompiliu Teodor, and others). Failing to regain his house, he was provided with a small apartment within the Institute’s building and eventually his pension was restored, signs of the respect he still commanded from his former colleagues and students despite the obvious danger to themselves. Eventually in 1960, his Securitate file was closed for complete lack of evidence, though he continued to be under surveillance.56

Dragomir’s post–1955 researches included medieval Balkan Vlachs, Church Union issues, 1848, and Avram Iancu. In 1959, he published Vlahii din Nordul Peninsulei Balcanice în Evul Mediu (The Vlachs from the north of the Balkan Peninsula in the Middle Ages),57 a work that capped his Balkan studies.58 In 1959–1962, he returned to the Church Union question once more with “Românii din Transilvania şi unirea cu biserica Romei: Documente apocrife privitoare la începuturile unirii cu catolicismul roman (1697–1701)” (The Romanians from Transylvania and the union with the Church of Rome: Apocryphal documents concerning the beginning of the union with Roman Catholicism, 1697–1701).59

And he was in the midst of trying to get his revised and expanded biography of Avram Iancu published, which finally happened in 1965. On the other hand, Dragomir had hoped to complete his work on 1848, but this was not to be.

Following an unsuccessful surgery, Silviu Dragomir passed away on 23 February 1962, just shy of his 74th birthday. Eventually his expanded Avram Iancu biography, which had been ready since 1958, was published in 1965.60 However, this was only possible following the 1964 mini-thaw which saw the return to Romanian academia of many first class pre–1948 scholars. Why? The unacknowledged motivation for this was the overriding mediocrity of the first postwar generation of historians (which included such worthies as Clara Cușnir-Mihailovici, Vasile Liveanu, and S. Știrbu) who were protégés of Mihail Roller (1908–1958), Petre Constantinescu-Iași (1892–1977), and other party hacks.61

Secondly, by the mid–1960s, a clear divide had appeared between the “academic” historians and the proletcult Marxists. The communist regime was beginning to recognize that the latter were a handicap as it took a national communist, de-Slavicising turn and sought to diminish the cultural influence of the USSR. Perhaps the tipping point came in 1964 with the publication of K. Marx, Însemnări despre români (Notes about Romanians), an obvious slap at Soviet historiography and theses.62 Those of the older generation who were genuine scholars, who had survived, and who were dependably nationalist were qui-
etly re-integrated into universities and research institutes and allowed to work. Alumni of Sighet alone produced Silviu Dragomir, Ioan Lupaș, C. C. Giurescu (1901–1977), Ștefan Meteș (1887–1977), and Victor Papacostea (1900–1962).

The fascinating story of the official and non-official treatment of Silviu Dragomir following his death is treated in detail by Sorin Șipoș and Ioan-Aurel Pop and need not detain us here.

III. Silviu Dragomir and the Romanian 1848

Within the context provided by the preceding overview of the life and work of Silviu Dragomir, the aim of the final section of this study is to provide a brief introduction to the writings of Dragomir dealing with the Romanian 1848 and with Avram Iancu. This task is greatly facilitated by the work of Pompiliu Teodor and Sorin Șipoș.

A. Avram Iancu

Dragomir’s scholarly interest in 1848 can be said to have begun with Avram Iancu. In January of 1924, Dragomir was asked by the President of astra, Vasile Goldiș, to write a biography of Iancu to commemorate the centennial of his birth. This story is told in a brief essay he published in the festive issue of Societatea de Mâine, 31 August 1924, entitled “Pe urmele lui Avram Iancu: În loc la prefătă la carte” (In the footsteps of Avram Iancu: Instead of a foreword to a book), obviously a kind of preface to the biography he had published earlier in the year. He was surprised at how little documentary material was available, so he had persuaded Goldiș to fund a four-week research trip to Vienna.

There he found part of the Kossuth archives, which provided the Hungarian view into what was happening in 1848–1849, into Magyar military operations, and into Kossuth’s policies. He also found the reports of the three Romanian prefects, Avram Iancu (1824–1872), Simion Balint (1810–1880), and Ioan Axente Sever (1821–1906), along with other materials in the Habsburg Ministry of Interior, Ministry of War, and Ministry of Justice archives, including most of the Romanian petitions to the emperor and a detailed alphabetic chronology of the events of the war. Dragomir also processed materials in various public and private archives in Romania, and library resources. An unfortunate exception was the Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, Iosif Hodoș, and George Barițiu collection at the Romanian Academy which had been sent to Moscow.
during the World War I and not returned. He also had to deal with previous writings—such as those of Iosif Sterca-Șuluțiu (1897)—which freely mix facts with fantasy.

Commenting on his own book about Iancu, Dragomir points out that it was commissioned as a work of popularization. That meant no notes or bibliography. It also meant that he left out or only lightly alluded to problematic issues. His goal was to include only those things that could be documented, and to concentrate on the factors that made the subject worthy of attention.71

Silviu Dragomir’s 1924 book on Avram Iancu was short and to the point. It was, as it was supposed to be, a popularization. And apparently it was widely received in that spirit and sold quickly, despite its lightly demythologizing of Avram Iancu. Perhaps the still young (he was 36 in 1924) Dragomir was already recognized by academics and ordinary people not only as a scholar but also as a deeply patriotic and sincere Romanian Orthodox (these for many Romanians were, in fact, inseparable). He became even more the center of attention at the 31 August 1924 commemoration festivities in Câmpeni, held in the presence of King Ferdinand I and Queen Marie, where he was chosen to give the festive lecture.72 Dragomir expounded on two points: firstly, on the unexpected development in the early 19th century of the Romanian national idea, and, secondly, on how Avram Iancu had become not only the hero of the Revolution but also the embodiment of the 1848 national movement and spirit. The travails of Iancu’s life after 1848 also became a symbol of the suffering that being part of the Romanian national movement would inevitably involve, both past, present, and future.

The book and the lecture were not Dragomir’s last words on Avram Iancu. As he subsequently accumulated more and more documentary material on 1848, he was accumulating documentary material for an expanded version of Avram Iancu. Thwarted by civic duty, politics, war, and the Stalinization of Romania, nevertheless by 1949 he had completed an expanded version of Avram Iancu.73 Owing to the ideological priorities of the communist regime, it was not published until after Dragomir’s death in 1965. A principal reason for all the delay and equivocation owed to the fact that Dragomir’s conclusions concerning Iancu were in the main incompatible with the official party line, whether this be the Romanian Communist Party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These findings he obstinately and courageously defended.74

The publishing history of Dragomir’s Avram Iancu was as follows:

As the 2022 publication of Dragomir’s full treatment of Avram Iancu makes clear, Dragomir’s book was and is an important contribution to the study of the Romanian 1848 in Transylvania, and it is certain that it will continue to influence future historiography.

**B. The Revolution of 1848**

The second area of Silviu Dragomir’s work as the historian of the Romanian 1848 involves the Revolution in Transylvania proper. Here, of course, he is known for his *Studii și documente privitoare la Revoluția Românilor din Transilvania în anii 1848–49*, an amazing work even in its incomplete form. He had, as was noted previously, taken his “find the documents or hold your peace” approach to his 1924 study of *Avram Iancu*. The Iancu book in turn led him to teach a course at the University in 1924–1925 on the “History of the Revolution in Transylvania in the years 1848–1849.” This was followed in 1930–1931 by a course on the political movements in Southeastern Europe in the year 1848 (with special look on the Romanians from Transylvania and the Romanian Principalities).75

Between 1924 and 1942, his continued work on the Revolution led to a string of articles and books on 1848. These included “Ultima încercare a guvernului unguresc de a câștiga pe Avram Iancu” (The last attempt of the Hungarian government to attract Avram Iancu), “Din corespondența dascălilor ardeleni în anul 1848” (From the correspondence of Transylvanian teachers in the year 1848), Ioan Buteanu, prefectul Zarandului în anii 1848–1849 (Ioan Buteanu, the prefect of Zarand in the years 1848–1849), “N. Bălcescu în Ardeal” (N. Bălcescu in Transylvania), *Un precursor al unității naționale: profesorul ardelean Constantin Romanul Vivu* (A precursor of national unity: Transylvanian Professor Constantin Romanul Vivu), “Les Roumains de Transylvanie à la veille du mouvement de résurrection nationale,”77 and “La Politique des Roumains de Transylvanie en 1848–1849 et la Cour de Vienne.”78 In addition there were numerous short commemorative pieces in the popular press. This listing illustrates the intensity, breadth, and duration of Dragomir’s preoccupation with
1848. His studies on Avram Iancu, Ioan Buteanu, and Constantin Romanul Vivu clearly set forth the political program of the Transylvanian Romanians and the character of their leaders, and laid a solid foundation for further investigations based on extensive documentation rather than hagiography.

Silviu Dragomir’s culminating but unfinished masterpiece was the *Studii și documente privitoare la Revoluția Românilor din Transilvania în anii 1848-49*, in six volumes, of which four saw the light of day. Here they are: Vols. 1, 2 and 3 (1944–1946; see the complete references in note 50); vol. 4 (draft completed in 1946–1947, but unpublished); vol. 5 (1946; see the complete references in note 51); vol. 6, *Istoria Revoluției. Partea a doua: Revoluția. Eroii. Împărătul și românii* (The history of Revolution. Part 2: The Revolution. The heroes. The emperor and the Romanians), draft completed but unpublished.79

The fate of vol. 4 remains unknown, though it was completed in manuscript by 1946–1947, when Dragomir’s arrest and imprisonment brought a temporary end to his work. His apparent awareness of what might be looming on the horizon accounts for the publication of vol. 5 before completing work on vol. 4: Dragomir wanted to get his history done before it was too late. He also hoped that it would be completed by the 1848 centenary, which in the event, was hijacked by the communist regime in 1948 and an absurd Marxist re-interpretation was imposed on the events of 1848–1849.80

Under the communist regime, Dragomir’s expertise was sought after for the work on volume 4 of the official collective history, *Istoria Romîniei* (The history of Romania).81 Though he was present at the discussion and was supposedly a member of the editing committee, his name was omitted from the book, which showed that even after his death his name was still a hot potato. Volume 4 had this to say about Dragomir’s work on 1848:

> a vast documentary material is found in the volumes of Silviu Dragomir, *Studii și documente privitoare la Revoluția romînilor din Transilvania*... in which, however, the author does not accent the role of the masses and doesn’t appreciate the revolution in Transylvania in its complexities.82

Dragomir passionately defended his views, and forcefully opposed the consensus criticism that the Transylvanian Romanians had “sold out” to the Habsburgs.83

In the process of preparing the document volumes, Dragomir came to know thoroughly what was available and something about their organization and importance for Romanian historiography.84 His long introduction to vol. 1 is a short survey of 1848–1849 indicating new insights that emerged from the documents, dispelling rumors, discussing promises made and promises broken.85 The actions, attitudes, and intentions of the Habsburg authorities were made much clearer through these materials.
Avram Iancu emerges in these documents, according to Dragomir, as a dauntless leader: “It is beyond any doubt that the perseverance and heroism with which he knew how to defend his mountains earned him the respect of imperial officer circles.”

Iancu “understood from the first the dubious character of the Austrian officers sent to the mountains as his collaborators and advisors.” In the end, the Romanians—especially A. T. Laurian (1810–1881) and Simion Bărnuțiu (1808–1864)—understood from the failures of 1848 that their task would be “first to build the Romanian nationality” and not act before they were prepared.

In 1960, Dragomir had again proposed completing the Studii și documente series, this time with an expanded scope in 10 volumes. The new series would not contain Dragomir’s history (vols. 5 and 6), but would be devoted to documents only. The material for the new vols. 4–5–6 and 8 were already almost complete. However this project also was blocked.

The 1960 plan has been made obsolete by the on-going publication by the Cluj Institute of History of a multi-volume (a dozen and counting) successor series of the documents related to Revoluția de la 1848–1849 din Transilvania (1977 ff.) However, it would appear to be both feasible and useful as well as a tribute to Silviu Dragomir’s work to publish the two unpublished parts of the original six-volume 1940s Dragomir Studies and Documents series in the future. Perhaps the set could be published with anastatic versions of vols. 1–2–3, and 5.

IV. Conclusion

Nicolae Bocșan once wrote an article entitled “Silviu Dragomir—Historian of the Romanian National Phenomenon.” It seems clear from the above that Silviu Dragomir might rightly himself be called “a Romanian national phenomenon.” Pompiliu Teodor, the premier Transylvanian student of historiography—who worked with Dragomir at the Institute in Cluj after 1957 and knew both his work and the man personally—described Dragomir’s work as “monumental,” and contended that

No one in modern Romanian historiography contributed as much to the revival of an epoch . . . than the historian Silviu Dragomir. It is undoubtedly possible to affirm that he revived . . . the real dimensions of the Romanian revolution.

Not only did he revive neglected aspects of study, he incorporated them into a “global reconstitution of the revolution.” At the same time, his documentary method was an inspiration to others.
Silviu Dragomir certainly made what now have to be seen as serious errors in judgement coupled with nationalist political mistakes, but these tended to affect his scholarly efforts less than most. This owed, in part, to his passionate engagement with national ideals in a dialectic between his intransigent Orthodoxy and his Romanianism. The longevity of his work owes not only to his insistence on carefully documenting everything but also to the fact that he was a positivist in his historical method. That is to say that he pursued a kind of Rankean goal of trying to ascertain “what happened” based on documents rather than inference. And such an effort, it would seem, is vastly superior to those who posit that we cannot really know anything and therefore fall into complete and useless relativism and emotivism.

Silviu Dragomir’s commitment to documents saved him from a myriad of blunders, and his courage after 1947, when many others simply caved in to the new totalitarian regime and rigid Marxist framework (what such people usually refer to as “new realities”), demonstrated the sincerity of his position. These elements are also what continues to make his work useful even when some of his conclusions are disconfirmed. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Dragomir appears to have done rather well on not letting his passionate personal commitments impair his scholarly efforts.

On the occasion of the Avram Iancu bicentennial, we look forward to additional and fair explorations of the work of Silviu Dragomir, discussions of its pros and cons, and perhaps a further revival of the study of 1848–1849 in the Romanian lands about which people can agree to disagree while trying establish as far as is humanely possible what happened in the past and why.

Notes

1. It should be emphasized that this paper is a description and not a critique of Dragomir’s work.

2. The primary source of information on the life of Silviu Dragomir, which has heavily been drawn on for this sketch is Sorin Șipoș’s outstanding study Silviu Dragomir—istoric, 2nd edition, with a foreword by Ioan-Aurel Pop (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea; Chișinău: Editura Cartdidact, 2008). This has been supplemented by Sorin Șipoș, “Historiography, Borders and Political Imaginary,” habilitation thesis, Oradea University, 2015. Șipoș does an excellent job of getting into Dragomir historical worldview as well as dealing in an informed way with the complexity of his work touching as it does on medieval history, the history of Southeastern Europe, Church Union, and 1848.

3. For the context in which Dragomir largely lived and worked, we are fortunate to have four classic essays: Ioan Bogdan, Istoriografia română și problemele ei actuale:


8. The basic bibliographical resources on the work of Silviu Dragomir are: Veronica Turcuș, Felicia Hristodol, and Gheorghe Hristodol, “Dragomir, Silviu,” in Bibliografia lucrărilor științifice ale membrilor Institutului de Istorie din Cluj-Napoca 1920–2005 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2008), 110–115, which appears to be the most complete to date; Nicolae Edroiu, “Istoricul Silviu Dragomir,” and “Repere cronologice: Date despre viața și opera istorică a lui Silviu Dragomir,” in Silviu Dragomir, Scrieri istorice, edited by Nicolae Edroiu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2015), ix–xx; Veronica Turcuș, “Referințe bibliografice asupra


11. He was nominated by Romania’s most outstanding Slavist Ioan Bogdan.

12. On the Orthodox Church connection, see Mircea Păcurariu, “O sută de ani de la nașterea istoricului Silviu Dragomir (1888–1962),” Mitropolia Ardealului 33, 2 (1988): 109–122. Păcurariu also includes an entry on Dragomir in his Dicționarul teologilor români (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1996), 150–152. Dragomir appears to have been a very devout Orthodox with a strong and informed faith. In fact, prior to the War, he gave considerable thought to seeking ordination as an Orthodox priest, but decided against it. Of course, his religious commitment was quite compatible with his view that Romanian Orthodoxy and Romanian nationality are two sides of the same coin. This also was a serious indictment against him after 1945, but paradoxically became a positive in the early 1960s.


15. On Goldiș, see Silviu Dragomir, Vasile Goldiș: Luptătorul și realizatorul politic (Sibiu: Editura “Asociaționii,” 1936), 16 pp. Lucian Nastăș-Kovács has pointed out how
surprisingly inter-bred Romanian academics were prior to 1945; see his *Intimitatea amfiteatrelor: Ipostaze din viața privată a universitarilor “literari”* (1864–1948) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 2010). However, in the case of Dragomir, Nastasă-Kovács (189) writes that that this marriage didn’t provide Dragomir “any supplementary trump cards in his career.”


17. See Dragomir’s retrospective, “Vingt-cinq ans après la réunion de la Transylvanie à la Roumanie,” *Revue de Transylvanie* 7–8 (1941–1943): 5–36. This same number has a number of other pieces about the unification period.


32. For details on this epoch, see Vasile Pușcaș, “The Cluj (Sibiu) University (1940–1945),” in Pușcaș, University and Society, 285–296.


35. As was typical among Romanian historians, Dragomir was active in more than scholarly writing, publishing a good deal in what might be called the popular press. These included: Transilvania, Adevărul, Patria, Țara Noastră, Gazeta Poporului, Telegraful Român, Revista teologică, Biserica și Școala, Luceafărul, Națiunea, Renașterea, Societatea de Mâine, Tribuna Poporului, Universul, Voința, among others.


silvăneni cu Biserica Romei în cercetările istoricului Silviu Dragomir,” in Dobrei, *50 de ani*, 113–120.


43. Șipoș, “Historiography,” 28–29. Șipoș argues that part of the irenic Dragomir’s approach was to avoid polemics and rely on overwhelming documentation.


54. On these matters, see Liviu Pleșa, Istoriografia clujeană sub supravegherea Securității (1945–1965) (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2017); and Sorin Șipoș and Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Dosarul de anchetă al istoricului Silviu Dragomir (1 iulie 1949),” in Pop and Șipoș, 120 de ani, 71–103.


58. Șipoș, “Historiography,” 28, considers this one of Dragomir’s lasting contributions.


62. See Vlad Georgescu, Politică și istoric: Cazul comuniștilor români 1944–1977 (Munich: Jon Dumitru-Verlag, 1981), 34 ff. As to the quality of the last wave of kulturniks, one could peruse the list of names given on p. 57. There is not a single name there that could even be called second rate. On “The Suppression and Reassertion

63. K. Marx, *Însemnări despre români (Manuscrise inedite)*, published by Acad. A. Otetea and S. Schwann (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964). Most of the work was done by Cornelia Bodea and G. Zane, both old generation scholars.

64. Set forth by Vasile Maciu’s foreword in Dragomir, *Avram Iancu*, 1965, 5–10. This involved the usual Ceaușescu era approach to such matters: emphasizing whatever the regime wanted to emphasize in the work of pre-communist historians whether or not this was in or out of context, ignoring inconvenient facts, statements, or interpretations; and sanitizing the person’s biography and writings, and claiming that the individual in question had seen the light and adopted “in good measure the materialist conception of history . . . to give a scientific foundation to his new works of history” (Maciu, “Prefață,” 8). Incredibly, subsequent to 1989, free access to manuscripts of Dragomir remained blocked. Șipoș was repeatedly denied access to Dragomir manuscripts on grounds that turned out to be untrue or tendentious (publication would be “a disservice to Romanian historiography and to the national interest,” Pop and Șipoș, *Dosarul Diplomei*, 13–14). I am more negative about Maciu’s foreword than Șipoș appears to be.


75. Șipoș, *Silviu Dragomir*, 411.
79. Șipoș, *Silviu Dragomir*, 432 ff. Manuscript in the Romanian Academy Library, Manuscripts, Silviu Dragomir coll. Șipoș, 436 ff. gives a full description of the contents of the sixth volume. It appears that a good deal of the material in this volume was included in Dragomir’s 1965 version of *Avram Iancu* (434). Pompiliu Teodor published an excerpt from vol. 6 as “Legiunile și prefectii,” in Dragomir, *Studii privind istoria revoluției române de la 1848*, 186–213; and in the same volume (41 ff.), refers to other parts of vol. 6.
80. Dragomir, *Studii și documente*, 1: V.
82. Constantinescu-Iași, *Istoria Romîniei*, 4: XXVI.
86. Dragomir, Studii și documente, 1: X.
87. Dragomir, Studii și documente, 1: XV.
88. Dragomir, Studii și documente, 1: XXIV–XXV.
89. Șipoș, Silviu Dragomir, 449–450.
92. Teodor, “Silviu Dragomir istoric al Revoluției din 1848,” 7, and 7–43 for further illumination. This essay should be required reading for anyone interested in the Romanian 1848.
94. C. S. Lewis writes in his admirable book on values and ethics, The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1943), 13: “I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite sceptical about ethics, but bred to believe that ‘a gentleman does not cheat,’ than against an irreproachable moral philosoper who had been brought up among sharpers.” And, of course, we have Lord Acton’s 1895 Cambridge Inaugural Lecture on “The Study of History,” reprinted in Lord Acton, Essays in the Study and Writing of History, edited by J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1985), 504–552, which stresses that one must always begin with primary documents which are then subjected to the critical “art of investigating . . . of discerning truth from falsehood” (528–529).
95. For a reasonable critique of some of Dragomir’s ideas, see Șipoș, “Histioriography,” 42–47.

Abstract
Silviu Dragomir, Historian of the Romanian 1848

The aim of the study is to provide an overview of Silviu Dragomir’s life and scholarly work, from his early studies in Blaj (Blasendorf, Balázsfalva) and Novi Sad to his university education in Cernăuți (Chernivtsi, Czernowiz) and Vienna, continuing with the major moments in his scholarly activity, with a special focus on the persecutions suffered under the communist regime. This is followed by a brief introduction to his writings dealing with Avram Iancu and the Revolution of 1848–1849.

Keywords
Silviu Dragomir, Romanian historiography, Avram Iancu, Revolution of 1848–1849
Between Dynastic Loyalty and the Nationalism of the “People of the Masters”
Avram Iancu and the “Invisible War” of Decorations

Avram Iancu, Alias “Decebalus Redivivus”

The first consistent analysis, based on original archival sources, of the question of Emperor Franz Joseph I’s decoration of Avram Iancu and the other Romanian heroes who showed dynastic loyalty during the Revolution of 1848–1849, fighting fiercely against the Hungarian troops, was carried out in the interwar period by the academic Ion I. Nistor.1 The results of this painstaking research were published in Bucharest² in 1931, and the data provided on that occa-

A first version of this paper was published in Romanian: “Între loialismul dinastic și naționalismul ‘poporului de stăpăni’: Avram Iancu și ‘războiul nevăzut al decorațiilor,’” in Avram Iancu—150 de ani de la moarte: Studii și comunicări, edited by Ela Cosma and Varga Attila (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut; Mega, 2023), 43–56.

“My wish is, first of all, the fulfilment of the promises made to the Romanian nation...”
(Avram Iancu)

Attila Varga
sion help us better understand a controversial episode of the post-revolutionary period.

Even in more recent times, due to ignorance of the main sources of the period, this episode often leads to truncated evaluations in Romanian historiography. There are still many who seek to find out “the reasons why the Imperial Court in Vienna did not recognize Avram Iancu as a hero and defender of Austrian interests in Transylvania, without finding any logical historical explanation for the deplorable and ungrateful behavior of the Austrians towards Avram Iancu,” the man who, during the events of 1848–1849, was the only one in Transylvania who defended the interests of the Habsburg Crown against the Hungarian Revolution, in addition to the national rights of the Romanians. Another question relates to why the Austrians so deeply detested Avram Iancu, the “Wounded Eagle” of the Revolution.

The reasons for this antipathy on the part of Emperor Franz Joseph I towards Avram Iancu and his comrades-in-arms have been attributed by recent critics to the fact that the hero had been recognized as a general and “King of the Romanians” by Tsarist General Alexander von Lüders, who had invaded Transylvania following the Warsaw agreement between the Russians and the Austrians. In addition, Avram Iancu and Axente Sever had written a memorandum to General Lüders asking the Russian tsar to intercede with Emperor Franz Joseph I on behalf of the Romanians. Of course, there is a lot of truth in these opinions, but the reality under discussion is more complex and requires a deeper assessment.

The first step in the matter of Avram Iancu being honored by the Court of Vienna for his heroism was taken by Bishop Andrei Șaguna himself. On 3 July 1849, he proposed to the Minister of the Interior Alexander von Bach that Avram Iancu be promoted to the rank of captain in the Imperial Army. The proposal was for Iancu and his soldiers to form a volunteer corps to defend the inhabitants of the province from the rest of the Hungarian troops who were plundering the population of Transylvania, organized in roving bands. This request was based not only on the need for security in a province still marked by revolutionary tensions, but also on the dynastic loyalty that Avram Iancu and his comrades-in-arms had shown so often during the resistance in the Apuseni Mountains, at the time of the civil war. It had come at a high price: around 40,000 human casualties (the Transylvanian Romanians numbered 1,600,000, so they lost 40 per cent of their total population), but also material damage amounting to 29,260,000 silver florins.

As a result of this more than convincing plea, which was supported by the testimonies of the soldiers who had fought in the province, Alexander von Bach decided in the Council of Ministers, on 18 August 1849, to decorate Avram
Iancu and his comrades. Two days later, the minister of the Interior reiterated the merits of Iancu and his fighters, and proposed that Iancu be given high honors, i.e., that he be accepted in the Imperial Army with the rank of captain, as had been done in 1848 with Đorđe Stratimirovich, commander of the Serbian army, at the insistence of the Croatian General Josip Jelačić.

The proposal for the decoration of Avram Iancu and his admission to the Imperial Army reached Emperor Franz Joseph I on 12 September 1849. The idea of promoting him to captain was not accepted, but the prospect of the decoration itself remained. The refusal was due to the fact that the Court of Vienna had adopted a reticent attitude towards the Romanians, despite the dynastic loyalty they had shown during the revolution. In effect, an “invisible war” began against the Romanians, especially as biased information was sent to Vienna because of their political and national claims.

This information came from the Transylvanian Saxons, according to an “old tradition”: on 14 April 1849, when the Diet of Debrecen dethroned the House of Habsburg and proclaimed the republic, the Saxon magistrates of Brașov (Kronstadt, Brassó) and Sighișoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár) welcomed the decision, portraits of the rulers were thrown away, Saxon officers and soldiers fought in Hungarian battalions, and the Romanians were criticized for speaking out in favor of the deposed despots and defending the emperor’s cause.

The Saxons saw in Avram Iancu a “Decebalus Redivivus,” and in his battles for the House of Austria a “new Dacian impetus that could turn Transylvania into Wallachia.” The contempt for the Romanians also appeared in the Viennese press, which wrote: “A Dacian-Roman metropolitanate in Transylvania and then the East is lost for Austria.”

The creation of a metropolitanate for all Romanians in the Habsburg Empire was the great ideal of the hierarch Andrei Șaguna. Such an idea of a Romanian metropolitanate could take shape in a period of great turmoil such as that between 1849 and 1870. The metropolitanate had to include all the Romanians of the Habsburg Empire, since they could only survive as a national entity in the form of an autonomous duchy in a federal empire. This was also the reason why the hierarch spoke with great conviction in favor of the autonomy of the Church, convinced that the State should provide the Church with material support, while respecting the autonomy of institutions and the freedom of conscience of the faithful. In return for autonomy and material support, Șaguna promised the authorities a devoted clergy who could use their influence over the peasant masses.

The idea of ecclesiastical autonomy for the Romanians, with which the Saxons sought to increase the antipathy of the Viennese Court towards the Romanians, was an “effective weapon” that was known to provoke hostility from the
central authorities. The events of the previous year in the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church, where in 1849, under the impetus of the Freemason Bishop of Csanád, Mihály Horváth, an attempt had been made to create an independent Hungarian national Church, separate from the Holy See, on the model of the Anglican Church under Henry VIII, had created unexpected tensions. This idea, combined with Hungary’s Declaration of Independence from the House of Austria, proclaimed in Debrecen on 14 April 1849, could not be viewed favorably by the Viennese authorities.

Saxon antipathy towards the Romanians increased in 1850, when Avram Iancu continued to be vilified in the Viennese press. There he was described as “a thief and a peasant who does not give up his trade even after the war,” despite the fact that Iancu had obeyed the demobilization order of 2 September 1849, and on 22 October 1849 he and his Motzen had voluntarily laid down their arms, handing over seven cannons and several shells to the Gubernium. This antipathy of the Transylvanian Saxons towards the Romanians and their political elite gained momentum especially after the defeat of the Revolution of 1848–1849.

Before that, however, the Saxons and the Romanians had been on the same side of the fence. When the Hungarians realized that they did not have a demographic majority on the territory of historical Hungary, they decided to put the national program of the union of Transylvania with Hungary first, namely, the imposition of the Hungarian language as the official language of the administration of the principality. It was also the reason why the Saxon University (Sächsische Nationsuniversität, Universitas Saxonom) allied itself with the Romanians, who were in the process of building their nation, and took part in joint actions. Moreover, at the beginning of the Revolution of 1848, as already mentioned, Romanians and Saxons showed dynastic loyalty to the House of Habsburg, and on 3 April 1848 the Saxon University recognized the Romanians of the Royal Land (Saxon Land, Königsboden, Fundus Regius) as equal to the Saxons.

The situation worsened after the end of revolutionary hostilities. The Romanians in Transylvania then continued their active campaign for national rights, but the Court in Vienna could not look favorably on movements demanding rights that entailed a framework of equality, and instead promoted the Germanization of the imperial provinces. The Transylvanian Saxons also fought for their own political ends, lobbying the Viennese Court through their own delegates in 1848–1849. They attracted high imperial officials to their side, such as Eduard von Bach, who also became an “advocate” for the Saxons. After the end of the Revolution, they realized that both the non-unitary geographical-territorial configuration of the Silesian region and the Romanian majority population were in fact obstacles to their own national aspirations.
The Romanians, for their part, although they showed loyalty to the sovereign during the 1848 Revolution, never gave up their own national aspirations, without having enough trained cadres to ensure sufficient weight in the new administration. Local control passed to the Saxons, who were better educated, spoke German and thus became the “favorites” of the Austrians. The Saxon elite thus became the basis of the new post-revolutionary administration of the province, and the new decrees of the imperial court did not affect the Saxon Land. Here, the old administrative division into districts and seats was preserved, as was the old legal organization. The Saxon vilification of the Romanian majority was aimed precisely at keeping them out of key positions in the provincial administration and the army; in other words, through such methods the Saxons sought to preserve their own advantages and privileges, thus blocking the rise of the “competition,” the Romanian elites, to senior positions in the provincial administration as well as in the army.

In addition, the idea of Daco-Romanianism, of the unity of all Romanians in a strong state, which was consolidated by the generation of the 1848 Revolution and which the Saxon press used precisely to increase the antipathy of the Court of Vienna towards the Romanians, also managed to create a furore at the time. The negative image was cemented in the collective consciousness and became the basis on which political and cultural-educational actions were crystallized in the general action for the affirmation of the Romanians within the Habsburg Monarchy.

One of these forms of political and cultural affirmation of the Romanians, the recognition of their important role within the Habsburg Monarchy, was the strong lobbying carried out in favor of the Romanian elite in 1848–1849. They were to be rewarded for their dynastic loyalty in the same way as the other leaders of the peoples of the empire. Among those who contributed to this lobby were not only Romanians, but also Austrian soldiers, who, knowing the merits of Avram Iancu and his comrades in the hard battles of the revolution, pleaded for them to be duly rewarded. This was the case with Colonel Karl von Urban, Major Alberti, Captain Gratze, and lieutenants Manzat, Ivanovics, and Novak. They wrote very favorable reports about Avram Iancu and the other ex-combatants.

The Transylvanian Governor Ludwig von Wohlgemuth, after collecting all the information received, drew up his own very favorable report, which he sent to the Minister Alexander von Bach, in July 1850. The latter drew up another report, which was sent to the Council of Ministers on 4 July 1850, and then to the emperor. According to this detailed report, the orders and persons proposed for decoration were as follows:
• Commander Cross of the Order of Leopold for three persons (Franz Josef von Salmen, Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church Andrei Şaguna, Josef Bedeus von Scharberg);²⁹
  • Knight’s Cross of the Order of Leopold for five persons (Count József Kemény of Magyargyverőmonostor, the Superintendent of the Evangelical Church from Transylvania Georg Paul Binder, Josef Florian Glanz, minister councilor, and Johann Daniel Ziegler, mayor of Sibiu);³⁰
  • Iron Crown 2nd class for Count József Bánffy, chamberlain and government councilor;³¹
  • Iron Crown 3rd class for Honnamon, Axente Sever, Avram Iancu, and Simion Balint (the emperor erased and mentioned the Golden Cross of Merit with Crown, so he denied the title of nobility to the Romanians);³²
  • Knight’s Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph for eight persons (Kirchner, Wächter—who was removed by the hand of the emperor, Schlauff, Schmied, Lange, Dindal, Müller);³³
  • Silver Cross of Merit with Crown for 16 persons (David Nicolai, Alexandru Ilazia Popea, Amos Frâncu, Toader Iulian, George Matei, Dumitru Corvin, Ion Daniil, Partenie Rațiu, Ion Balint, Vasile Balint, Samuil Simonis, Macarie Moldovan, Ion Bătтеanu [?], Vasile Rasu, Ioachim Olteanu, Pinciu);³⁵
  • Silver Cross of Merit without Crown for 35 persons (Gross, Lang, Schuner [?], Theil, Lipphardt, Schmidt, Hann, Schieb, Kiesch [?], Steiner, Hartmann,
Minister Bach had to take into account the emperor’s interventions, and so a new list had to be drawn up for the recipients, which was shorter than the one originally proposed, i.e., 135 people. The original list included 137 people, of whom 65 were Romanians, 60 Saxons, 11 Hungarians, and one Armenian. The new version of the list of honors was signed by the emperor in Bad Ischl on 21 August 1850. A certain Blatter, head of the Imperial Chancellery, sent the new version of the list to the Minister of the Interior immediately after the sovereign’s approval. This version contained the name of the decorated person, his place of residence, the proposed medal and the merits he had acquired.

In the case of Avram Iancu, the description highlighted the following aspects:

Lawyer from Câmpeni [Topesdorf, Topánfalva]; decorated with the Golden Cross for Services to the Crown; very popular among the Romanians; used this popularity to encourage his countrymen to resist Hungarian tendencies and to adhere to Austria and its legitimate ruler; at the first Blaj [Blasendorf, Balázsfalva] Assembly in May 1848 he helped to encourage the people; after the second Blaj Assembly in September 1848, he organized the National Guard in the mountains; in November 1848, he led the 1st Regiment of Romanian Border Guards, many thousands of soldiers, to Aiud [Straßburg am Mieresch, Nagyenyed] an Turda [Thorenburg, Torda], and from there to Huedin [Heynod, Bánffyhunyad], where he joined the Czechoslovak army after the imperial troops had evacuated Cluj [Klausenburg, Kolozsvár]; at the end of December, Iancu retreated to the Apuseni Mountains, where, together with Balint and Sever, they held out for eight months, despite the lack of food and ammunition; the enemy, who advanced on 6 and 18 May, then on 11 June 1849 with cannons and large forces as far as Abrud [Großchlatten, Abrúdbánya], was twice defeated and the third time, due to losses and the denial of access to supplies, was forced to retreat after a nine-day battle. There and at Alba Iulia [Karlsburg, Gyulafehérvár], the emperor’s authority was maintained, and Iancu’s popularity boosted the morale of the people and increased the resistance of those who fought hard without resources.

Despite these guarantees, the image of Avram Iancu and his fighters at the Viennese Court did not improve. In addition to the negative lobbying of the Transylvanian Saxons, new vectors of influence appeared which, paradoxically, although not hostile to the Romanians, did not add any value to their national cause: General Alexander von Lüders and Tsar Nicholas I.
The “Invisible War” of Decorations between Petersburg and Vienna

The echoes of the bravery showed by Avram Iancu and the moți (Motzen) during the Revolution of 1848–1849 went far beyond the borders of the Habsburg Empire and were felt as far away as Tsar Nicholas I’s Russia. In 1858, Artur Adamovich Nepokoychitsky, chief of staff of the tsarist occupation troops in Moldavia and Wallachia, published in St. Petersburg (1866) a work entitled Description of the Transylvanian War of 1849. Among other things, he pointed out that the western part of Transylvania was held by the Wallachians, especially the mountainous and inaccessible areas, which allowed them to wage a defensive war against the Hungarians, under the leadership of Iancu, who was already well known.

Iancu, a man unfamiliar with anything to do with the military sphere, found it difficult to organize the militia, especially as his resources were totally inadequate. But what cannot be overcome by willpower?

Iancu—the soul of the Wallachian Uprising—enjoyed the trust and love of the people. Wherever he went, he was greeted with great enthusiasm and all attention was focused on him. The Wallachians saw in him their patron.

Thus, eight years after the end of the 1848 Revolution, Avram Iancu’s reputation was still high, especially in the high military circles of the Tsarist Empire. General Lüders himself played an important role in spreading this heroic image of Avram Iancu. Beyond words and praise, he turned to deeds, deciding to give the hero all the honors due to a great military personality. He summoned Iancu to Sibiu, thanked him for his bravery and promised him decorations. According to the sources, he also gave 3,000 gold coins to Iancu and 300 gold coins to Axente Sever.

The latter was also said to have received a sword of honor from Alexander von Lüders. In Petersburg, the tsar, having been informed of the military exploits of the Transylvanian Romanians, sent Avram Iancu, Axente Sever, and Simion Balint the Order of Saint Anne, 2nd class, but the Austrian authorities delayed the transmission of these decorations. Nicolae Bălcescu, on the other hand, indicates that for Avram Iancu it was the Order of Saint Stanislaus, 2nd class, and for Axente Sever and Simion Balint it was the Order of Saint Anne.

Alexander von Lüders also found out about the political and national demands of the Romanians, which he sent to Tsar Nicholas I in the form of a memorandum. The reply from Saint Petersburg came soon after. The tsar ex-
pressed his sympathy for the Romanians, but as he could not directly intervene in an internal matter of the Habsburg Empire, he decided to send the memorandum to the Court in Vienna.\textsuperscript{47} This approach, however, only worsened the image of the Romanians at the imperial court.

The visit of Avram Iancu and Simion Balint to Emperor Franz Joseph I on 8 March 1850 was not as successful as expected. The emperor was reluctant to accept the claims of the Romanians. Simion Bărnuțiu, in a conversation with Prince Karl Borromäus von Schwarzenberg,\textsuperscript{48} was astonished to learn that the Romanian intellectuals were considered dangerous,\textsuperscript{49} so much so that on 27 January 1851 Emperor Franz Joseph I himself declared that there were dangerous people among the Romanians.\textsuperscript{50} Caught between the reluctance of Vienna and the diplomatic “offensive” of the Russian officials, hit hard by the intrigues and the slanderous campaign of the Transylvanian Saxons, the recognition of the merits and national claims of Romanians experienced a setback. Their dynastic loyalty was stifled by the nationalism of the “people of masters,” felt by Austrians and Hungarians alike.

**Dynastic Loyalism vs. “People of the Masters” Nationalism\textsuperscript{51}**

The report on the merits and decorations proposed for the Romanians, as already mentioned, reached the Ministry of the Interior in the autumn of 1850, from where it was sent to the local authorities in Transylvania. Avram Iancu did not receive the news of his decoration until January 1851, when he was invited to collect it from the sovereign.\textsuperscript{52} Although he was invited, he refused to go, because he was offended that the emperor had not accepted the Romanian claims and had not awarded him the medal proposed by General Wohlgemuth, which would have given him the title of peer.\textsuperscript{53}

On December 1849, he was arrested “by mistake” at the Hălmagiu (Nagylhalmágy) fair by a Austrian patrol. The local people grabbed fence posts and went to free him. The militia captain at the scene of the arrest asked Iancu to calm the angry crowd. He made a speech, asking the crowd to remain calm as they were in no danger.

Axente Sever was also arrested and then released, an unpleasant situation described in the report of 7 November 1849. The arrest took place on 1 November 1849. Axente Sever was taken between bayonets to the barracks in Sibiu, although he had asked not to be treated as a criminal, especially as he had de-
cided to appear in person before the military tribunal. He was also deprived of the sword of honor given to him by the Russians, for fear of committing suicide. His arrest was extended, and on 24 November he was still being held in the Sibiu garrison, but he was released following the intervention of Andrei Șaguna. The real reason for his arrest was never established, but both Iancu’s and Sever’s arrests greatly outraged the Romanians in Transylvania and increased tensions there.

Behind it all was the unseen struggle between the dynastic loyalty of the Transylvanian Romanians and the nationalism of the “people of the masters,” which had been strengthened among the Austrians especially after the defeat of the 1848 Revolution that had shaken the Habsburg Empire to its foundations. A number of leading members of the Austrian political elite of the time concluded that the survival of such a diverse empire depended on how it was reorganized. This elite emphasized the need for reforms to prevent possible centrifugal movements of the peoples of the monarchy. The basis for such reforms was Austrian nationalism itself, which promoted a political and cultural unity centered on the Catholic religious identity.

The Austrian elite soon realized that they could not economically and militarily sustain for long a medieval dynastic empire with disparate territories, and so they gradually sought to regroup the empire’s forces in the Danube region. Gradually, Austria’s cultural identity began to be permanently associated with the southeastern European region, where ethnic diversity continued to cause instability. In this area, the German culture of the Austrian state, perceived as the superior culture “of the people of the masters,” became a guarantee of progress and stability.

This guarantee was also relied upon by the post–1848 Romanian political elite in Transylvania, led by Avram Iancu. However, the sad outcome of the action to honor the Transylvanian heroes of the 1848 Revolution was a confirmation of the fact that historical reality had weakened the intensity of the political myth of the “good emperor,” which had previously had a “therapeutic value” for the Transylvanian Romanians. It revealed a mental structure shaped by the Habsburg emperors, whose reformist policies responded to the messianic expectations of the Romanian population. For the Transylvanian Romanians, such a regrettable episode as the decoration was a signal that the time had come to rethink their position in their relations with the Austrian authorities, but also to make a new start.
Notes

1. Academician Ion I. Nistor (16 August 1876, Bivolărie/Suceava–11 November 1962, Bucharest) was a brilliant historian and a militant unionist from Bukovina, a member of the organizing committee of the National Assembly in Cernăuți that decided on the union of Austro-Hungarian Bukovina with Romania, a committee in which he drafted the Act of union. He was professor at the universities of Vienna and Cernăuți, then rector of the University of Cernăuți, university professor in Bucharest, member of the board of the Society for Romanian Culture and Literature in Bukovina (1913), president of the Committee for Bukovinian Refugees, director of the Library of the Romanian Academy, leader of the National Liberal Party, former minister of state, representing Bukovina, minister of Public Works, minister of Labor, minister for Religious Affairs and the Arts, and a member of the Romanian Academy. On the occasion of his acceptance as a full member of the Romanian Academy, he recalled a chapter in the cultural life of the Romanians of Bukovina and received a response from Nicolae Iorga. In 1916 he published The History of the Church in Bukovina and Its National-Cultural Role in the Life of the Bukovinian Romanians. He edited the volume Diplomatic Correspondence and Austrian Consular Reports (1922, 1938) in the Hurmuzachi Collection, the literary magazine Junimea literară (Literary youth), the History of Bessarabia (1923), and he also supported the journal Codrul Cosminului (Cosmin’s Forest) of the Institute of History and Language at the University of Cernăuți. His reference work remains The Ukrainian Problem in the Light of History (1934). Before his death in November 1962, he wrote the History of Bukovina, which remained in manuscript until 1991, and completed the synthesis of the History of the Romanians (2 vols., 2002–2003). He was arrested by the communist authorities on 5 May 1950 and interned in Sighet prison for 24 months. His sentence was later extended to 60 months. He was released on 5 July 1955. See Dorina N. Rusu, Membrii Academiei Române 1866–1999: Dicționar, 2nd edition, rev. and enl., with a foreword by Acad. Eugen Simion, chairman of the Romanian Academy (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1999), 734–735.


5. See link above.

6. Baron Alexander von Bach (4 January 1813, Loosdorf, Lower Austria–12 November 1893, Schöngrabern, Lower Austria), minister of the Interior of the Habsburg Empire, architect of neo-absolutism, but also of the 1855 Concordat with the Holy See, which gave the Roman Catholic Church control over education and family life.
10. Đorde Stratimirovich (7 February 1822, Novi Sad–15 December 1908, Vienna) was the commander of the Serbian army in the Serbian insurrection of 1848–1849 and later a major general in the Austrian army.
15. *Siebenbürger Bote* (Sibiu) 59, 141 (1849); *Bucovina* 2, 40 (1849), apud Nistor, 289.
20. Ibid.
22. Gräf and Nägler, 322. See the Declaration of the Saxon National University, made in Sibiu on 3 April 1848, which decided to grant to the Romanians 1. electoral rights equal to those of the Saxons; 2. equal rights of admission to the guilds of Romanian apprentices and craftsmen; 3. equal canonical shares for Romanian Orthodox parishes or equal salaries for Romanian priests; 4. equal rights for Orthodox priests as the rights of the priests of the accepted religions. Ștefan Pascu and Victor Cheresteșcu, eds., *Revoluția de la 1848–1849 din Transilvania*, vol. 1, *2 martie–12 aprilie 1848* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1977), doc. 171, pp. 264–267.
25. Mádly, 290.


34. Nistor, 17–19.


40. Cosma, 482.

41. Cosma, 421.

42. Cosma, 426.

43. Cosma, 431.


48. Karl Philipp Borromäus Prince of Schwarzenberg (21 January 1802, Vienna–25 June 1858, Vienna) distinguished himself as governor of Transylvania between 1851
and 1858. He was the son of Field Marshal Karl Philipp Prince of Schwarzenberg, founder of the secondary line of the House of Schwarzenberg.


50. Bogdan-Duică, 212.


53. His refusal to accept the decoration was based on the fact that, above all, he wanted the emperor to decorate his nation by respecting the promises he had made: recognition of his nation and its language, then equality with the other nations of Transylvania. See Bogdan-Duică, 213.


**Abstract**

Between Dynastic Loyalty and the Nationalism of the “People of the Masters:” Avram Iancu and the “Invisible War” of Decorations

This study presents a very important and sensitive part of the life and activity of the Romanian national hero Avram Iancu, after the end of the Revolution of 1848–1849. Given their achievements during the revolutionary battles, he and his comrades-in-arms should have been decorated and rewarded accordingly. Despite the testimonies and recommendations of important personalities of his time, Avram Iancu did not receive the recognition and the distinctions due from the Emperor Franz Joseph I. Moreover, he and his comrades-in-arms were humiliated, falling victim to the intrigues of the Transylvanian Saxon elites in the high political spheres of Vienna. This analysis shows how the heroes of the Romanian nation from Transylvania of the first half of the 19th century, caught between dynastic loyalty, the intrigues of the Transylvanian Saxons and the nationalism of the “master people” of Austria, suffered disappointments and thus ended a difficult chapter of their modern history. It was a time of struggle for political and national rights.

**Keywords**

Avram Iancu, Transylvanian Revolution of 1848–1849, military decorations, ethnic relations
Avram Iancu’s Will and Legacy
Unknown Legal Documents
(1850–1877) in the Rațiu Collection
of the Lucian Blaga Central
University Library in Cluj-Napoca

Ela Cosma

WHEREAS MY only wish has been the happiness of my Nation, for which I have toiled until now to the best of my abilities—pain without much success—, it is with sadness that I now see my hopes and sacrifices coming to naught.

I do not know how many days I have left; a kind of premonition seems to tell me that the future is uncertain. Therefore, it is my wish and firm command that, after my death, all my movables and immovables be placed at the disposal of the nation, to be used in the establishment of a Law Academy, as it is my firm belief that those fighters wielding the weapon of the law will be able to secure the rights of my Nation.

Câmpeni, 20 December 1850

Avram Iancu,
Lawyer and Emeritus Praefectus

Avram Iancu (1824–1872) is the absolute hero of the Transylvanian Romanians. The commemoration of one and
a half century since his death (2022) and the anniversary of two centuries since
his birth (2024) are celebrated in Cluj-Napoca, under the joint aegis of George
Barițiu Institute of History of the Romanian Academy and of Lucian Blaga
Central University Library, by means of the recently released first two tomes of
the book series “Avram Iancu—200 de ani de la naștere” (Avram Iancu—200
years since his birth).²

In spite of the huge importance and the significant role played by the “Prince
of the Mountains” (Craiul munților), both during the Transylvanian revolution
and war of 1848–1849 and in the following two decades, as a young father of the
modern Romanian nation, our hero’s life, deeds and writings are still little known,
while our historiography still lacks a corpus of documents regarding Avram Iancu.

On 6 November 2015, an unknown collection of legal historical docu-
ments belonging to the Rațiu family—including Avram Iancu’s death
documents—was festively donated by Indrei Rațiu, the son of politi-
cian Ion Rațiu (1917–2000), to Lucian Blaga Central University Library of
Cluj-Napoca, via its director, Dr. Doru Radosav.³

By care of Dr. Ionuț Costea, chief of the Department of Special Collections
of the Cluj-Napoca Central University Library, the documents of the Rațiu col-
lection were scanned and entrusted to me for editing. In January 2016 I made
the transcriptions of the Romanian documents (written with Cyrillic and Latin
letters) and I translated the German and Hungarian ones into Romanian. The
scientific revision of the Hungarian documents was made by Dr. Remus Câm-
peanu, researcher at George Barițiu Institute of History.

The shock caused by the reading of these unexpectedly fateful and funeral
documents determined me, in February 2016, to ask Dr. Doru Radosav and Dr.
Gelu Neamțu, an expert in Avram Iancu⁴ and editor of the corpus published by
my institute of history, Documente privind revoluția de la 1848 în Țările Române. C. Transilvania (Documents regarding the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian
Lands. C. Transylvania),⁵ to proofread my transcriptions. After their proofread-
ing, the aforementioned historians insisted both on the need of the past realities
to be presented as they were, with their lights and shadows, for the sake of au-
thenticity, verity, truth, and on the necessity of publishing the unknown docu-
ments of the Rațiu collection, accompanied by their explanation and contextual-
ization in an extensive study. This is how the book about Avram Iancu, Lawyer
of the Motzen and of the Romanian Nation came into being in 2023.⁶

The Rațiu collection contains 31 documents from the years 1850–1877,
28 of them unedited until 2023. Among them a single one is very fa-
mous: the testament written and signed manu propria by Iancu himself.
The three previously published documents of the Rațiu collection are: the holograph testament of Avram Iancu (Câmpeni, 20 December 1850)—published by Iosif Sterca Șuluțiu in 1897, in the first biography dedicated to Iancu in the magazine *Transilvania* and in a separate brochure, as well as two death conscriptions of the “Prince of the Mountains” (Vidra de Sus, 8 October 1872 and 16 October 1876)—published by Augustin Rațiu in 1924 in his newspaper, *Turda*.

The 31 documents of the Rațiu collection, edited and published for the first time in the abovementioned critical edition of 2023, are accompanied by a document inventory comprising: 1. Avram Iancu’s holograph testament (Câmpeni, 20 December 1850), registered (Sibiu, 25 September 1873) and authenticated (Abrud, 20 January 1874); 2. the testament of Alesandru Iancu, Avram Iancu’s father (Vidra de Sus, 26 June 1855); 3. Alesandru Iancu’s death conscription (Vidra de Sus, 24 February 1856); 4–5. the first and the second protocol of the Abrud court (*sedria*) on: I) Alesandru Iancu’s asset inventory and II) the trustee to be established for Avram Iancu (Vidra de Sus, 7 September 1866); 6. receipt at Avram Iancu’s funeral (Baia de Criș, 12 September 1872); 7. Avram Iancu’s hospitalization costs (Baia de Criș, 12 September 1872); 8–16. further receipts at Iancu’s funeral (Baia de Criș, Alba Iulia, Brad and Deva, 12–13 September 1872); 17–23. various receipts regarding Iancu’s funeral (Baia de Criș, Țebea, 15–19 September 1872); 24. another receipt at Iancu’s funeral (Baia de Criș, 3 October 1872); 25. Avram Iancu’s death conscription (Vidra de Sus, 8 October 1872); 26. the death notice made by the village office (*antistia*) on Avram Iancu’s death conscription (Vidra de Sus, 10 October 1872); 27–28. further receipts with Avram Iancu’s funeral costs (Baia de Criș, 13 October 1872); 29. the second death conscription of Avram Iancu (Vidra de Sus, 16 October 1876); 30. the protocol of Georgiu Iancu, Avram Iancu’s nephew, on the high expenses related to Avram Iancu, “the hero of the mountains,” between 1871 and 1876 (Vidra de Jos, 12 September 1877); 31. Georgiu Iancu’s request addressed to the district court concerning Avram Iancu’s incomes and expenses (Câmpeni, 8 October 1877).

The legal documents about Avram Iancu may be grouped into several distinct categories including: a) the testaments of Avram Iancu and Alesandru Iancu (doc. 1–2 of the Rațiu collection from 1850/1874/1873 and 1855); b) the death conscription of Alesandru Iancu (doc. 3 of 1856) and the death conscriptions of Avram Iancu (doc. 25 of 1872, doc. 29 of 1876), as well as the provision issued by the *antistia* of Vidra de Sus for Avram Iancu’s death conscription (doc. 26 of 1872); c) two protocols of the county *sedria* of Abrud (doc. 4–5 of 1866); d) receipts of expenses and amounts of money payed for Avram Iancu’s hospitalization (doc. 7 of 1872), for ringing the bells in the Ro-
man Catholic, Reformed (Calvinist) and Greek Catholic churches in Baia de Criș (doc. 15–16, 19 of 1872) and at the funeral of Avram Iancu (doc. 6, 8–14, 17–18, 20–24, 27–28 of 1872); c) a protocol of expenses detailing 40 receipts totalizing 1,958 florins, and the request addressed to the district court in Câmpeni to record Avram Iancu’s expenses and income for the years 1871–1877 (doc. 30–31 of 1877).

The Rațiu collection’s pièce de résistance is one of the most famous testaments in Romanian history, namely, the very last will written in Romanian with Latin letters and signed manu propria in Câmpeni on 20 December 1850 by Avram Iancu. The original holograph testament is preserved at Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Special Collections, the Rațiu Family collection. Such a holograph testament has a general validity and, usually, there is no longer a need for it to be authenticated. In this particular situation, after the testator’s death (10 September 1872), Iancu’s testament was registered in Sibiu (25 September 1873), then made public by the executor of the will Matei Nicola and later authenticated in Abrud (20 January 1874). The national heritage document containing the last will of Avram Iancu is of exceptional historical and legal value.

The undisputed leader of the Transylvanian Romanians during the revolution and the national war of 1848–1849, an altruistic young man aged only 26 in 1850, Iancu left all his movables and immovables to the Romanian nation in Transylvania, greatly concerned with its happiness and wellbeing. Avram Iancu’s testamentary vision regarding the happiness of the Romanian nation is anticipated and explained by the hero’s little-known proclamation, issued in Câmpeni on 4 March 1849.

The comparative analysis of his 1849 proclamation and of his last will from 1850 shows that the practical means imagined by Iancu in order to achieve and ensure the happiness of the Romanians were exclusively collective and national, namely, the founding of the first Romanian law academy in Transylvania and the provision of Romanian justice to the inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains called Motzen (moț).10

The second pillar of the Rațiu collection is the original testament of Avram Iancu’s father, Alesandru Iancu, unknown and unedited until 2023. Written in Romanian with Cyrillic letters, this testament drawn up in Vidra de Sus on 26 June 1855 is an immediate application of the Austrian Civilian Code of 1853 and of the subsequent imperial patent of 1854.

Alesandru Iancu established the destination of his movables and immovables after his death in his last will, drawn up 3 months and 1 week before the testa-
tor’s death (2 October 1855), as stipulated in his death conscription registered in Vidra de Sus on 26 February 1856. The testament described in 14 points the immovables (points 1–6) and the movables (points 7–10 and 13–14) owned by the testator.

Point 11 is the most surprising, as it actually reversed the algorithm of inheritance. By declaring his youngest son to be “of unsound mind and a spendthrift” (la minte clătit și prădător), that is, lunatic and wasteful, Alesandru Iancu requested the State Court to appoint a guardian (tutore) to supervise Avram Iancu and prevent him from spending his father’s assets.

In point 12, as well, Alesandru Iancu sought to keep his inheritance intact, stipulating that after the death of his wife Maria and of his elder childless son Ioan, the family fortune was to remain to Gheorghe, the son of his nephew Iosif Iancu (the son of Avram Iancu senior, the brother of Alesandru Iancu). The illiterate Alesandru Iancu signed his will by “placing his finger on the cross” (prin punerea degetului pe cruce). The autograph signatures of the ranger chief Joseph Schuster and of the two witnesses, district deputy (Albert) Mânzat and chief actuary Carl Lerchenfeld, certified the legality of the document, which was affixed with red wax seals.11

The documents preserved at the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca also provide new and very interesting historical information regarding the two “F”: the family and the finances of Avram Iancu. We become thus acquainted with Iancu’s extended family, by means of the genealogical data and the lists showing all his paternal relatives. Avram Iancu’s relatives on his mother’s side are totally ignored in the registers, and this is not accidental. Although Austrian law granted women equal rights and shares in the succession, in actual fact the old Romanian customary law showed remarkable endurance in the Land of the Motzen (Țara Moților). Thus, the dowry given to a girl upon marriage—sheep, cattle and movables (seldom money)—compensated for the land and other immovables that could be acquired only by male children, the girls being excluded from the succession.

The archive inventory of the Rațiu collection also includes several receipts, lists of expenses, financial reports and accounts (semi, sămălă, Rechnungen), comprising amounts of money to be settled (calcule, socoteli, számla, Rechnungen).

In order to better understand the special value of the documents regarding Avram Iancu, hosted today by the Special Collections of the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, neither their complete processing by transcription and translation, nor their historical and historiographical critical editing are enough. Only when we add the perspective of legal history can we
comprehend the spatial and temporal context and the judicial framework in which they were issued, as well as the significance of these documents with legal validity.

Fortunately, during the last decade the Historical School of Cluj has provided us with several essential works. Without them, the interpretation or even the simple description of the documentary pieces in the Rațiu collection would remain a mere notification of documents regarding Avram Iancu’s last years. Therefore, of great theoretical and methodological benefit are especially the volumes edited in 2009 by Ioan Bolovan, Diana Covaci, Daniela Deteșan, Marius Eppel, and Crinela Elena Holom, *Ecclesiastical and Lay Legislation regarding the Romanian Family in Transylvania in the Second Half of the 19th Century*;12 in 2011 by Daniela Deteșan, Adrian Onofrei, Mircea Prahase, and Claudia Septimia Sabău, *Testaments from the District of Năsăud, 1861–1871*,13 as well as the doctoral thesis of 2019, dedicated by Gabriel Romeo Moldovan to *The Testament in Transylvania in the 16th–18th Centuries: Legal Aspects and Discourse about Death*.14 Inheritance practices in Transylvania after 1850 and even case studies from the Land of the Motzen regarding testamentary inheritances (1887) were presented by Daniela Deteșan in further studies (2011, 2013).15

Both testaments, the death conscriptions, the protocols and accounts, in fact all the documents in the Rațiu collection are intrinsically linked to the legal issue of succession or inheritance. Usually, even nowadays, after the last will is made before the death of the testator, upon his death a three-step process is started, involving: 1. the opening of the succession, 2. the successional transmission and 3. the sharing of the inheritance, which also means calculating the legal inheritance quotas, in order to answer the question regarding the relatives: who inherits and how much? The abovementioned bibliographical references help us place the documents about Avram Iancu’s death in the legal historical framework of the time of their writing.

The procedure to be completed for the “conscription of the case of death” (*conscrierea cazului de moarte*), as well as the stages of the succession, established by the imperial patent of 9 August 1854, are presented synthetically by Daniela Deteșan, Adrian Onofrei, Mircea Prahase, and Claudia Septimia Sabău. In the first stage, the death was established. In the second stage, the will was presented before witnesses and heirs. In the third stage, the will was made public at the court. In the fourth stage, the movable and immovable goods were inventoried. In the fifth stage, the heirs were summoned to the court. In the sixth stage, a protocol of the heritage settlement was concluded. In the seventh stage, the declaration of inheritance and the possession document were issued.16

Considering the steps listed above, the role and the significance of the documents in the Rațiu collection become evident. The three death conscriptions,
namely, that of Alesandru Iancu’s death (1856) and the other two conscriptions of Avram Iancu’s death (1872 and 1876), belong to the first stage of initiating a trial for succession. To be added here is the notice issued in 1872 by the village office (antistia) of Vidra de Sus as regards the death conscription of three villagers (Avram Iancu, the local judge and another village inhabitant). We can see that, upon the deaths of Alesandru Iancu and of his son, the standardized forms—introduced by the Austrian legislator by means of Law 208 (the imperial patent) of 9 August 1854—were also used in the Land of the Motzen. According to article 50 of this law, standard form no. 1 regarding the conscription of a death was the longest (including 16 points). The Rațiu collection holds three such typed documents.

We lack inventories of the assets left on the death of Alesandru Iancu and of Avram Iancu. The collection of the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca includes the first protocol of the Abrud court (sedria) of 1866, regarding the inventorying of Iancu senior’s assets. The second protocol of the sedria of Abrud aimed to establish a trusteeship for Avram Iancu, in order to enforce the unequal sharing of the fortune left by the deceased father. Unfortunately, the documents of the actual court trials regarding the inheritances of both Alesandru Iancu (after 1866) and Avram Iancu (after 1872) are yet to be identified. Maybe the documents of the trials will be found at some point, scattered and disparate, in other archives or collections.

Nevertheless, the Rațiu collection allows us the reasonable assumption that there were two trials for succession, concerning the wills of Iancu the father and Iancu the son. Even if there is a lack of evidence as regards the actual trials, the documents of the Rațiu collection still offer a conclusive judicial outline and picture of the analyzed cases.

Reading the documents of the Rațiu collection in a legal key opens up new perspectives for a better understanding of the fateful, even tragical second half of Avram Iancu’s life (1850–1872), as well as of his rich material and spiritual legacy.

Thus, the documents preserved at the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca bring to the fore not just any legal case, of an anonymous family of Transylvanian Romanians living in the Apuseni Mountains in the second half of the 19th century (and even then the documents would have been of great historical interest). Instead, we are dealing with documents with a strong emotional impact, related to the fortune of the Iancu family and especially to the inheritance of Avram Iancu. The documents reveal the importance of succession in the Land of the Motzen, at the time when the men of the Iancu family lived
and died there (the father, Alesandru, died in 1855, the brother, Ioan, in 1871, and Avram Iancu in 1872).

The father and the older brother of the “Prince of the Mountains” followed the rules and embraced the materialism of ordinary existence, whereas Avram Iancu broke out of the common pattern. He was able to move the mountains in order to defend his people and his country, with a weapon in his hand at the head of a popular army in the national war (1848–1849), and with the weapon of the law when fighting for the forests of the Motzen (1850–1852), but he did not lift a finger to defend himself against the injustice of his own kin (1855–1866). It was precisely he—the lawyer of the family, acquainted with the law, dreaming to found and bequeathing his fortune to a Romanian Law Academy in Transylvania—who showed supreme contempt for any personal and individual worldly goods.

He moved between extremes: from wastefulness due to his exaggerated altruism to abject poverty (as the documents in the Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca show), putting above all and above his own life the ideal communal values and the happiness of the Romanian nation.

(Translated by Ela Cosma, translation revised by Horia Cosma)

Notes

1. The holograph testament of Avram Iancu with the autograph signature of Avram Iancu, “lawyer and emeritus praefectus” in the Latin alphabet. Original: Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, Special Collections, Rațiu family coll., page 1r, photo testament_0001. Translated into English by Ela Cosma. Here is Avram Iancu’s last will in the original Romanian language:

_Ultima mea Vointia!_

Unicul dor a vieții mele fiind ca să-mi văd Națiunea mea fericită, pentru care dupe puteri am și lucrat până acumă, durere, fără mult succes, ba togma acumă cu întristare văd că speranțile mele și jertfa adusă se prefac în nimic.

Nu sciu câte zile mai pot avea; un feliu de presimțire îmi pare că mi-ar spune că vizitorul este nesigur; voiesc dară și botărât dispun ca, după moartea mea, toată averea mea mișcătoare și nemișcătoare să treacă în folosul națiunii pentru ajutoriu la înființarea unei academii de drepturi, tare crezând că luptători cu arma legii vor putea scoate drepturile națiunii mele.


Avram Iancu,
Adv. și Em. Prefect


5. The corpus of *Documente privind revoluția de la 1848 in Țările Române. C. Transilvania* was published by the modern historians at George Barțiu Institute of History of Cluj-Napoca in 12 volumes (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1977–2020).


17. Deteșan et al., 20–21.

**Abstract**

Avram Iancu’s Will and Legacy: Unknown Legal Documents (1850–1877) in the Rațiu Collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca

Our article presents the little known so-called Rațiu collection of documents from the years 1850–1877 regarding the death of the Romanian hero Avram Iancu. The documents were donated in 2015 by Indrei Rațiu to the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca. They are valuable legal historical documents regarding the testaments of Avram Iancu (1824–1872) and of his father, Alesandru Iancu (1797–1855), as well as their trials for succession. The documents were written mostly in the Romanian language with Cyrillic and Latin letters, but inserts and documents in German and Hungarian were also added.

**Keywords**

Avram Iancu, testament, legal documents (1850–1877), Rațiu collection, Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca
150 Years Since Avram Iancu’s Passing into Eternity
A Publishing Retrospective of the Year 2022

Introduction

The day of 10 September 2022 marked the 150th commemoration of the death of Avram Iancu, the hero of the Romanian Revolution of 1848–1849 in Transylvania. In that significant memorial context, the figure of the “Prince of the Motzen” (mountain-dwellers of the Apuseni Mountains) was brought back into attention through the publication of seven volumes dedicated to his life and work, as well as to the way in which the hero’s memory is reflected in Romanian mainstream and folk literature. The books were published by three Transylvanian publishing houses: Școala Ardeleană of Cluj-Napoca, Techno Media of Sibiu, and Theosis of Oradea, the first one having carried a shorter Romanian version of this paper was published in the volume: *Avram Iancu—150 de ani de la moarte: Studii și comunicări*, edited by Ela Cosma and Varga Attila (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut; Editura Mega, 2023), 57–68.
out the most comprehensive editorial project dedicated to the commemoration of 150 years since Avram Iancu’s passing into eternity. In the present paper, these volumes will be presented in the chronological order of their appearance and not according to their literary category or genre: drama, literature, literary criticism, periodicals, and historiography.

Școala Ardeleană Publishing House of Cluj-Napoca

At the beginning of 2022, Școala Ardeleană publishing house of Cluj-Napoca, led by poet and patriot Vasile George Dâncu, launched a large-scale editorial project intended to bring back to the attention of contemporary Romanian readers the figure of one of the most famous national heroes of the Romanian Pantheon. A number of academic, cultural-patriotic and foundational institutions became associated with the project, such as the Romanian Academy, through its George Barițiu Institute of History and its Center for Transylvanian Studies of Cluj-Napoca, the Transylvanian Leaders Foundation, the Avram Iancu Cultural-Patriotic Society of Romania, and the Association of the Transylvanian School of Book Publishing and Promotion. By bringing together the creative forces and energies of a number of Transylvanian intellectuals—writers, historians, and literary critics—as well as generous sponsors, who share a noble sense of love for the homeland and a desire to honor the heroes of the Romanian nation, Școala Ardeleană publishing house has succeeded in launching four volumes as part of a series titled “150 Years Since Avram Iancu’s Passing into Eternity” on the Romanian book market of 2022. The books were published both in classic printed form and in electronic format (eBook), featuring the same format or typographical configuration, a very similar illustration of the covers, and the ‘Avram Iancu 150’ logo, created by graphic designer Teodor Bogoi, and are easily accessible on the publisher’s website under the entry ‘Avram Iancu 150.’

The publishing project made its debut early in the year with two drama volumes, one by writer Mircea Tomuș (1934–2022): Glonțul de argint sau Adevărata moarte a lui Avram Iancu: Teatru (The silver bullet or The true death of Avram Iancu: Theater), and the other by philosopher and writer Lucian Blaga (1895–1961): Avram Iancu: Dramă (Avram Iancu: Drama), an edition supervised, prefaced and provided with a critical dossier by Mircea Popa, followed in the autumn of the same year by two other volumes, of history and historiographical and literary analyses, namely, Silviu Dragomir’s (1888–1962) Avram Iancu: O viată de erou (Avram Iancu: A hero’s life), edited with an intro-
duction and note on the edition by Ioan Bolovan and Sorin Șipoș, and Mircea Popa’s (born 1939) Avram Iancu: Făuritor de istorie națională (Avram Iancu: National history-maker). In all, there were two new volumes, authored by the late writer, critic and literary historian Mircea Tomuș and by Professor Mircea Popa, and two books initiated in the interwar period by two outstanding representatives of 20th-century Romanian culture and historiography: Lucian Blaga and Silviu Dragomir.

Mircea Tomuș’s last ante-mortem book reveals the Transylvanian writer’s skills as a gifted novelist and dramatist, with a propensity for the crucial moments in the history of the Romanians of Transylvania, as also indicated by his earlier novel Aripile demonului (The demon’s wings). In his analysis of this book dedicated to Avram Iancu, historian and literary critic Mircea Popa observes:

Mircea Tomuș is not only a modern recorder of historical phenomena, but also an interpreter of multiple causes and effects, as well as a lover of the fascinating personalities of our national history, who brought about sequences of events and changes in political views.

Mircea Tomuș’s drama showcases Avram Iancu as “a character from an ancient tragedy, inflexible and impenitent, whose path and fate had been preordained.” Like any great character of antiquity, Mircea Popa goes on to point out,

Iancu pursues his destiny, his eyes burning with illusions and claims humiliating to the emperor, who finds himself reprimanded by the Transylvanian mountain-dweller’s piercing gaze for having lied to a people and disregarded their sacrifice and loss of human life. Iancu’s intangible figure is placed once more in a memorable light by the very fact that he saved an emperor’s throne and by the fact that his appearance before such an individual forces those present to distinguish the true emperor from the puppet, as the latter fades impotently before the immeasurable popularity of that Christ of the mountains.

In conclusion, that same literary critic of Cluj adds,

the highlighting of such imponderable elements, in greater numbers and more carefully transfigured, makes Mircea Tomuș’s masterpiece an instructive reading on intransigence and betrayal, on oaths of faith and the breaking of promises made.

The equation is thus squared, in the sense that that entire history of Transylvania, centered around “the good emperor,” is nothing but a “secular farce, where betrayal and deceit played an essential role.”
Blaga’s play *Avram Iancu*, originally published in 1934 and re-edited in the summer of 2022 in the form of an edition supervised by Mircea Popa, is one of philosopher Lucian Blaga’s interwar dramatic creations, alongside *Zamolxe* (1921), *Tulburarea apelor* (The disturbance of the waters) (1923), *Daria* (1925), *Ivanca* (1925), *Înviere* (Resurrection) (1925), *Meșterul Manole* (Master Manole) (1927), and *Cruciada copiilor* (The children’s crusade) (1930), all of which were acclaimed by critics of their time and were successfully staged in Cluj, Bucharest, Oradea, Timișoara, Brașov, Cernăuți, Lugoj, etc. The edition published under the patronage of the Școala Ardeleană publishing house is dedicated to the memory of Dorli Blaga (1930–2021), the author’s daughter. For Lucian Blaga, Professor Mircea Popa convincingly affirms, the historical character of Avram Iancu “corresponds to his idea of a dramatical revival of some of the legendary figures of folk mythology and history,” such as Zalmolxis, Master Manole or Anton Pann, as

*real-symbolic characters deeply rooted in the national spirituality, whose energetically catalyzing reverberations initiate a dialogue between past and present of the most spectacular kind. The dramatic approach, however, pertains to tragic mythology and mirrors the relationship between hero and history through the lens of contaminated Nietzscheism, which influenced his views in more than one respect, according to which times of crisis require heroes to match. Hence the intervention of the supernatural in the preparation of the superhuman. Avram Iancu is such a symbolic figure, shaped by history, yet transgressing history due to the scale of his work.*

Therefore, the literary critic concludes, Lucian Blaga’s play is not “historical in the strict sense of the word, but mythical,” as the playwright employs just a

*few real characters among a series of mythographic projections related to the damned hero and the fate of an oppressed people destined to keep being deceived by perverted foreign rulers who are indifferent to the natural desire for emancipation.*

In fact, the author himself stated at the time that his play

*is not a “historical” drama in the usual sense of the word. “Historical” is only the framework of this drama, in a sense. The events that make up the drama take place in the crucial year of 1848, as well as later. In my drama, I have tried, to the best of my ability, to elevate the subject beyond historical contingencies and to deepen the perspectives, so as to render, in a nearly legendary or mythical setting, the human tragedy of a leader and, if I may be so bold, of a nation. My drama is thus history raised to the level of mythical potency, reality elevated beyond itself.*
Specialized critics, represented by the reputed contemporary ethnologist Ioan Taloș (b. 1934), have pertinently noted that

*the mythical dimension of the play is given by the enigmatic and mysterious presence of the Babă (old woman, also known as Muma-Pădurii [Witch of Woods]), the key figure of the play’s prologue, who serves to provide the mythical-magical dimension to the drama’s archetypal substrate.*

In his turn, Mircea Popa contends that

*Blaga needed this character in order to highlight the facets of the mythology of the place, which evokes the deep, archetypal connections between man and his surrounding nature, with cosmological roots supplying the power of the beings that inhabit this part of the world.*

Blaga’s play consists of a prologue and three stages comprising ten scenes, whose expressive theatrical force is given by the mythical-folkloric motif of the transformation of bird into man, expressed in the lines: “În grădina lui Ion/ Toate păsările dorm./ Numai una n-are somn,/ Cată să se facă om” (In Ion’s garden/ All the birds are asleep./ Only one is sleepless./ Seeking to become human), taken by the playwright from a folklore anthology compiled by Ion Pillat. From the very outset, Lucian Blaga shows Avram Iancu as a man driven by his devotion to the liberation of the Romanian people, a hero arising after a long and torturous wait to lead his mountain-dwelling people into battle. That is why

*he enjoys the esteem and respect of his enemies, the immense love of his own people, and his appearance in the revolution’s hotspots is always an occasion for joy and popular enthusiasm, the Motzen following him faithfully in any situation.*

He seeks no personal gain, but is guided only by the interests of the general cause. Iancu is a visionary and a prophet, always able to distinguish between diplomatic trickery and the reality on the ground. The hero is an emissary of intransigence and respectful of the truth, as Blaga has him utter fiery lines such as: “Epistles and petitions, as we have seen, get us nothing but promises! Let us build on blood! Let us build on steel!”

The third book published by Școala Ardeleană publishing house as part of the “Avram Iancu 150” series is the monograph titled *Avram Iancu*, by the eminent Transylvanian historian Silviu Dragomir and republished in Cluj-Napoca in September 2022. The work was first published in 1924, on the centennial of Avram Iancu’s birth, when several Romanian historians, literati, and cul-
cultural personalities marked the 100-year anniversary of the hero of the Romanian Revolution in Transylvania by writing an entire series of popularization articles, specialized studies, and monographic volumes of varying length and scientific value. Historian Silviu Dragomir showed an unabated interest in the biography of Avram Iancu and of other tribunes of the Romanian Landsturm, as well as in the history of the Romanian Revolution in Transylvania in general.

Dragomir is the author of numerous historiographical and documentary works dedicated to the 1848–1849 Revolution in Transylvania, having compiled several volumes, of which he managed to publish five between 1944 and 1947, while the sixth remained in manuscript form. A professor at the Andrean Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Sibiu (1911–1919) and at King Ferdinand I University of Cluj (1919–1947), corresponding (1916) and full (1928) member of the Romanian Academy, Dragomir is a nationally and internationally recognized historian with an impressive oeuvre and legacy. His scholarly efforts were focused on the ecclesiastical history of the Romanians of Transylvania in the 17th and 18th centuries, the history of the Revolution of 1848–1849, medieval history, and the history of Eastern Romany in the Balkan Peninsula. Excluded from Cluj university life (1947), expelled from the Academy (1948) and incarcerated in the prisons of Caransebeș and Sighet (1949–1955) due to his involvement in interwar Romanian politics, Dragomir was perceived by the ideologists of the Stalinist Marxist-Leninist regime as a “bourgeois historian,” being labelled a “nationalist” incapable of revising his historical views in accordance with the interpretation proposed by the Rollarian historiography of the 50’s.14

That is the reason why, during his lifetime, he was denied the publication of his monograph *Avram Iancu*, revised in 1949 and completed in 1955, the work being printed posthumously in a censored form only after the softening of the regime in 1965,15 and then in 196816 and 1988.17 The historian’s desire to persuade the regime’s censors to approve the publication of the monograph is, however, easily observed, both in his preface and in certain passages of the work, where he quotes or paraphrases excerpts from Marx and Lenin, as well as some Russian communist historians.

In fact, the entire saga of Silviu Dragomir’s research on Avram Iancu and the 1848–1849 Revolution, as well as on the publication of the monograph on the “Prince of the Mountains” is detailed by the editors of the latest edition in their substantial introduction titled “Silviu Dragomir and the Elaboration of the Biography of Avram Iancu: Stages and Ideological Implications, Historical Significance.”18 The two distinguished Transylvanian historians, Professors Ioan Bolovan of Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and Sorin Șipoș of the University of Oradea—the author of a historical monograph titled *Silviu Dragomir—istoric* (Silviu Dragomir—historian), published in three editions (2002, 2008,
2015)—, introduce the 21st-century reader to the biography of Silviu Dragomir and to the Romanian historiography of the 1848–1849 Revolution, thus enabling the reader to understand the tortuous itinerary of Avram Iancu’s monograph, starting from the historian’s worksite and running through the gauntlet of the communist ideological censorship of the second half of the 20th century. The two historians’ endeavor clearly justifies not only the initiative of reprinting the best monograph on Avram Iancu to date, but, above all, the need to have it printed in its original form, as desired by the author and as identified by the editors in the Silviu Dragomir collection kept at the Hunedoara County Office of the National Archives. This detail is worth highlighting, as none of the editions published in the last three decades (1998, 2012, 2016, and 2018) was based on Silviu Dragomir’s original manuscript, but were republications of previous editions corrupted by the communist censorship. In their note on the edition, Ioan Bolovan and Sorin Șipoș mention all these details, explaining that the novelty of the present edition lies precisely in the publication for the first time of the full text of the manuscript drawn up by the author, starting with the very title: *Avram Iancu: O viață de eroi* (Avram Iancu: A hero’s life), as proposed by Silviu Dragomir, but deemed inappropriate by the censors of the communist era, who struck off that sublime characterization: “a hero’s life.” Last but not least, this restitution is justified not only from a scholarly perspective, but also from an ethical point of view, representing a moral duty towards the memory of Silviu Dragomir, who must be known and remembered “as he really was,” not as the censors of the communist regime wanted to present him.19

The monograph is structured into ten chapters, the author focusing in particular on Avram Iancu’s activity between 1848 and 1852, yet not failing to include aspects of his private life (friends, love interests, illnesses), as well as the less favorable or the downright tragic moments and stages of his biography. Thus, chapters II–IX20 can also be read as a history of the revolution, the (Austrian-Romanian-Hungarian) civil war, and the Romanian national movement in Transylvania in 1848–1852, preceded by an initial chapter depicting the hero’s origins, adolescence and education21 and followed at last by the tenth chapter, dedicated to his sad end.22 All in all, the core of Dragomir’s monograph reflects the way in which the figure of the “Prince of the Mountains” has been perceived and preserved in the collective memory of the Romanian nation and in the main historical and literary works dedicated to him, but without any uncritical renditions of various historical pieces of information and narratives, which Dragomir directly and sometimes quite sharply and caustically deconstructs.

Dragomir proceeds in this manner because, unlike other biographers of Avram Iancu, he undertook a critical study based primarily on an immense amount of written sources, collected from Romanian, Hungarian and Austrian
archives, to which he added a critical synthesis of a vast specialized bibliography, based on the works of Romanian, Hungarian, Austrian, and Russian historians, as well as on oral tradition, which endowed this monograph with a manifest capacity to stand the test of time and its author with undeniable scholarly authority in regard to the biography of Avram Iancu and the issue of the 1848–1849 Revolution in Transylvania. In spite of the occasional moments in the text that reveal the historian’s undisguised admiration for the national hero of the Romanians of Transylvania, and in spite of certain adjectives, qualifiers and expressions borrowed from the dialectical materialism of class struggle, which denote a tendentious negative labelling of the Habsburgs and the privileged social classes, in short, of the “old” and “reactionary regime”—instances where the author’s subjective and sentimental Romanian views, on the one hand, and his compromises with the Marxist-Leninist historical ideology, on the other, can be identified—the dominant ideas, the conclusions and the overall vision of the work are not corrupted and therefore cannot really be attacked on various epistemological grounds. Beyond such strictly specialized or critical-historical issues, Dragomir’s historical discourse is a captivating one, his narrative possessing distinct literary beauty, with brilliant turns of phrase and superb characterizations of the main character, such use of language highlighting the historiographer’s ability to address a wide range of readers and even to cross over into the realm of literature.

Particularly suggestive in this respect are the following randomly selected excerpts, which make for a remarkable portrayal of Avram Iancu and consolidate his emblematic role in the history of the Romanian nation of Transylvania:

*His entire being is woven out of qualities that make him popular. His curt, yet resolute manner of speaking stems from his mountain-dweller’s blood. His language, occasionally sprinkled with jokes and embellished with metaphors, does not in the least set him apart from the peasant spirit. Old men praise him for his reasonable council in measuring the chance of success, while the young admire him for his courage and the boldness of his hopes on behalf of the people... Iancu is now determined to give himself to the people, to whom he instinctively brings the most precious means of extorting victory: the will to fight unwaveringly and the energy to pursue, beyond all sacrifice, the liberation and progress of his nation. It is clear that the true captain of the Romanian army, gathered from all corners of Transylvania, was Avram Iancu. His popularity had long surpassed the confines of the Apuseni Mountains. The people, who loved him, now regard him as a leader called upon to break the chains of slavery. That is why they have invested him with the romantic title of Prince of the Mountains.*
Given the historiographical and literary value of Silviu Drăgomir’s monograph on Avram Iancu, the author of the present paper can only hope that as many Romanians as possible, who love their country unconditionally and wish to become acquainted with its history and heroes, will acquire and read this book about the life of a brave hero whose “sole longing” was to see his nation redeemed. In conclusion, this book is part of that category usually referred to as formative readings, expanding the intellectual horizon and increasing the sense of patriotism of a person and of a nation.

The final book published in Cluj-Napoca, in November 2022, as part of the editorial project dedicated to 150 years since the death of Avram Iancu, belongs to the Cluj professor, critic and literary historian Mircea Popa and was launched on 30 January 2023 at Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca on the occasion of the author’s birthday. Professor Popa has earned a reputation not only among his fellow historians, writers, literary critics, and philologists, but also in the Transylvanian and Romanian cultural and social milieu in general, thanks to the more than 80 books he has published as author, co-author, editor and coordinator, as well as to the positions—pertinent and firm—he has publicly expressed in the written press and in cultural magazines on literary, historical and cultural topics, but especially on key social-political and national-patriotic issues. His writings are pervaded not only by the voice of the old-school, solidly trained historian and literary critic, with a genuine exegetical talent and profound hermeneutics, but also by that of the ardent patriot, polemical at times, caustic and incisive on occasion—in short, the intellectual profile of a fierce fighter for the truth and justice of his nation, committed “to the glory of his homeland,” as a line from a popular poem called “Iancu’s Song” goes. The volume brings together articles and reviews written by Professor Mircea Popa over time about Avram Iancu, about the cult and the facets of the hero in Romanian literature and historiography.

It is no coincidence that the ample foreword is titled “In Lieu of a Preface: Between Literature and History: The Cult of Avram Iancu” and that, instead of a conclusion, there is an epilogue titled “In the Conscience of Posterity.” After an analytical retrospective of the eulogistic and anniversary volumes, the poetry and the literature, as well as the main commemorative manifestations dedicated to Avram Iancu’s personality from the hero’s death to the present day, the author stresses that “Iancu as a symbol is more relevant than ever” because “all those who love and revere Avram Iancu are still fighting for the preservation of human dignity, of national entities and of the love for one’s country and nation.” In other words, Avram Iancu is more than a mere historical figure who played a key role in the history of the Romanians of Transylvania in 1848–1850; he has become a symbol of the Romanian struggle and national dignity. At the
same time, the self-sacrificing spirit and magnanimity manifested by the Prince of the Mountains in the service of the Romanian nation make him a model of patriotism and a timeless example to be followed, as Iancu is counted among the “Fathers of the Homeland.”

Chapter I, “Avram Iancu—Facets of a Hero,” comprises nine subchapters, which capture the manner in which the great hero’s personality has been portrayed in works of literature and dramas written by Mihai Eminescu, Lucian Blaga, Ioan Pop-Florantin—the author of the first historical novel dedicated to Iancu—, Alexandru Ceușianu, Ovidiu Hulea, Mircea Tomuș, and Teofil Răchițeanu, as well as in the conscience of the Romanian people—where he has been counted among the “saints and founders of the country”—, and, finally, in the film script by Hungarian writer Balázs Domokos-Haraga. With respect to the latter, Professor Mircea Popa states that “he is due special praise,” as he has succeeded in overcoming national bias and the “historical attitudes of his people” and provided a

fair interpretation of the tumultuous events of 1848, thus making this novel a highly faithful mirror of the events it evokes, which constitutes a great step forward in the accurate understanding of Hungarian-Romanian relations in time and over time.

Chapter II, “Avram Iancu in the Historical Arena,” comprises ten subchapters presenting five fundamental monographs dedicated to the Prince of the Apuseni Mountains by a number of renowned Transylvanian historians—Iosif Sterca Șuluțiu, Alexandru Ciura, Gelu Neamțu, Florian Dudaș, and Silviu Dragomir—, while another five subchapters are focused on the main stages of the hero’s life, such as the challenges of his youth as a student, his relations with Cluj and Blaj, the spiritual, social, national and ideological filiation between Horia and Iancu, the family of the tribune Vasile Fodor. The chapter ends with an overview of the great festivities organized at local, regional and national level in 1924, on the occasion of the centennial of Avram Iancu’s birth, when the entire country paid tribute to him for his memorable deeds.

Mircea Popa’s book about Avram Iancu shows us today that the life and activity of the Prince (Crăișor) of the Apuseni Mountains has been a constant object of historical and literary investigation, from Amos Frâncu and Iosif Sterca Șuluțiu at the turn of the 20th century, to Ioan Lupaș, Silviu Dragomir, and Lucian Blaga in the interwar period, and from Ștefan Pascu, Liviu Maior, Pompiliu Teodor, and Horia Ursu in the socialist era to Gelu Neamțu, Ioachim Lazăr, Ovidiu Bârlea, and Mircea Tomuș in the last three decades, to mention only the representative names of Romanian historiography and literature. The
author also reveals that a “much sought-after field has been that of traditions, memoirs, and folklore, yielding most remarkable anthologies and testifying to a strong and persistent interest of the collective mind in the preservation of the memory” of Avram Iancu. With this volume, Professor Mircea Popa joins the ranks of the outstanding personalities of modern and contemporary Romanian culture that have turned an admiring gaze towards the effigy of the national hero Avram Iancu and rendered his biography with talent and skill, thus cultivating and increasing among their fellow countrymen the fame and the cult of the Prince, whose only desire was to see his nation redeemed.

Techno Media Publishing House of Sibiu

The historical and literary endeavor to recover and revive the memory of the great hero would not be complete without the intelligentsia of the city of Sibiu, where the astra Association was founded in 1861, a true academy for Transylvanian Romanians, which brought together the energies of Romanian scholars, contributing decisively to the affirmation and progress of Romanian culture and literature in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș between 1861 and 1948. Thus, in the autumn of 2022, with the aid of the Techno Media publishing and printing house of Sibiu,32 the following two volumes were published: *Avram Iancu, Eroul națiunii* (*Avram Iancu: The hero of the nation*)33 and *Avram Iancu: Mărturii istorico-literare* (*Avram Iancu: Historical and literary testimonies*).34

The first volume, edited by Emilian M. Dobrescu and Maria Grancea, appeared under the patronage of the Town Library of Avrig and is, in effect, a compilation of the papers presented at the 6th edition of the Gheorghe Lazăr Academic School, organized by the Municipality of Avrig and the Town Library of Avrig on 9 September 2022. The collective volume comprises nine articles and studies written by historians, literati, history teachers, and a well-known archivist, and tackles the following topics pertaining to military history, imagology, literary and oral history, literature, sourceology, and art: “The Artillery of Avram Iancu’s Army and the Masters of Cannon Casting” (Gheorghe Bichigean); “Brothers Octavian and Eugen Goga on Avram Iancu” (Cosmin-Crăciun Cruciat); “Avram Iancu—A Martyr and Hero of the Romanian Nation” (Aurel V. David); “Avram Iancu and the Revolution of 1848–1849 in Transylvania: Attitudes, Representations and Mentalities” (Petre Din); “Avram Iancu: A Novelized Biography” (Emilian M. Dobrescu and Edith Mihaela Dobrescu); “The Image and Spirit of Avram Iancu As Perceived by the Inhabitants of Rogojel (Vlădeasa) Village in the 1950s” (Mihai D. Drecin); “Avram
Iancu in Romanian Literature” (Anca Sîrghie); “The Most Beautiful Avram Iancu in Romanian Sculpture (Interview)” (Anca Sîrghie); “Avram Iancu—Archival Documents” (Alexiu Tatu), accompanied by an Addendum containing a series of letters written by the organizers and participants in the 6th edition of the Gheorghe Lazăr Academic School of Avrig, intended as a homage to the national hero Avram Iancu. With their diverse scientific, literary and historiographical scope and significance, the papers gathered in this volume auspiciously complete the bibliography dedicated to Avram Iancu, who remains a landmark of our national history and a research subject still open to Romanian historians and literati of the past, present, and future.

The second volume published in November 2022 in Sibiu is a work by Professor Lucian Giura (born 1950), the former dean (2002–2008) of the Faculty of History and Heritage of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Interested in the life and work of Transylvanian cultural personalities, such as the Transylvanian-Saxon priest Stefan Ludwig Roth, the 1848 revolutionary Ștefan Moldovan of Mediaș, Banat scholar Emilian Micu, and historian Ioan Lupaș, the Sibiu academic correctly understood the need to bring Avram Iancu back to the attention of the contemporary Romanian public by compiling a substantial anthology of historical and literary texts selected from folk literature or signed by well-known Romanian historiographers and writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the foreword to the volume, signed by the poet, novelist and essayist Silviu Guga (b. 1944), the reader discovers that this anthology is the third of its kind dedicated to Avram Iancu, after the volumes Poezii poporale despre Avram Iancu (Folk poems about Avram Iancu) by Simeon Florea Marian, published in Suceava in 1900, and Avram Iancu: Antologie literară (Avram Iancu: A literary anthology), compiled by Alexandru Andrițoiu in 1972. However, unlike the previous volumes, as that same author of the foreword points out, Professor Giura’s approach “is commendable” because it provides the 21st-century Romanian reader with “the most comprehensive anthology on the subject of Avram Iancu that includes historical texts and documents, evocations in memoirs and speeches, and literary texts,” carefully selected “to highlight the figure of that great patriot who suffered the grim fate of a veritable martyr,” thus arousing the interest of “both history and literature lovers.” The book compiled by Lucian Giura is structured in three parts: “I. Avram Iancu in Folk and Cultured Poetry,” comprising 53 poems; “II. Avram Iancu in Prose and Periodicals,” the most substantial section of the book; and “III. Avram Iancu in Drama,” containing two excerpts from plays by Ion U. Sorciu and Lucian Blaga. Among the authors of the poems and texts rendered in this volume are some of the most resonant names of 19th and 20th-century Romanian culture, including historians such as Enea Hodoș, George Barițiu, Alexandru Papiu-
Ilarian, Nicolae Iorga, George Bogdan Duică, Nicolae Buta, Ioan Lupaș, Silviu Dragomir, Virgil Șotropa, and Pompiliu Teodor, and Romanian writers, poets, and prosaists such as Vasile Alecsandri, Iosif Vulcan, Andrei Bârseanu, Octavian Goga, Emil Isac, Roman Ciorogariu, Vasile Goldiș, Vasile Stoica, Alexandru Ciura, Cezar Petrescu, Nichifor Crainic, Ioan Alexandru, Ana Blandiana, and Adrian Păunescu. It becomes obvious to the contemporary reader that Avram Iancu, nicknamed “the Prince of the Mountains,” has been preserved in popular consciousness as the central figure of the events of the 1848–1849 Revolution, being woven into songs and idealized in poems, like all famous leaders of social and national struggles. Iancu’s cult has become deeply ingrained in the hearts of the Transylvanian Romanians and he has taken his eternal place in the Romanian pantheon, all of great Romanian historians, poets, writers, and people of culture having written remarkable pages about his life and, above all, about his brave deeds, such representative works being comprised in this book, suggestively titled Avram Iancu: Mărturii istorico-literare (Avram Iancu: Historical and literary testimonies). Finally, it is worth pointing out that another reason why Professor Lucian Giura’s anthology stands out among other works of its genre has to do with the academic paraphernalia (notes, appendices, bibliography) indispensable to such a publishing endeavor of historiographical, literary and patriotic relevance.

**Theosis Publishing House of Oradea**

In the second half of 2022, the Theosis publishing house of Oradea issued the volume Avram Iancu—150: Oglinda sinceră a vieții noastre naționale (Avram Iancu—150: The candid mirror to our national life), signed by Orthodox Fr. Ion Alexandru Mizgan,37 Ph.D. in history (2013) and Th.D. (2023), the author of numerous articles, studies and volumes on church history, Romanian history, and particularly on the issue of the Fourth Crusade of 1204 and its protagonists. The author’s profile as a historian and author is reflected in this three-part book as well. From the very onset, the author confesses that the aim of his endeavor was not exclusively scholarly, but also patriotic, as, in the context of a well-rounded commemoration, he sought to contribute to the rekindling of “the love for one’s Country, the love and respect for one’s Ancestral Land,” thus honoring the memory of Avram Iancu, one of the great heroes of the Romanians, who contributed to the survival of the Romanian nation throughout history.38 The volume consists of three chapters, the first one, “Avram Iancu, Prince of the Apuseni Mountains” providing a brief biography of the hero,39 while the second part contains the reflections on Avram Iancu of two historians from Ora-
dea and a writer from Maramureș, namely: the late professor Sever Dumitrașcu (1937–2022) of the University of Oradea,40 historian Florian Dudaș (b. 1947), one of the most knowledgeable experts on the biography of Avram Iancu and his presence in the Romanian collective mind, author of three substantial volumes dedicated to the hero and published in several editions,41 and the writer Nicoară Mihali of Maramureș, who was responsible for the reprinting in 2021 of the first monograph dedicated to Avram Iancu, originally published in 1897 under the signature of Iosif Sterca Șuluțiu.42 The final chapter of the volume tells the life story of Avram Jeflea, a descendant of the Iancu family from Vidra, a friend of the author, who passed away too early, which is why this work has been dedicated to his memory.43 Fr. Mizgan’s book can be included in the genre of the popularization literature of a profoundly eulogistic nature, intended to glorify Avram Iancu and keep his memory alive in the Romanian consciousness, thus following in the footsteps of that priest who filled in the “register of the dead” of Vidra de Sus parish in September 1872 by writing under “Occupation of the deceased”: “Avram Iancu, Hero of the Romanians.”

Conclusions

O n the one hundred and fiftieth commemoration of Avram Iancu’s passing into eternity, Romanian historians and writers of Transylvania, as well as the publishing houses Școala Ardeleană of Cluj-Napoca, Techno Media of Sibiu, and Theosis of Oradea fulfilled their professional and moral duty towards the memory of the “Prince of the Mountains,” whose sole desire was to see his nation redeemed. Although different in their scientific approach and in size, yet well-defined in terms of profile, the volumes in question are addressed to the contemporary Romanian public: from specialized historians and literary critics to writers, priests, history lovers, and Romanian patriots all over Transylvania, who have acquired and wish to pass on the respect for the figure of Avram Iancu, preserved in the Transylvanian Romanian collective mind under the eloquent and candid name of “the Sweet Prince of the Mountains” (in Romanian, “Crăișorul Munților”).

Notes


6. Popa, 123–125.


8. Qtd. in Popa, 89–90.


10. Qtd. in Popa, 64.

11. Qtd. in Popa, 65.


16. Silviu Dragomir, *Avram Iancu* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), 368 pp., with illustrations embedded in the text and a print run of 24,160 copies (16,000 paper-backed and 8,100 bound), as stated on the final page.


27. Popa, 32.

29. Popa, 150.
30. Popa, 158.
36. Silviu Guga, foreword to Giura, 15–17.
38. Mizgan, 7.
40. Mizgan, 45–50.
41. Mizgan, 52–62.
42. Mizgan, 63–75.
43. Mizgan, 77–87.

Abstract
150 Years Since Avram Iancu’s Passing into Eternity: A Publishing Retrospective of the Year 2022

The present article provides a brief historiographical analysis of the editorial year ‘Avram Iancu 150,’ which saw the publication of seven volumes of history, literature, poetry, critical literature, and drama dedicated to the hero of the Romanian Revolution of 1848–1849 in Transylvania. Four books were published by the Școala Ardeleană publishing house of Cluj-Napoca, the only publishing house in Romania to have undertaken a large-scale publishing project dedicated to restoring the life and memory of Avram Iancu for the 21st-century reader, two volumes were published by the Techno Media publishing house of Sibiu, and another volume by the Theosis publishing house of Oradea. Two of the six volumes are critical re-editions of works written in the first half of the 20th century by two distinguished personalities of Romanian culture: philosopher, writer and playwright Lucian Blaga and historian Silviu Dragomir. The other volumes were authored by writer Mircea Tomuș, critic and literary historian Mircea Popa, historian Lucian Giura, librarian Maria Grancea, and Father Ion Alexandru Mizgan of the Orthodox Church.

Keywords
Transylvania, Avram Iancu, Romanian historiography, literature, editorial year 2022
The Soviets and the Request for a Plebiscite in Bessarabia
One Hundred Years Since the Soviet-Romanian Conference in Vienna from 27 March to 2 April 1924

With the end of the Conference in Vienna, it was possible to assess the results of this unprecedented confrontation in the until then short history of Soviet-Romanian relations.

ONE HUNDRED years ago, in Vienna, on 27 March 1924, six years after the union of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania, the works of the Soviet-Romanian Conference began, after lengthy preparatory negotiations involving the diplomats of the two countries. Vienna marked an intermediate point in the tactics of the Soviets regarding Bessarabia: from the readiness to renounce any claims in the early 1920s, in the midst of the civil war or following the war with Poland, through the request for a plebiscite in the years of Lenin’s New Economic Policy and of entering the international arena, to the open threat of force in 1940, during the Soviet-German friendship period. On the other hand, after the USSR had been recognized at the beginning of February 1924 by Great Britain and Italy, the moment...
chosen for the conference in the Austrian capital did not seem to be the most opportune for Romania’s interests.

The choice of Vienna as the venue for the Russian-Romanian conference, according to Austrian Foreign Minister Alfred Grünberger, was in full accordance with Austria’s tendency to contribute to the great work of political and economic reconstruction in Europe and the consolidation of the peace. He was confident that the Viennese atmosphere would exert a beneficial influence, helping to overcome differences and bring about a compromise between the two countries. Wishing success to the conference, the Austrian hosts were convinced that a good result of the Russian-Romanian meeting would contribute to the political and economic consolidation of the old continent.¹

At the beginning of the conference, different hypotheses circulated in the international press and different scenarios were outlined, some more controversial than others, highlighting, above all, the uncertainty and even the skepticism in regard to a future agreement. On the other hand, realizing the significance of the moment, the big dailies from Moscow and Bucharest took a principled position, rallying behind the delegations and waiting for their first moves on the chessboard.

The Request for a Plebiscite

IN THE joint meeting of the two delegations, on 28 March, the first Russian delegate N. N. Krestinsky, the USSR ambassador in Berlin, proposed to discuss 1) territorial, 2) financial and economic, 3) legal and political issues.

Accepting the order of the proposed issues, the first Romanian delegate, Constantin Langa-Râșcanu, head of the Romanian Legation in Sofia, showed that the primary objective of the conference was to “resume normal relations” between the two states “on the basis indicated during the exchange of views that took place at Lausanne, and as agreed at the Tiraspol meetings of 26 November and 5 December 1923.”² The resumption of normal and friendly relations, from the point of view of the Romanian authorities, involved “necessarily and above all the recognition of the border.” According to Langa-Râșcanu, the presence of the Soviet delegation in Vienna was proof that the USSR Government, as a result of the talks at the Lausanne Conference, was ready “to recognize the Dniester as the border between Russia and Romania and that the issue of Bessarabia is not disputed.” In the desire to find “a formula that satisfies both Governments,” the Romanian delegation was willing to collaborate with the Soviet delegation to “solve in the broadest possible spirit all the problems with a view to resuming normal relations between both states.”
By referring to the “conversations” in Lausanne, Langa-Rășcanu was expressing the Romanian Government’s point of view on the principles of normalizing relations with the USSR. At the same time, he was seeking to test the reaction of the Soviet delegation, to see whether there was any intention regarding the recognition of Romania’s eastern border.

Krestinsky read out a response in Russian, “prepared ahead of time” and coordinated with Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov. He was surprised by the fact that the Romanian delegation considered the issue of Bessarabia’s incorporation into Romania “already solved” and that they had interpreted the arrival of the Russian delegation in Vienna as a recognition of the Dniester as “the border between the USSR and Romania.” The first Russian delegate specified that he had the mandate to discuss amiably, without any restrictions, all disputed issues, including the territorial one. Krestinsky pointed out that both the USSR Government and the previous authorities of Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine “did not give their consent to the incorporation of Bessarabia into Romania,” considering that the territory between the Prut and the Dniester had been “occupied” by Romanian troops in 1918 “by force and violence.” The Romanian Government’s arguments to justify “this seizure by force” were deemed unconvincing.

In his plea, Krestinsky sought to dismantle three “inaccurate theses” of the Romanian Government, arguing that: 1) Bessarabia had never belonged to Romania, because its territory had been in the past under the authority of Turkey, was “liberated” following a series of Russo-Turkish wars and “incorporated” into Russia in 1812, with the Romanian state being established a few decades later. In the process of regulating relations with neighboring states, the USSR was guided by the revolutionary principle of the peoples’ self-determination, and not by “some historical rights”; 2) from a Soviet perspective, the declarations of union of the Council of the Country of 27 March and 27 November 1918 had “no legal value,” because the assembly in Chişinău allegedly did not have the right to rule on such a vital matter, and besides both resolutions had been issued “under the pressure of the Romanian military occupation and terror,” following an irregular vote. In this situation, the USSR Government demanded “a plebiscite among the population of Bessarabia,” held in complete freedom. At the referendum, the population between the Prut and the Dniester had to decide, if: a) “they want to remain incorporated in the USSR”; b) “they want to leave the Union and be incorporated into Romania” or c) “they prefer to exist as an independent and sovereign state”; 3) from the Soviet point of view, the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia of 28 October 1920, “signed without the participation of Russia and Ukraine,” had “no legal value.”

Krestinsky insisted on solving the Bessarabian problem, which he considered “totally litigious,” through a plebiscite of the local population, organized in
complete freedom. The Soviet Government did not support “by any means” the thesis of its “historical rights” over Bessarabia, as the successor of tsarism, and did not “by any means” insist on maintaining the province “in the bosom of the USSR.” However, he claimed that the “majority” of the Bessarabian population “accepts with difficulty its de facto incorporation into Romania.” This is why they insisted on the plebiscite. According to the first Russian delegate, if the Government in Bucharest was convinced that the overwhelming majority of Bessarabians identified with the Romanian people and wanted to belong to Romania, it should not have spoken against the referendum.

The Soviet delegation’s claims that it had reason to hope for a majority protest vote against the “incorporation into Romania” were clearly spurious. However, it was not so much the results of the referendum that interested the Soviets, but rather a possible acceptance of this initiative and the attestation of a previous case that could be invoked later, in one country or another, to destabilize the fragile balance of the Versailles peace.

From the Soviet point of view, the refusal of the Romanian delegation to discuss the issue of Bessarabia, thus declining the proposal of the referendum, was equivalent to the recognition by the Bucharest authorities that they held Bessarabia under their rule by force. The Soviet delegation felt obliged to declare “categorically and once again” that the USSR Government “did not and does not give its consent to the incorporation of Bessarabia into Romania and categorically protests against the annexation of Bessarabia by Romania.”

So, at the first working session, Krestinsky made a frontal move, seeking to take the initiative and dictate the rules of the game. In accordance with his instructions, not only did he not react to the references of Langa-Rășcanu to the “basis” set in Lausanne, which meant that Moscow did not put any value on what was discussed between the representatives of the two sides in the past, but also categorically denounced the main “theses” of the Romanian authorities regarding Romania’s rights over Bessarabia. The renunciation of the argument of the “historical rights” of the USSR over the territory between the Prut and the Dniester was a new element in the Soviet approach, although practically a good part of Krestinsky’s speech focused on the highly subjective and distorted interpretation of the historical developments in Bessarabia after 1812, pushing the discussion precisely into the realm of polemics about the past. The technique of disregarding “historical rights,” albeit half-heartedly, was however dictated more by the awareness of the fact that historical justice was on the side of the Romanians, as well as by the intent to surprise and cast oneself in a positive light. The vulnerable issue of “historical rights,” however, had to be compensated for by transferring the dispute to the field of “legal rights,” where, as it was believed, Romania would have been the disadvantaged party. As the
so-called “Averescu–Rakovsky agreement,” the only document concluded between the representatives of the two parties through an exchange of letters between Iași and Odessa, at the beginning of March 1918, remained expired even on the date of signing, Krestinsky contested the self-determination of Bessarabia through its elected representatives in the Council of the Country and did not recognize the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia, to which Russia was not a party, demanding a plebiscite on the self-determination of the land.

The game of the Soviet diplomacy seemed quite sophisticated: on the one hand, the “historical rights” over Bessarabia were renounced, on the other hand, a plebiscite was demanded to create some new “rights” in place of the “old” ones. By advancing the plebiscite demand, the Soviets were trying to feign some regard for the principles of bourgeois democracy, hoping to win the game even with their opponent’s weapons, and, in case of a refusal, to deal a blow to their image. One way or another, the plebiscite proposal was a new form of contesting the Romanianness of Bessarabia. A simple approval of the very idea of a plebiscite on the Romanian territory between the Prut and the Dniester, six years after the Union, would have cast doubt on the legitimacy of its place within united Romania, as well as on the national unity as a whole. If the idea of a plebiscite, at the time it was launched at the Paris Peace Conference by a “Russian political representation” headed by Prince Georgy Yevgenyevich Lvov, could find some formal justification while the high Areopagus had not yet ruled on the Bessarabian issue, four years after the signing of the Treaty on Bessarabia, later ratified by three signatory countries, in which the Bolshevik Government never asked for the referendum, this sudden but delayed revelation of the Soviet leadership hardly lends itself to a rational reading. After all, the Soviets needed a spectacular entrance into the European arena, and the scope and resonance of such a diplomatic initiative as a plebiscite requirement in a European country could provide them with a whole range of propaganda tools.

In fact, the subtle demand for a plebiscite was, in the hands of the Soviets, a versatile weapon, ready to strike not only at Romania, but also, in the event of imposing a referendum in Bessarabia and creating a precedent, at the entire post-Versailles order, which had to be destabilized and shattered by any means, peaceful or violent. By advancing this demand of great strategic scope and with multiple objectives, the new Russia of the Soviets, which showed no regard for holding referendums within itself, tended to show that it was re-emerging on the international stage as a former Great Power.

First of all, the request for a plebiscite made it difficult for the conference to proceed, but the Romanian delegation, instructed by Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, was prepared for such a turn.
The Response of the Romanian Delegation

In the meeting of 31 March, the Romanian delegation wholly dismantled the entire scaffolding of the Soviet “theses,” showing that: 1) In 1812 Bessarabia was seized by the Court of the Tsars from the Land of Moldavia, violating the unity of its people with the consent of the Ottoman Porte. The Principality of Moldavia, with a compact Romanian population, which in 1812 was a victim of the imperialist policy of the tsars, voluntarily united in 1859 with Wallachia, forming modern Romania. The objection that Romania, under the name given to the modern Romanian state, did not exist in 1812, was immaterial, because there had always been “the same living and unitary nation, having a single common language, the same historical past and an indisputably identical ethnic character.” Uniting with Wallachia to form Romania, “Moldavia naturally transferred all its rights to the latter state” which, as it was pointed out, represents “the same political reality perpetuated in a new form.” 2) The union of Bessarabia with the Romanian state was due to local initiatives and, as supported by the Romanian Government, it was first debated, starting on 25 March, in the fractions of the State Council of the Moldavian Democratic Republic, and then submitted to a vote in plenary on 27 March 1918. After the free vote of the Council of the Country on 27 March, everything that happened in Bessarabia, including the adoption of the agrarian reform and the Declaration of “unconditional” union on 27 November of the same year, belonged to Romania’s internal life. The Soviets had to understand that Bessarabia, forcibly torn from the mother country in 1812, had returned to the motherland through an act of free self-determination. 3) The Union of Bessarabia was recognized by the Great Powers, through the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris, dated 28 October 1920, between France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan, on the one hand, and Romania, on the other, thus acquiring an internationally recognized status.

The Romanian delegation extensively addressed the issue of the “plebiscite” proposed by the Soviet side in utter disregard of all the acts of self-determination of Bessarabia, citing, among other things, a statement by Leon Trotsky, one of the Bolshevik leaders, who characterized in 1922 (“Between Red and White: A Study of Some Fundamental Questions of Revolution, with Particular Referenced to Georgia”) the proposal to withdraw the Red Army from co-opted Georgia and to hold a referendum under the control of mixed commissions made up of communists and socialists as “a most despicable imperialist trap masquerading as national self-determination.” The plebiscite, which the USSR demanded in Bessarabia, was never practiced by the Soviets. The insistence on a plebiscite between the Prut and the Dniester could be interpreted by the
Romanian Government “as being directed specifically against it.” However, on this basis, the negotiations could not be continued.

At the same time, the Romanian Government rejected the proposal of the plebiscite also in order to avoid entering into a flagrant contradiction with the Allies who had put their signatures under a treaty consolidating Romania’s sovereign rights over Bessarabia.

The answer of the Romanian delegation dismantled step by step the whole argumentation of the Soviets, without disregarding the sharper historical aspects pertaining to mutual relations and substantiating with irrefutable arguments, of race and law, the legitimate rights of Romania over the old Romanian province between the Prut and the Dniester. The unequivocal rejection of the plebiscite demand, as a hostile attempt to interfere from the outside in the internal affairs of the country, was also based on a series of cogent arguments, in accordance with the instructions of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu. Thus, the concern for the defense of Bessarabia’s right to be part of united Romania was accompanied by the effort to prevent, by rejecting the idea of the plebiscite, the undermining of the foundations of the postwar peace in Southeast Europe. It was clearly stated that for the Soviets, once they renounced their “historical rights” over the strip of land between the Prut and Dniester, the only solution in the case of Bessarabia that would bring them the friendship of the Romanian people was to recognize the return of Bessarabia to the bosom of the Romanian nation, correcting the errors of the past.7

The End of the Conference

Krestinsky showed in the meeting of 2 April that the Soviet Government did not support the thesis of its “historical rights” and did not insist on keeping Bessarabia “at any cost within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.” He reiterated that he proposed “a plebiscite in Bessarabia,” to determine, under the conditions of guaranteed freedom of expression, whether the population wanted to remain in the USSR, leave the Union and be incorporated into Romania, or would prefer to exist as an independent and sovereign state. The position of the Soviet delegation, Krestinsky declared, was interpreted by the Romanian delegation as “an absolute renunciation by the Soviet Government of all rights over Bessarabia” and as disinterest in its future fate. He objected to the inaccurate interpretation of the meaning of his statement. Krestinsky declared that if the population of Bessarabia were to decide in a free “plebiscite,” contrary to the conviction of the Soviet side, in favor of
“leaving the USSR, forming an independent state, or uniting with Romania,” his Government would agree to any decision and “will not retain it by force” within the Union, as Romania did “with a number of provinces taken from its neighbors.” For the time being, however, as Krestinsky mentioned, his Government continued to consider Bessarabia “as part of the territory of the Union” and “could not recognize that the seizure of Bessarabia by the troops of the Kingdom of Romania in 1918, by force and violence, would create for the Romanian Crown any rights over Bessarabia.”

Convinced that Romania was holding the province between the Prut and the Dniester “despite the will of the overwhelming majority of the population,” the Soviet delegation rejected the Romanian Government’s approach regarding the recognition of Bessarabia as part of Romania. Krestinsky proposed to the Romanian delegation to give up setting “any preconditions” and proceed by mutual agreement to the discussion on the conditions for organizing the plebiscite. In the opinion of the Soviet delegation, this was the only way for “the Romanian Government to avoid the accusation that it holds Bessarabia under its power violently and against the will of the population, as it does with Bukovina, populated mostly by Ukrainian peasants.”

Refractory to the call of the Romanian delegation, the first Soviet delegate, following the instructions of the Political Bureau in Moscow, put even more emphasis on the demand for the plebiscite, not before repeatedly bringing up distorted historical data and empty accusations against Romania. Between these there was also the accusation that Romania fraudulently holds Bukovina, populated, as it was claimed, by “a majority of Ukrainians,” despite the demographic statistics that attested a relatively equal weight between the two predominant ethnicities—Ukrainian and Romanian. In the case of Bukovina, which had never been among the lands of the Russian Empire, the Soviets sought to sneak in the same method of the plebiscite, exclusively under the pretext of unfounded ethnic motivations. The allusion to Bukovina, after the contestation of Bessarabia, outlined the true dimension of the Soviet plans towards Romania, completely confirming the necessity of a firm countering of such subversive intentions.

As Constantin Langa-Rășcanu pointed out, the plebiscite, which the Soviet Government insisted on, was “an exceptional means for solving international difficulties,” when no other means could be found to ascertain the natural political affiliation of a population. Or, “the eminently Romanian character of Bessarabia, as well as its repeated acts of self-determination” made “the entire plebiscite proposal useless and vexatious.” Bessarabia, concluded Romania’s first delegate, “is a living part of the very organism of the Romanian nation,” its surrender or amputation being “an absolute impossibility.”
The Romanian delegation regretted that all its efforts to reach an amicable agreement did not find the expected echo. It noted that the delegation of the USSR refused to change its view on the plebiscite question, departing from the basis of the negotiations set in Lausanne. Consequently, observing that despite all efforts the Soviets persisted in their irreconcilable attitude, the Romanian delegation found itself compelled to suspend the talks and return to Bucharest.\(^{10}\)

Both at the beginning of the conference, and at the end of the proceedings, the Romanian delegation emphasized that the only way to return to the negotiating table was in keeping with the “basis” agreed in Lausanne, which, however, was no longer relevant for the Soviet representatives. The conference came to an end in the evening of 2 April.\(^{11}\)

**Conclusions**

With the end of the Conference in Vienna, it was possible to assess the results of this unprecedented confrontation in the until then short history of Soviet-Romanian relations. At the negotiating table, the delegates of the two countries presented two divergent offers: a plebiscite versus the recognition of Romania’s sovereignty over Bessarabia. Romania’s offer was natural and in full agreement with its national interests of good neighborliness with the Soviets, but also with the policy of the Great Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia. On the contrary, draped in the democratic garb of the plebiscite, the Soviet offer aimed to turn Romania into the training ground of dangerous and toxic experiences for its stability and state integrity and to deceive the Western democracies, seeking to demolish everything that had been built in this part of Southeast Europe, based on the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference. Once these subversive intentions were uncovered and countered, the Soviet representatives would only reap the propaganda fruits of their unfriendly approach. Henceforth, the Bessarabian card would be played by the Soviet propaganda with even greater ferocity everywhere, even regardless of the context, disturbing the waters and poisoning the atmosphere around Romania.

From the stage generously provided by the Government of Austria, where they tried to exploit some of the more sensitive points of the Romanian file, the Soviet delegates conveyed to the whole world that the time of concessions in foreign policy had passed and that henceforth the role of the USSR in the sphere of international relations would have to be given a different weight. The rise of a new Union of incalculable and irreconcilable Soviets was a direct threat to Romania, which saw its eastern frontier threatened as never before in the recent
past, but it was also a challenge to the policies and security interests of the Great Powers in Southeast Europe.

If, until Vienna, the two neighboring states, despite all the diplomatic hostilities, had felt somehow attracted to each other, after the failure in the Austrian capital, the Soviets and Romania would move further and further away from each other for a whole decade. The ultimate and unacceptable demand of the plebiscite, drastically reducing the room for maneuver of the Soviet diplomacy and causing a principled rejection on the part of the authorities in Bucharest, had the effect of closing the doors for a further Russian-Romanian agreement on a negotiated basis.

**Notes**

2. On 19 December 1922, the representative of Romania at the Lausanne Conference, Constantin Diamandy, had a long meeting with the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgy Vasilevych Chicherin, who made an offer for a future Soviet-Romanian conference. According to Chicherin, the Soviets were willing to recognize Romania’s rights over Bessarabia in exchange for the handover of the Romanian treasury assets held in Moscow and the renunciation of any financial claims, to settle other matters in dispute and to sign a non-aggression pact for a certain period with Romania. Chicherin’s offer, however, was directly related to the situation in Russia at the time and did not entail a firm commitment. At the Soviet-Romanian talks in Tiraspol, the readiness of the two sides to meet in a bilateral conference was confirmed (Cojocaru, 51–53).

3. The Declaration of the Council of the Country of 27 March/9 April 1918 on the union of Bessarabia with Romania was voted with 86 votes for, 3 against, and 36 abstentions, 13 deputies being absent, out of a total of 138. The declaration of the Council of the Country of 27 November/10 December 1918 was voted with about 70 (80) votes for, about 10 against, from the total number of 93 deputies on the lists. Mihai Tașcă, “Sfatul Țării a ales România Mare,” Timpul (Chișinău) 27 November 2008; Sfatul Țării: Documente, vol. 1, Procesele-verbale ale ședințelor în plen, edited, introductory notes and commentaries by Ion Țurcanu (Chișinău: Știința, 2016), 92.

4. In relation to this request, it is worth noting that as early as 25 December 1922, in a letter to Litvinov, with reference to the rumors about a plebiscite in Bessarabia, Chicherin indicated that the departure of Romanian troops from the territory between the Prut and the Dniester was the condition for a referendum, which was from the Romanian point of view “absolutely improbable.” “Any intermediate decision, such as autonomy or independence [for Bessarabia],” Chicherin continued, “is for us very acceptable, very desirable, and for Romania, unacceptable.” The referendum, he believed, “would be a precedent for Dobruja, and for Transylvania, and for Banat.” The head of the Soviet diplomacy not only realized the unacceptability for Romania of a referendum in Bessarabia, but had the opportunity to convince himself of this fact, talking with the journalist Iacob Rosenthal, the editor of Adevărul (The truth) Bucharest newspaper, during a discussion at the Lausanne Conference. Chicherin told Rosenthal on 1 January 1923 that in the matter of Bessarabia “our principle leads to a plebiscite, and the decisions of the Council of the Country, taken under the pressure of Romanian bayonets, cannot be considered, in any way, as a plebiscite.” Rosenthal replied that Romania “will not accept, under any circumstances, a plebiscite in Bessarabia.” Therefore, the Soviet ruling circles knew, long before the meeting in Vienna, what would be the reaction of the Romanian Government to the request for a referendum in Bessarabia and, nevertheless, the plebiscite remained the ace in Krestinsky’s sleeve, ostentatiously played in front of the Romanian representatives.

5. Cojocaru, 169–175.

6. In a Note to the Paris Peace Conference of 24 July 1919, of the representatives of the former imperial and post-imperial Russian authorities (Prince Lvov, minister-
chairman of the Provisional Government, Minister of Foreign Affairs S. D. Sazonov, N. V. Tchaikovsky, V. A. Maklakov, the ambassador of the Provisional Government in France), gathered in the “Russian Political Conference,” a plebiscite was requested only in the perimeter of the “four Moldavian counties of Bessarabia” (Bălți, Soroca, Orhei, and Chișinău), which had to be organized “under conditions of maximum trust, as soon as order is restored in Russia.” Until then, a “provisional administration under the tutelage of the Peace Conference” had to be installed in Bessarabia, which had to annul all the measures and decrees of the Romanian authorities. As a principle of self-determination for the peoples of the former Russian Empire, the idea of a referendum was made public on 9/22 December 1917 by the delegation of Soviet Russia at the negotiations with the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk. Thus, p. 3 of the immediate and general peace project of the Soviets provided: “3) National groups that have not enjoyed political independence shall be guaranteed the opportunity to decide freely, by referendum, on the question of their accession to one or another state or of their governmental independence. This referendum will have to be organized in such a way as to guarantee full freedom of vote for the entire population of the territory in question, without accepting emigrants and refugees.” Joseph Noulens, Mon ambassade en Russie Soviétique 1917–1919, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), 197. See also Marin C. Stănescu and Costin Feneșan, Lenin și Trotski versus Ludendorff și Hoffmann: Două cupluri inamice care au schimbat cursul istoriei (1914–1918): Documente, scrieri, mărturii, amintiri și relatări (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999), 405. In reality, the principle of the referendum, accidentally articulated, had no value for the Bolshevik Government, but, at most, only a strictly propagandistic one, being abandoned practically as soon as it was announced, especially since it did not agree with the revolutionary theory of “class struggle.”

7. Cojocaru, 182–188.

8. According to the Austrian census of 1910, the population structure of Bukovina, according to the language of communication, looked like this: 38.4% Ruthenians, 34.4% Romanians, 21.2% Germans, 4.6% Poles, 1.3% Hungarians. Constantin Ungureanu, “Populația Bucovinei în perioada administrației provinciale (1861–1918),” Revista de istorie a Moldovei 1(105) (2016): 35–36.


10. C. Langa-Rășcanu’s statement does not contain any reaction to the USSR’s claims on Bukovina, which can be explained 1) by their deliberate disregard, to emphasize the absurdity and unacceptability of such malicious gestures, or 2) by a lack of attention of the Romanian delegates, taken by surprise by the allusion to Bukovina. Later, various Romanian officials would reject with all their energy any Soviet claims on Bukovina.

Abstract
The Soviets and the Request for a Plebiscite in Bessarabia: One Hundred Years Since the Soviet-Romanian Conference in Vienna from 27 March to 2 April 1924

Six years after the union of Bessarabia with Romania, the works of a Soviet-Romanian conference began in Vienna, on 27 March 1924, after lengthy preparatory negotiations. The delegates of the two countries presented two divergent offers: a plebiscite versus the recognition of Romania’s sovereignty over Bessarabia. Romania’s offer was natural and in full agreement with its national interests of good neighborliness with the Soviets, but also with the policy of the Great Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty on Bessarabia. On the contrary, draped in the democratic garb of the plebiscite, the Soviet offer aimed to turn Romania into the proving ground for dangerous and toxic experiences for its stability and state integrity, and also to deceive the Western democracies, seeking to demolish everything that had been built in this part of Southeast Europe, based on the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference.

Keywords
Romanian-Soviet relations, plebiscite, Vienna Conference (1924), diplomacy, negotiations
Refusal to Negotiate
Britain’s Position and Impact on the World War in 1940

Introduction

The literature on the Second World War devotes an important segment to the decision of the United Kingdom to refuse to negotiate with the Axis Powers in the summer of 1940. This represented a moment when the government in London wanted to show that it was the only actor in the former leadership of the League of Nations that was still resisting Germany’s attempt to change the global order.

The Versailles peace system and the network of collective defense built in Europe, starting with the Locarno Accords (1925), were sabotaged by a weak set of principles that were established to maintain European peace. The incoherence of the Versailles Peace favored the consolidation of some revisionist powers. The 1930s were the scene of political and ideological confrontation, as the interwar collective security system demonstrated its inability to consolidate. Only after Germany annexed Austria (1938) and invaded Czechoslovakia (March 1939) and Poland (September 1939) did the United...
Kingdom and France declare war on the aggressor state. This was a belated attempt to activate the collective peace and security system built in previous decades.3

Germany’s military operations in the West annihilated Western resistance. Belgium capitulated, and France was defeated, with client regimes imposed. German expansion increasingly threatened the United Kingdom. Adolf Hitler prepared his negotiations according to the strength of his opponents. He saw in the United Kingdom, led by Neville Chamberlain’s government, a state desperately trying to avoid war; in France, he saw a chaotic adversary, while the Central and Eastern European states seemed to him actors that he could rule through mediation and arbitration.4 When he took over the government’s leadership on 10 May 1940, Winston Churchill had few options on the table. On the brink of military defeat, France was trying to convince the British leadership to accept the involvement of Benito Mussolini as a mediator between Germany and the Western states. On the other hand, the United Kingdom did not appear to have sufficient military strength to withstand a German attack.5 Ultimately, the British prime minister rejected the proposal to negotiate with the Axis Powers.6

The thesis of this article is that the United Kingdom’s refusal to negotiate with Germany in the summer of 1940 saved Europe at the cost of a world war. From the perspective of the international order, the refusal to negotiate is equivalent to avoiding the legitimization of Germany’s action in international politics.7 Through the lens of international negotiations, the British decision can be interpreted as a strategy to buy time to obtain more favorable alternatives: (a) a defeat of the adversary on the battlefield or (b) a sufficient consolidation of British power towards a rebalancing of the negotiating power in front of Germany.

**Literature Review**

History is written by the victors, not only through peace treaties but also through panegyrics. Winston Churchill was careful to leave to posterity his own perception of the years of World War II.8 Historians and other witnesses to the events later improved the accuracy of the data in these memoirs. The British prime minister’s heroic image dominates much of this war’s historiography.9 However, the decision in 1940 not to accept negotiations with Hitler can also be approached through the lens of strategic risk. Some skeptical authors believe that Churchill’s refusal to leave open the way to negotiations was a strategic error that increased the duration and harshness of the world conflict.10 Buchanan’s analysis of Churchill’s leadership from May 1940 to July 1945 tries to highlight mainly the failure of the British prime minister’s diplomacy:
At war’s end, Hitler and his evil and odious regime had been buried, and Churchill had played a historic role in its demise. But all three of the great causes of his life—keeping socialism from Britain’s door, preserving his beloved empire, and preventing any single hostile power from dominating Europe—had been lost.\textsuperscript{11}

Andrew Roberts portrays a pragmatic leader, showing that Churchill struggled to deal with the geopolitical complexities that World War II brought to the world stage.\textsuperscript{12} However, David Reynolds cautions that the British prime minister’s decisions must be seen in the context of his era, because decision-making is often influenced by the amount of information available at the moment and the pressure created by the dynamics of international politics.\textsuperscript{13} This global dynamic reveals a period of confrontation between the superpowers in the international system,\textsuperscript{14} and Churchill’s decisions had an impact on small states or outside Europe.\textsuperscript{15} For example, the refusal to negotiate hastened the geopolitical movements of Germany and the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe, and states such as Romania were left without the power to resist. The evolution of May and June 1940 events led the Bucharest government to abandon the Franco-German security guarantees and create a new foreign policy strategy.\textsuperscript{16}

This article focuses on the perspective of wartime strategic negotiation and its impact on the geopolitical dimension of international politics. We can consider Churchill’s refusal to negotiate with the Axis Powers as part of a strategic geopolitical calculation, despite the impulsive and stubborn temper that made him famous. The minutes of the War Cabinet meetings in London (May–June 1940), together with Churchill’s famous public speeches and the memoirs of the British leader’s contemporaries, reveal a careful calculation that we can judge through the lens of international negotiations and international conflict management.

**Analysis of the Negotiation Environment**

Winston Churchill came to head the British government in the context of a power vacuum created by the resignation of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax’s refusal to succeed him. This situation smoothed Churchill’s entry into 10 Downing Street. Not being unanimously approved even by the MPs of his own party, the new prime minister created a War Cabinet of five people: three Conservatives (Winston Churchill, Lord Halifax, Neville Chamberlain) and two Labour (Clement Attlee and Arthur Greenwood).
Churchill’s leadership was consultative and delegative, not authoritarian and rigid. He understood that the context in which he exercised his premiership required pragmatism and flexibility, along with resistance to pressure and the ability to manage crises. That is precisely why he focused on creativity and risk in formulating decisions.17

Churchill knew in the most profound detail the evolution of the previous years’ events, being actively involved in the government of the United Kingdom starting from September 1939 in his capacity as First Lord of the Admiralty. He had a crucial say in his country’s military strategy from this all-important position. However, in the eight months that preceded his premiership, Churchill had a poor performance, marked by hesitations and miscalculations. The most resounding failure of the British Admiralty was the Norwegian problem, when the British government underestimated the strength of the German naval forces.18 From the perspective of British diplomatic evolution, starting from 1938, London’s actions were far below the level of the commitments assumed resoundingly in the interwar period, when it portrayed itself as one of the significant guarantors of the European defensive security system. The occupation of Czechoslovakia, days after the signing of the Munich Agreement, showed the leaders at 10 Downing Street that Hitler had no regard for international commitments and could not be considered a credible dialogue partner. However, the British and French reaction to the developments of 1939 was disappointing from the perspective of the alliances they had previously promoted and of how they understood to defend the principles of the international order created after 1919. In the case of Poland, invaded on 1 September 1939, the government in Paris hesitated to take an immediate firm position, delaying by two days the joint Franco-British reaction to declare war on Germany. It was just a statement, without any concrete action; it was valuable time for the armies of Germany and the Soviet Union to deploy in Eastern Europe. The worst geostrategic error committed by France and the United Kingdom was not engaging in the activation of the European defense system and allowing Hitler to open a war front on their borders.19

Encouraged by the lack of real reaction from the Western powers, Germany began to direct its military action towards them. The German Blitzkrieg assault on Holland, Belgium and France destabilized the European balance of power, pushing the United Kingdom into isolation from the continent. The Maginot Line, which should have provided France’s land security, was bypassed by Germany through Belgium and the Netherlands, surprising Paris with no effective resistance. The approach of the German troops to the English Channel announced the imminent capture of the British troops. In this context, the
Dunkirk evacuation (Operation Dynamo) was presented as an organized retreat and the beginning of British resistance.20

The Italian government, which until then had not been directly involved in the events of the previous eight months, expressed its willingness to mediate an armistice between Germany and the Allies. The French prime minister handed this message to Lord Halifax (then foreign secretary). The new government in London was faced with a diplomatic offer to which it had to give an immediate response.21

Analysis of Options and Choice of BATNA

Negotiation is a common practice in international politics, reflecting a circular process that repeats almost rhythmically. Rare are the situations where the negotiation ends with the conclusion of a treaty or agreement. From the negotiation theory perspective, negotiation planning is one of the most critical stages (see figure 1).

![Fig. 1. The negotiation life cycle](https://example.com/fig1.png)

However, in an international environment characterized by a violent conflict, the planning stage suffers massively because it complicates the decision-making process. Time pressure and the impossibility of having all relevant information in creating negotiation options affect negotiation strategy and tactics. Conflict resolution is achieved between two extremes: conflict avoidance (accommodation) or violent confrontation (illegal actions). Between these extremes, there is an extensive palette of intermediate forms (see table 1).

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<th>Table 1. Forms of approaching a conflict</th>
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<th>Negotiations</th>
<th>Administrative decisions</th>
<th>Legal decisions</th>
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<td>Government/administration</td>
<td>Third party decisions</td>
<td>Coercion/violence</td>
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<td>Conflict Avoidance (accommodation)</td>
<td>Informal meetings (discussions and problem solving)</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Mediation (third party, no legal implications)</td>
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Source: Saner, 35.

Mediation is an intermediate form of dispute resolution. It can take three different shapes: facilitation, formulation, and manipulation. Regardless of its forms, mediation offers the opportunity for amicable reconciliation based on equity and equality before the law. The year 1940 witnessed the escalation of conflict where decisions were made based on relative knowledge of dynamic data about the adversary’s actions. Heuristic approaches (prejudices and intuitions) dominated decision-making processes in such fluid and uncertain terrain. For example, what we know today, after eight decades, gives us a picture of the tension experienced by the five members of the War Cabinet in London.

In the stage of preparing a negotiation position, the team involved must identify the Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). However, this objective requires an analysis of the negotiation environment, projecting costs and benefits, and internal debates to accommodate the option. In May 1940, Churchill had two real options: negotiation with Hitler or resistance.
After receiving the letter from the French government, there followed five days of heated debates between the impulsive Churchill and the much more calculated Lord Halifax. The British prime minister believed that the United States president should have been the one to approach Mussolini and not London through the French government, as it was a real sign of vulnerability to Hitler. On the German side, Churchill would have accepted the restitution of German colonies and the acceptance of German domination over Central Europe as a negotiation offer. Everything else was non-negotiable.24

In reality, the context of May 1940 left Churchill with only two options: (a) armistice, which meant a weakened United Kingdom, lacking sovereignty and under German influence, which would have led to its exclusion from the European balance of power, and the disappearance of the liberal democratic system; (b) resistance, which could have become a model of national but also international inspiration and mobilization, as well as the prospect of creating a possible international front against Germany. In other words, the British prime minister had to choose between an uncertain peace and a risky war. In the logic of the negotiations, the British government’s BATNA was based on the fundamental interest of national survival and maintaining the integrity of the United Kingdom. This analysis was based on the awareness of a low ability to use the Royal Air Force, which had been poorly trained in previous decades.25 Therefore, the best alternative to negotiation with Hitler was continued struggle and British independence.26

Impossible Negotiation. Refusal to Negotiate

Churchill’s refusal can be analyzed through the lens of the range of strategic options available to the United Kingdom in May 1940 and a rational calculation: cost–benefit. Negotiation theory shows that effectiveness is measured by the ability of actors to identify their fundamental interests and avoid positioning themselves on flexible principles.27

In May 1940 Churchill spent three days debating with members of his Cabinet whether to negotiate with Germany or not. About these debates, neither the prime minister nor the foreign secretary admitted, in their memoirs, that they had taken place. Only in 1990, five decades later, did the British Archives reveal the secret minutes of the War Cabinet, and ‘CAB 65’ covers the complex and intense debates of 26–28 May 1940.28

The five days of deliberations in the British War Cabinet are an illustration of the prisoner’s dilemma. In the absence of sufficient information and under time pressure (two elements essential to defining “bounded rationality”29), Churchill
relied on intuition when he assumed that rejecting negotiations with the Axis Powers might have led to a better long-term outcome.\textsuperscript{30} Equally, the British leader believed that accepting the negotiations would have meant a betrayal of fundamental values and national integrity, too great a cost for any possible temporary benefit.\textsuperscript{31}

War can be interpreted as a form of disturbing the balance of power whereby the adversary is forced to return to the negotiating table. This meaning existed in the political thinking of Winston Churchill, but Adolf Hitler did not have the experience of the British leader. Negotiation was a form of tactical delay for the German chancellor, just as it was for Joseph Stalin. As a result, this process had to be adapted to the new diplomatic semantics. The interpretation of the objectives and actions of the adversaries had to be passed through the filter of the intelligence action. It was precisely this paradigm difference that Churchill sensed when he refused to negotiate with Hitler. Weakening the adversary and its allies was becoming essential for the postwar balance of power to be as favorable as possible to Great Britain. The end of the United Kingdom leader’s speech in the House of Commons on 18 June 1940 can be interpreted in this key. In this logic, the British leader considered it useless to sacrifice the British alongside France, and the best message would have been that London would continue the fight against Hitler for the liberation of Europe.

\textit{Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.}\textsuperscript{32}

Churchill’s intuitive decision meant a paradigm shift from a disadvantageous positional negotiation for the United Kingdom to a principled negotiation that involves a focus on mutually beneficial options.\textsuperscript{33} In this case, “mutual” should be replaced by “Allies,” because the prospect of resistance to the negotiation was to increase the bargaining power of the allied states.

\textbf{The Impact on Europe}

By refusing to negotiate with Hitler, Churchill extended the war to Germany’s disadvantage, but at great risk to the United Kingdom and the Central and Eastern European countries. The move of the British government forced the German leader to accelerate the processes of influencing the governments of the Central European states.
A week after Churchill’s speech in the House of Commons, French resistance was crushed, not even 46 days after the assault of German forces had begun. Officially, the security system envisioned in the 1930s has collapsed. Just as in 1812, when Tsar Alexander I, faced with the imminent danger of Napoleon’s invasion, hastened the peace with Turkey and annexed Bessarabia, in 1940 the fall of France led Moscow to rush the eastern plan of Soviet geopolitical strategy. Within weeks, through fierce coercive diplomacy, the Soviet Union implemented the secret provisions of the Molotov–Ribentrop Pact and annexed the pre-World War I territories that had been under the rule of the Russian Empire. Germany had to concern itself with a geopolitical adjustment of its interests in Central Europe in such a way that its Soviet partner did not obtain a position that was too advantageous. In this logic, Hitler became the guarantor of border changes regarding Romania, maintaining both the Bucharest and Budapest governments in check.

Viewed from a broader perspective, the British refusal to come to terms with Hitler also represented a signal to the other states to begin a collective resistance against Germany. Thus, London became the headquarters of resistance for numerous exile organizations in Europe: the Polish government in exile, the Czechoslovak government, the Yugoslav government, the Free French government. In fact, a true center of European anti-fascist resistance was created in London.

Final Remarks

In the long run, the refusal to negotiate strengthened Britain’s position as the main bastion of resistance to German expansionism in Central Europe. This gesture encouraged other states to enter the war alongside the Allies. Hitler’s Blitzkrieg was slowed considerably by the British resistance and the strengthening of the Alliance. This persistence in the war led to the defeat of the Axis Powers and the definition of a new world order. Keeping the United Kingdom in the war showed that Europe could not be dominated by a single pole of power, which had a major impact on the balance of power on the continent. This decision preceded the later involvement of the United States and the Soviet Union in the war.

The Molotov–Ribentrop Pact (23 August 1939) was the founding act of a world order in which the Soviet Union and Germany divided Europe into spheres of influence. Hitler’s geopolitical calculations included the annihilation and domination of the Western powers so that he could then exercise control
over Central Europe, a space he shared with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{39} However, less than a year after the signing of the Pact, the United Kingdom decided to defy the emerging world order in 1940 and refused to accept an unfavorable and humiliating negotiation with Germany. The refusal to negotiate was an act of delegitimization of the Soviet-German understandings and their actions on the international stage.

Winston Churchill’s gesture marked the beginning of building an alternative world order. The main tools used by the British leader were the negotiations (with the Allies) and the war speech, through which he always emphasized the values that had to shape the new postwar world order. However, in the new global construction, new spheres of influence were redrawn, and the Central-Eastern European states that, before 1938, had received security guarantees from France and the United Kingdom were handed over to the Soviet sphere of influence in exchange for a new international peace system. Therefore, Churchill’s refusal saved Europe from a global order and paved the way for an alternative.

Notes

17. Many traits of Winston Churchill’s personality and the manner in which he exercised his office as prime minister are to be found in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (New York, 1991); Paul Addison, *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero* (Oxford etc., 2005); Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (London, 2017); Roberts, *Churchill*.
25. Lloyd George, chapter 9.

**Abstract**

Refusal to Negotiate: Britain’s Position and Impact on the World War in 1940

In 1940, amidst World War II, the United Kingdom, under Prime Minister Winston Churchill, decisively refused to negotiate with the Axis Powers. This article explores the strategic implications of this refusal, arguing that it prevented the legitimization of Germany’s aggressive policies and altered the war’s course. By analyzing the Versailles peace system’s failures, Churchill’s leadership, and the geopolitical shifts resulting from the United Kingdom’s stance, the article highlights how this decision shaped the postwar world order, influencing Europe’s geopolitical landscape and setting the stage for an Allied victory.

**Keywords**

World War II, Winston Churchill, UK foreign policy, Axis Powers negotiations, Central Europe
Due to its sheer reality, the historical fait accompli of the EU’s existence, there are very few critical perspectives on the process of European integration that can count at the same time as alternatives to it. In other words, quite few of the critical approaches to the European Union can claim to be addressed from a similarly real—or realizable—historical process of continental integration. Most of EU’s critiques, whether they are expressed in a more populist, trashy way, or in a more sober one, be it right or left leaning, can be easily dismissed or ignored by the EU’s establishment as mere intellectual exercises, addressed from a moral or theoretical high ground deprived of realism. In this strict sense, there is probably only one critique that is—or rather was—at the same time the expression of an alternative project of European integration, and

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that is the perspective of the East-European socialist bloc and of its own attempt at supranational or sub-continental integration—the COMECON. This perspective has not only the merit of being articulated from a rival, critical, and similarly real project of European integration, but also of being strictly contemporary to the first, decisive phases of Western integration, thus capable of throwing a precious light, nowadays lost, on the origins and early dynamics of what eventually became the European Union.

Notwithstanding all these merits, the reconstruction of the COMECON’s perspective on the process of West-European integration is beyond the scope of this article. What I intend to do here, instead, is merely to probe into this horizon by focusing on the peculiar role and perspective of one of the most unique actors caught in this historical process of continental rival integration and disintegration—namely, the perspective of socialist Romania on both the COMECON and the West European nascent EEC. Due to its unique trajectory, having started as a faithful Soviet pupil and then developed into a staunch internal oppositionist of the socialist bloc, communist Romania’s perspective can highlight—through its contrasts and shifting alliances—the content, scope and aims of the socialist critique of European integration, thus providing a fertile entry point into this whole topic.

It is no wonder that, due to its unique trajectory and hence privileged perspective, communist Romania’s foreign policy, especially towards the socialist bloc and the rival capitalist camp, has been the object of a certain scholarly interest, both in its time and more recently. However, none of these approaches matches the range and volume of the archival research produced recently by Elena Dragomir, in a series of articles and books. In what follows, I will first discuss Dragomir’s archival reconstruction of this topic, focusing on her two recent monographs—*Opoziția din interior: România și politicile CAER față de CEE* (The internal opposition: Romania and the CEEA policies towards the EEC), 2019; *O relație asimetrică: România și Piața Comună* (An asymmetrical relation: Romania and the Common Market), 2022. The second part of the article will be devoted to some critical considerations on the allegedly pragmatic, adaptive, and non-ideological nature of Romania’s foreign policy stance during this period, as established by Dragomir, but also by previous scholarship on this topic. The article will conclude by briefly bringing back into focus the “ideological” aspect of this foreign policy relationship and strategy, which is rather neglected in these recent reconstructions of this topic.
Romania and the COMECON

Dragomir’s extended survey of communist Romania’s dealings with its socialist surroundings and the West-European project of continental integration focuses primarily on the archival material of the various meetings, committees, negotiations, and political decisions that took place between these three actors—communist Romania, the COMECON partners, and the EEC member states and establishment. In reconstructing communist Romania’s perspective and relations with these actors, Dragomir neatly separates between two aspects of this complex process: on the one hand, the ideological critiques that communist Romania expressed, in its media and through its leaders, with regards to the nascent capitalist integration of EEC; on the other hand, the pragmatic approaches and relations that Romania tried to establish with the Common Market and its member states. There is no doubt as to the hierarchy of these two aspects. The latter one, the pragmatic, real relations between the Socialist Republic of Romania (SRR), the EEC (and the COMECON) is clearly the most important one for Dragomir, covering, in her latest two monographs, more than 1,000 pages (including the two volumes that gather all the relevant archival documents); while the ideological critiques of the EEC, which are discussed in a few dozen pages, are seen as secondary. In Dragomir own words:

Even though Romania’s view remained in general critical with regard to the Common Market and the project of Western integration, its pragmatism—derived from following its own interests—pushed Romania in a different direction than the Soviet one. This indicates, again, that in the (economic) foreign policy of postwar Romania, ideology mattered less than it was initially thought, the role of ideology being overtaken by the commercial-economic interests.10

And yet, as Dragomir argues, ideology, and specifically the ideological critiques of Western capitalism and of the Common Market, were not quite mere décor, but did fulfil a double instrumental role: that of anti-capitalist, socialist rhetoric for the public at home and at large; but also, more efficiently or pragmatically, that of counterargument to any socialist attempt at a similar regional Eastern integration. In other words, the main role of the various denunciations, in the Romanian press, especially from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, of the EEC as a capitalist, imperialist and monopolist project was that of resisting and opposing any similar supranational project or temptation among the socialist bloc—in short, the critique of the EEC was meant as a preemptive critique of the COMECON.11
This certainly is plausible, at least in the sense that Romania’s pragmatic relation with Western Europe and the Common Market was primarily determined by Romania’s non-position in—and opposition to—the Eastern socialist system and its possible integration; the cause of Romania’s insistent courtship of the former was her irreducible distrust of the latter. But also in the sense that, as Dragomir shows, the very project of socialist integration under the umbrella of the COMECON came—or was revived, under Khrushchev—as a reaction to the first signs of European integration in the mid–50s. These Western attempts, materialized in the Treaty of Rome, the European Coal and Steel Community, the ultimately failed European Defense Community, and the Euratom, were perceived by the socialist states as both a menace to their future economic trade with the West, and as a model to be replicated in the interior of the socialist bloc. This perspective on the nascent EEC was logically translated in the socialist states’ behavior, i.e., their concerted attempts at increased integration of the COMECON, which, as Dragomir rightly shows, was never merely a Soviet pet project or instrument of dominating its satellites. In this collective push towards socialist regional integration, the socialist states actively and indeed pragmatically tried both to resist and replicate, at a similar level, the menace and model of supranational Western European integration. Romania instead had a different opinion from the get-go, arguing, on the one hand, that Western integration cannot function as a model for socialist integration, being suited only to monopoly capitalist formations; and, on the other hand, that its menace was not so serious for the socialist states, which could still count on developing bilateral relations with the Western states, notwithstanding the integrationist push in the West. How legitimate was this optimism, this faith in the perdurance and development of bilateral relations with the member states of the EEC will be seen later. For now, it should be remembered that, as stated before, for communist Romania, and in contrast to the stance of the other members of the socialist bloc, the nascent EEC was clearly not seen as a menace or as the main menace—since for Bucharest the main menace was the projected socialist integration in the East, and the only chance of resisting this was through developing commercial ties with the Western states and the Common Market.

Romania’s repeated, staunch opposition to any attempt at socialist integration of the Eastern bloc is amply documented by Dragomir’s first two-volumes monograph—Opoziția din interior: România și politicile CAER față de eec (1957–1989). This is quite a spectacular, yet monotonous reading. What is disconcerting is Romania’s consistency in opposing, for more than 30 years, any initiative that might have made even the smallest step towards regional integration, using the same arguments and the same tactics, even though the external, continental context had changed dramatically in the meantime. This certainly throws
a dubious light on Romania’s allegedly “adaptative” strategy—which is, pace Dragomir, the second most important characteristic of Romania’s foreign policy in this period, after its already praised “pragmatism.” How was this strategic behavior adaptative, if it remained exactly the same in a completely changed situation? Its strategy of hoping to circumvent the socialist integration by means of developing bilateral ties with the Western states might have made some sense until the 1970s, when the Western integration was still only an uncertain project, and individual states in the West could still chose their own foreign economic policies, thus allowing small socialist states to exploit the differences and divergent interests existing between them; but this bilateralist strategy certainly did not make much sense afterwards, when the EEC managed to impose its common economic framework, forbidding its member states from developing bilateral agreements on their own, and thus forcing the external parties—among them Romania and the other socialist states—to negotiate with the Western bloc as such, from a much weaker position and in a considerably more imbalanced relationship—a highly predictable development amply documented by Dragomir’s second two-volumes monograph, aptly called *O relație asimetrică: România și Piața Comună (1957–1989)*. But more on this—on the appropriateness of notions such as “pragmatic” and “adaptative” as defining traits of communist Romania’s foreign strategy—in the third section of this article.

The first expressions of dissent by communist Romania towards the project of integration of the socialist bloc were articulated as soon as Khrushchev made his first attempts to revive and consolidate the empty shell of the COMECON as left by Stalin. This was the famous moment of Romania’s oppositionist stance in the 1962 discussions, celebrated in virtually all the scholarship on communist Romania’s foreign policy as the first signs of its anti-Soviet opposition and turn towards a national-sovereign stance. Faced with the menace of the ECSC, the socialist bloc, argued Khrushchev, should increase the economic integration at the level of the COMECON, by coordinating the various national economic plans, increasing the specialization of the member states and devising, eventually, a single economic plan for the whole bloc. Since other socialist states were already comparatively more industrialized than Romania, this effort towards specialization, intended to preclude the wasteful redoubling of existing industries and lines of production among the members of the COMECON, would have meant allocating for Romania the role of foodstuffs and raw materials provider in the socialist bloc. As is well known, Romania heroically rejected this proposal, with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s leadership thus opening the path towards the national sovereigntist stance pursued later by Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Over the ensuing decades, Romania consistently persisted in this “pragmatic” approach, resisting any proposals for socialist integration on any occasion: by
rejecting the “Prague Program” in 1962; by basically emptying out the “Minimal Program” proposed in 1964 and then sabotaging its implementation. But also, more awkwardly, after 1968 and the coming into force of the EEC’s common agricultural policy, which implemented tariffs and negatively affected 90% of the socialist states’ exports towards the EEC; in 1971, by rejecting the “Complex Program,” at a time when the Common Commercial Policy of the EEC came into force, gradually ending all bilateral relations and forcing the socialist states to deal directly with the protectionist behemoth of the enlarged EEC; and then, from the 1970s onwards, as the issue of the recognition of the EEC by the socialist bloc and its member states repeatedly came on the agenda, by making sure that the mutual recognition between the EEC and the COMECON was deferred sine die, or at least that it would come only after the establishment of official relations between the individual socialist states and the EEC—a position extremely convenient to the EEC, which did not have any interest in recognizing the COMECON as an equal partner and preferred, instead, to approach each socialist state separately, from a much stronger position.

On every occasion, at each reunion of the COMECON, Romanian leaders argued that the COMECON should keep its initial statute, that of a merely “consultative” forum, and that the economic plans of each member state constituted an indispensable part of their national sovereignty that could not be infringed by any step towards supra-national integration. The tactical toolkit included: repeatedly invoking the original, Stalinist charter of the COMECON, in which it was designed as a merely consultative organ, deprived of any power; resorting to the principle of the “interested party,” whereby only those states that were interested in the policies proposed should take part in the agreement; and then later, when this principle threatened to leave out Romania from the possible regroupings of the other socialist states, by claiming its interest, but also its disagreement with the specifics of the proposed plans—a tactic which again had the effect of blocking any proposals, thus functioning as a sort of perverse veto.

The very success of these tactics in blocking any integrationist initiative at the level of the COMECON are an indicator of the significant influence that Romania enjoyed in this institution and prove that, if it wanted to, it probably could have used its leverage also for constructive aims, by ensuring, for example, that the projected integration was achieved on fair terms for the countries involved. Instead, Romania used its influence in the socialist bloc only in a negative, disruptive, and vetoing way, while trying to apply positive, constructive pressure in its relationship with the capitalist EEC, repeatedly asking for better trade terms and for a less protectionist stance from the Common Market in its regard—all, unsurprisingly, fruitless efforts.
Romania and the Common Market

The history of these failed efforts is the topic of Dragomir’s most recent monograph—*O relație asimetrică* (2022). Just like the previous one, this also makes for a spectacular yet somehow monotonous reading: it documents three decades of failed attempts, and of more and more negative outcomes, of Romania trying to persuade the EEC establishment to grant it freer access to its markets and less protectionist taxes, licenses, and portfolios, a decades-long effort during which the limited, occasional gains did not alter the clearly downwardly, ruinous, more and more “asymmetrical” relation.

All through the decades,

*Romania’s exports were heavily affected by EEC discrimination. Trade relations were not free, based on price and quality competitiveness, but imposed and carefully controlled by the Community, so that its producers were always at an advantage.*

In the late 1960s—that is, in the most beneficial period, as bilateralism was still the rule—the Romanian imports from the EEC countries were overwhelmingly dominated by technological products (51% industrial technology and means of transportation, 41% chemicals and manufactured products), while its exports towards the EEC countries consisted in large part (85%) of foodstuffs and raw materials. Practically, in its dealings with the West, Romania was already trapped in exactly the same situation it wanted to avoid in the Comecon, and this was even before the increased integration and enlargement of the EEC and the consolidation of its protectionism, which only made things worse. As Dragomir notes, in spite of all the efforts of the Romanian leaders and negotiators to improve the tariffs, quotas, and general parameters of its trade with the EEC, “these efforts were ‘annihilated’ by the prohibitive and discriminatory measures imposed by the Common Market.”

“This situation was unfavorable to the economic interests of Romania,” leading to a widening deficit in its balance of trade. The situation would only get worse with the coming into force of the EEC common agricultural policy and common economic policy, which gradually ended all bilateral relations among states, and imposed limiting tariffs and licenses on the bulk of Romania’s trade with the EEC. All through the decades, we witness the bizarre spectacle of a communist state, cap in hand, asking the capitalist world for free trade, while the developed “free world” erects all sorts of protectionist barriers in its path—from frequent anti-dumping infringements, through drastically curtailing the import licenses, to high tariffs, negotiable proposals etc.
Another tactic employed by Romania in trying to soften the protectionism of the EEC was by joining GATT—one of the first socialist countries to do so. Yet nothing came out of this either: as Dragomir drily summarizes,

*despite the initial hopes, Romania failed to benefit from non-discriminatory treatment by the EEC or developed countries in general—precisely because GATT allowed derogations from the principle of non-discrimination.*

Another tactic employed was, from 1968 onwards, that of asking to be recognized, in international trade, as a developing country by the West, hoping that by gaining this status it would enjoy the same system of general preferences that the developing countries enjoyed in their dealings with the EEC and, in general, with the developed capitalist states. This aspect allows us to make a few remarks on a recent trend in communist historiography—the “socialism goes global” approach, focusing on the relations between the Eastern socialist states and the non-aligned movement, or Third World more generally. Much is made, in this approach, of the global, internationalist impetus of the Eastern socialist countries, and of their anti-colonial solidarity with the Global South. However, from Dragomir’s reconstruction, the case of Romania, in this whole field, appears in a quite different, unique light: in its case, “socialism went global” only because it refused to go regional. Or, rather, it was its undermining of any chance of building a regional socialist system—in a word, its anti-socialist foreign policy—, coupled with its failure to court any favors from the capitalist bloc, that forced communist Romania to “go global.” Moreover, this turn towards the Global South did not have much to do with a presumed anti-colonial solidarity, being instead grounded in more “pragmatic” concerns. Romania’s request to be recognized as a “developing country” was actually, in its concrete effects, quite un-solidary towards the developing countries themselves: as Dragomir shows, most of the other East-European socialist states were seen, and accepted to be seen, as developed countries, hence they were generally donors of preferential treatments and tariffs to their Third World partners, not receivers. By asking to be recognized as a developing country, Romania was instead hoping to achieve not only better terms of trade with the EEC and Western capital, but also with the Global South, by receiving, and not giving, preferential treatment in their mutual trade. It goes without saying that this strategy of begging thy neighbor, although it produced some occasional results by establishing in the late 1970s and 1980s bilateral deals with various states from the Third World, did not persuade the EEC to alleviate its protectionist stance towards Romania.

As for the benefits of joining and petitioning the IMF, again before most of its socialist brotherly neighbors, see below the issue of debt.
Switching, as Romania tried to do from the 1970s, to a more “proactive,” not only reactive, stance towards the EEC, by starting various initiatives, did not improve its situation either. Nor was the Community willing to contemplate the idea of granting Romania credits at low interest rates—thus pushing it towards the IMF and private financial institutions. Moscow warned Romania, already in 1970, that it would have great difficulties in repaying the credits contracted on the Western markets. Yet, already from 1974, Romania had to contract credits from the IMF and the IBRD to finance its imports from the West, which it could not balance through its exports. As for its pragmatic relation with the EEC, “Romania did not succeed in obtaining a sectoral agreement on financial credits, just as it hadn’t been able to obtain such a sectoral agreement for transports, fishing and agriculture”—the technology and industry imports being already severely regulated. From the ‘80s onwards, with Romania’s brutal austerity by means of which it tried to repay in advance the foreign debt, thus curtailing severely the imports from the EEC, the Common Market became even more punishing in its retaliation and uncompromising in its stance towards Romania. And this, in spite of all the persuasive effort made by the Romanian side, which rightly—but vainly—explained that

*the surplus recorded in Romania’s trade balance with EEC countries was exceeded by the cumulative value of the imports from the EEC and the payments made to EEC countries on account of its foreign debt.*

*By the end of 1988, Romania (was) the only East-European country not to have established official relations with the EEC . . . Romania was willing to grant official recognition to the Common Market, in exchange for a global trade agreement on the terms proposed by Bucharest. But the tactic did not bear fruit. On the contrary, it proved to be counterproductive.*

So what, then, was the pragmatic result of all these pragmatic efforts?

**Pragmatism?**

As Dragomir herself candidly puts it, “in practice, Romania’s pragmatism did not produce the desired outcome, because of the stratagems employed by the Common Market.” Was it then only a pragmatism in theory, if in practice it proved to be such a failure? But how come, if the theory—the official, repeatedly stated ideology—was itself a warning against the naivety and dangers of such a “pragmatic” approach?
The very succession of the titles of Dragomir’s recent monographs—from the “internal opposition” in the COMECON to the “asymmetrical relation” with the EEC—should cast doubt over the “pragmatism” of Romania’s strategy towards its European partners East and West: precisely because of that “internal opposition,” of sabotaging every chance of a functional socialist regional system, Romania was trapped, for what concerned its most pressing economic needs, in an “asymmetrical,” exploitative relation with the EEC, left on its own at the mercy of Western capital, ending up in less than two decades totally thrashed by the international markets, in virtual economic default, avoided only by the harsh austerity and sacrifices imposed on its own population. Why was all this pragmatic?

The only sense in which this behavior could be called pragmatic is if we limit the subject and horizon of discussion to the perceived interests of the ruling elite, if we assess this pragmatism strictly as a logic of power: since the Romanian rulers knew it was the Soviets that put them in power, they were well aware that this implied both a lack of real legitimacy at home, and a constant danger of an expeditive deposition—or even reshuffle—at the hands of those same Soviets that had put them there. Hence, the most pragmatic thing to do, in order to ensure their survival at the top, was to try to carve up a space of autonomy from the Soviets, thus increasing their legitimacy back home, and opening a space of maneuver outside the borders. But in this sense, any ruler who holds desperately to his throne, no matter the costs, is pragmatic. And in the case of communist Romania, as we saw, the costs were quite exorbitant. What we must inquire, instead, in order to validate this pragmatism, is whether it was capable of ensuring the material conditions of its own survival, whether its actions actually supported the avowed pragmatic aims. And from this perspective, communist Romania’s foreign policy was not pragmatic at all. On the contrary, it was quite misfortunate, and its disastrous results should not have come as a surprise, as they were perfectly predictable on the basis of Romania’s own ideological declinations, i.e., its repeated rhetorical expressions of socialist solidarity and its no less frequent critiques of Western state monopoly capitalism.

Moreover, if we limit the meaning of Romania’s pragmatism merely to its resistance and defiance of Moscow, because this served the immediate interests—the very survival—of the ruling elite, then the whole breakthrough of a “new interpretative paradigm” which is repeatedly announced by Dragomir in her monographs evaportates into a mere terminological relabeling. As Dragomir explains, the burden and focus of explanation in the traditional scholarship on communist Romania’s foreign policy is its relation with Moscow, which is usually portrayed either as defiance, autonomy, relative autonomy, complicated balance etc.—but which, in any case, is seen to have overruled all other
concerns. But if the only meaning of “pragmatism” in the new interpretative paradigm is the same old autonomy from Moscow—because it was the only concrete gain, in an otherwise generally disastrous train of multiple consequences—then the innovation is merely terminological. Not coincidentally, despite its claims to a new interpretative paradigm grounded in the idea of “pragmatism,” Dragomir’s reconstruction shares its positive appreciation of communist Romania’s foreign policy with the supposedly more traditional takes on it. It is a common feature of almost all scholarly research on communist Romania, even those most anticommunist—and Dragomir’s fortunately does not fall in this category—to praise its foreign policy, most of all because it was anti-Soviet, because it was grounded on the desire to create a relative autonomy from Moscow. Dragomir simply gives the label of pragmatism to this anti-Soviet strategy already established by the traditional historiography—but its “pragmatic” virtues were already well documented in that old “interpretative paradigm.”

Unfortunately, any other possible meaning of this allegedly “pragmatic” grand strategy, besides its anti-Soviet tones, lacks any content or foundation.

This lack of pragmatism, this utter ingenuity, is already striking in the first major decision undertaken by communist Romania in the international field, its famous opposition to Khrushchev’s plans for integrating the economies of COMECON members.

First of all, in those fateful debates of 1962, the issue on the table was not the choice between industry and agriculture, a distinction which tends to quickly overlap with the bigger and heavily charged one between modernity and Middle Ages. It was, instead, a question of choosing between heavy industry, focusing on capital goods or, in Marxist terms, on the Department I (of means of production), and the alternative of developing a modern, rational, efficient agriculture and light industry, by focusing the production on the Marxian Department II (of means of consumption). With the benefit of hindsight, given our ongoing ecological and food crisis, as well as the general trend towards de-industrialization on the European continent, which dramatically affected Romania’s comparatively inefficient and wasteful heavy industry even more than it did the other countries, the choice should have been clearly in favor of the proposed plan for socialist integration. Not to mention the fact that, accepting the plans for socialist regional integration and Romania’s allocated role in it would have meant, in time, creating an optimal basis for a truly ecological industry and agriculture, devoted to society’s most immediate needs and preponderantly using local resources.

But even without the benefit of hindsight, the dangers facing Romania’s oppositionist stance should have been quite clear—and they revealed themselves as such in no time at all. By opposing Khrushchev’s plans for the COMECON, com-
munist Romania’s “pragmatic” and “adaptative” approach meant it refused being trapped in a presumably unequal exchange with its socialist allies, in which it would have been forced to sell raw materials and agricultural products while importing industrial technology and finished products from its neighbors. Yet this exchange mustn’t have been such an unequal and unfair one as feared by the Romanians: judging from the experience of the other socialist states, it was not at all at dominated by the Soviets, but was instead based on quite advantageous terms and subsidized treatment for their socialist “satellites.”36 Not to mention Romania’s effective influence in the ranks of the COMECON, which its own successful internal opposition testifies—a level of influence which was absolutely missing in its relation with the EEC. Instead, by rejecting the socialist integration and its allocated position in it, Romania had to conduct exactly the same kind of business and trade with the Western states, and from the 1970’s with the EEC, exporting mainly raw materials and foodstuffs, and importing industrial products and technological know-how, but on considerably much worse terms and in a much more unequal relation than the one offered in the projected socialist integration. The idea that this unequal exchange with the rival capitalist bloc could have helped Romania in becoming an industrialized country, thus reducing its gap towards the developed world—that is, towards that same developed capitalist West that aptly exploited its asymmetrical relation with Romania—was clearly devoid of any realism, and should have been seen as such if only the Romanian leaders had given some thought to their own repeated “ideological critiques” of capitalism and of the imperialist bloc. Instead, by using this anti-capitalist and socialist discourse as a mere façade, and throwing themselves in the arms of Western capitalism simply in order to counter the perceived Soviet threat, Romania ended up, as was quite predictable, with a costly heavy industry that was not only much less efficient than the heavy industry in the developed West, but also in comparison to its immediate rivals, the other socialist states, and which, moreover, especially in its penchant for the chemical branch, once Romania’s oil and gas reserves started dwindling, ended up with an industrial infrastructure lacking its basic raw materials—which again had to be imported, on disadvantageous terms, and in exchange for agricultural and textile products, from abroad.37 A lose-lose situation, predictable from the get-go, which nonetheless still passes for pragmatic and adaptative.

The impossibility of achieving the stated goal—functional industrialization, massive economic upgrade—through the unequal exchange with the capitalist West should have been quite plain not only for a hardened Marxist, but even for any decent economic strategist: one cannot pass from a preponderantly agricultural, non-industrial economy to a highly technologized industry with the prof-
its derived from trading agricultural, non-industrial products in exchange for highly technologized products, because this unequal exchange, especially when your partner is a rival, capitalist bloc, which has absolutely no interest in granting you any preferential treatment, by definition does not produce any surplus or profit to be reinvested. And this is where the issue of debt—foreign debt—comes in: precisely in order to re-balance the structural imbalance of its trade with the EEC and the West, Romania had to borrow and incur more and more debt—which, less than a decade later, would push it towards practical default, avoided only by imposing savage austerity. Again, all this spiral of debt-austerity-breakdown, which sealed the fate of Romanian communism, was a direct consequence of that same “pragmatic” foreign policy and economic strategy, of Romania’s sabotaging the chance of regional socialism and throwing itself in the arms and at the will of the capitalist camp. So, what was “pragmatic” about it?

The same thing also applies to the notion of “national interest,” which Dragomir often uses as a synonym for Romania’s alleged pragmatism in international relations: all its actions were, allegedly, subsumed under the imperative of “national interest.” But the whole concept of “national interest” is, in itself, quite non-communist or at least quite inappropriate to describe the behavior of a communist state. The only national interest of a communist state is, by definition, to safeguard and consolidate its communism. And this, for a country like Romania, could only be achieved by integrating the country in a functional socialist international system. Hence, its “national interest” was inherently anti-nationalist. The idea of building communism in a single state, against the resistance, or at least independently from its regional neighbors might make some sense for a country like the Soviet Union in the 1930s, whose size and whose encirclement by hostile powers practically did not leave any other choice. But this strategy did not make any sense for a country the size of communist Romania, surrounded as it was only by socialist allies. In other words, in the dilemma international socialism vs. national economic autonomy by means of heavy industrialization, from a truly Marxist-Leninist perspective there is no question as to their priority. The internationalist imperative clearly comes before the imperative of heavy industrialization. The former pertains to strategy; the latter is merely a tactic. This hierarchical relation between the two imperatives is also expressed chronologically: the first five-year plans came into force in the Soviet Union in the 1930s only after the failure of international socialism, and as a forced reaction to it—encirclement, hence socialism in a single country and autonomy, hence focus on heavy industry and on producing the necessary means of production. But in conditions of international, brotherly socialism—and the postwar COMECON and socialist bloc provided these real, historical conditions—
there is no imperative of national autonomy and hence no necessary sacrifice for heavy industry. Specialization, division of labor, fair exchanges and socialist solidarity should be quite enough.38

At the same time, this proves that Romania’s behavior was rather un-pragmatic even in the most common sense of the term—which Dragomir uses often—, that of sacrificing ideological concerns for concrete, immediate gains. As shown above, there were no concrete, immediate gains from Romania’s “pragmatic” behavior, but only predictable negative results, while the reason for sticking to this strategy in spite of its negative outcomes was rather ideological in itself, in the most basic sense of misguided, delusional strategy: it was a strict adherence to the Stalinist formula of privileging heavy industry at all costs, but in a context in which this tactic did not make any sense anymore—which rendered it precisely a delusional, ideological approach, and, as such, un-pragmatic.

This whole discussion is not about judging whether the perceptions of Romania’s communist rulers were accurate or not—and Dragomir rightly refrains from this.

The present research grants special attention to the actors’ perceptions and convictions, without trying to answer whether these were accurate or not, whether they corresponded to reality or not . . . Ignoring or refusing to take into account the perceptions and convictions (of an actor), especially when he “perceives” imminent and ominous threats to its interests and security, simply on the grounds that these perceptions do not correspond to “reality” as it is defined by the analyst, is a fundamental error.39

But this discussion is not about comparing the Romanian communists’ perceptions to reality. It is, instead, an attempt to compare their behavior with their declarations, their allegedly pragmatic approach to the EU and the COMECON, on the one hand, and their critique of this state monopoly capitalist formation and their socialist decantations, on the other hand, and to probe into the cognitive disjunction and logical gap that divides them. The problem in Dragomir’s treatment is that by taking these perceptions and convictions as real (for the actors involved), and then characterizing the foreign policy built on them as pragmatic, realist and adaptive, she ends up validating them as also true. What is problematic and unaddressed here is precisely the gap between the actors’ perceptions—their fundamental distrust of Moscow—and their avowed convictions—their repeated expressions of socialist solidarity and anti-capitalist critique. Now, for the Romanian elite, the former (the distrust towards Moscow) was obviously real, but one can doubt whether it was all that true: after all, as Dragomir repeatedly remarks, the COMECON was not a Soviet instrument for
dominating its satellites, but a genuine attempt at integration embraced by most of the socialist states. Furthermore, as recent scholarship has amply proved, doing business with Moscow and the other socialist states was clearly not as bad as doing business with Western capitalism and the EEC turned out to be. So, in brief, the Romanians’ perceptions (their apprehension of Moscow) might have been real (for them), but quite doubtful in actual fact, or at least in comparison to other more menacing potential business partners. As for the other term—the Romanian elite’s avowed socialist and anti-capitalist convictions, they appear not to have been real at all, not to have been really believed by the Romanian elite, although they were quite probably true: their repeated critiques of state monopoly capitalism and their repeated socialist declarations should have alerted them to the danger of sabotaging the project of socialist regional integration and of abandoning one’s economic fate to the mercy of international monopoly capital.

If this is true, then the whole aspect of the “ideological” critiques, by the Romanian communists, of Western capitalism in general and the EEC in particular, and the whole “state monopoly capitalism” theory on which they were grounded turn out to be considerably more important than Dragomir concedes—and more than the Romanian communists assumed them to be.

It is an odd thing that Dragomir does not give much importance to the concept of “state monopoly capitalism” (and, in general, to the ideological critiques of the EEC formulated by Romanian authors and rulers). Odd, because the very content and context of the numerous documents and meetings that she discusses are a strikingly immediate confirmation of the validity of that concept. Most of the negotiations, proposals, accords or treaties between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the EEC were done through “technical, unofficial contacts between senior officials of the two parties.” Since both the political and the security aspects were, as it were, out of discussion—the latter being firmly entrenched by the existence of the two military blocs, the former precluded by the lack of official recognition between the two actors—, all these negotiations and accords touched exclusively only the economic aspects, and thus strikingly show the state (and even more the supranational West European formation) in its most banal Marxian posture, as the representative and agent of the collective interests of its capitalists, or as the executive of its own state (or super-statal) monopoly capitalism. This is what all these tense and repetitive “political” negotiations are all about: who gets to sell and buy what and on what conditions, in the “national interests” of its concentrated, monopolist private capital in the West, or in the interests of the nationalized, state capitalism in the East.

I will attempt in a different paper to reconstruct the meanings and strategic deployments of the theory of “state monopoly capitalism”—more exactly, the
various conceptual Soviet layers of this theory (Lenin’s, Stalin’s and Varga’s) and the dialectic relation between them, as well as communist Romania’s initial rather rigid, restricted understanding of it, and its further ideological shift or rearticulation of the theory from the 1970s onwards. For now, and to conclude, this re-opening of the ideological aspects of communist Romania’s “pragmatic” foreign policy should allow us a final methodological or conceptual argument, on the role and weight of such labels as “pragmatism,” “realism,” and “ideology” in historiographical reconstructions.

A possible objection to our argument here could point to this: by criticizing and deconstructing the “pragmatism” of Romania’s foreign policy aren’t we, perhaps, in danger of falling in the opposite trap, that of reconstructing this history in quite idealistic and moralistic terms as failed opportunities, dubious communist convictions and internationalist treason? Perhaps, this argument would continue, communist Romania’s foreign policy should be reconstructed not in these terms, as failed or grasped opportunities, as pragmatism or ingenuity, but in a more materialist and context-determined way, as simply Romania’s forced choice—only choice—in the given context. From this perspective, communist Romania’s choices and actions are, perhaps, quite understandable: because of the original birth scene of Romania’s communist regime, because of Moscow’s looming ascendence over it, because of the negative and exploitative nature of the first forms of economic “cooperation” with the Soviet Union—the Sovroms under Stalin—, and finally because of a “realist” awareness of the economic backwardness and West-dependency of the countries of the socialist bloc, Romania opted—like many developing countries—for a typical developmentalist strategy based on import substitution industrialization, which logically entailed imposing protectionist and independentist, autarchic relations with the immediate competitors in the socialist bloc, while trying to upgrade its economy with the help of Western technology and capital. From this perspective, the issue of foreign debt can also be realistically reassessed, as Romania borrowed “pragmatically” at the beginning of the 1970s when capital was cheap, and only found itself with unsustainable debts at the end of the decade because of the unpredictable evolution in foreign markets and US monetary policy. As for communist Romania’s “courtship” of the capitalist West, proper consideration should be given to the peculiarity of Western Europe and the EEC in this context: the reason why Romania was so insistent in its courtship had much to do with its conviction that Western Europe might become a real “third-way” alternative to US capitalism. This belief was, again, quite realistic or understandable in its context, given all the theatrics of de Gaulle’s sovereigntist opposition to NATO and the EEC in the 1960s and given the Ostpolitik and détente context of the 1970s. In this context, it was quite natural for Romanian
strategists to consider the West European countries as a power less hostile and protectionist than the US, and less threatening than the Soviet Union, and thus to base the economic development of the country on building economic ties with them. From this perspective, the coming into force of the EEC and of its protectionist foreign economic policies spelt the ironic end of this European illusion for the Romanian communists, the end of Western Europe as a possible sovereign power, distinct from both Moscow and Washington, allied or friendly to other independent, sovereign and non-aligned countries. Though it should be said that this development, while contradicting the hopes that the Romanian communists placed on Western Europe in the late ’60s and early ’70s, was very much in line with their predictions made in the late ’50s and early ’60s, on the impossibility of Western Europe attaining its autonomy from the US and its incapacity to really act as a major third power.

While all these components of the evolving context were certainly real, and perceived as such by the Romanian communists, what I try to argue here is simply that this context was, nonetheless, as all context is, also ideologically pre-constructed. And the first ideological prerequisite of this seemingly spontaneous, “realistic” apprehension of the existing context was conceiving of socialist Romania on the likeness of its ruling elite, as a country which is threatened first of all by its socialist neighborhood, and which can forge a future for itself only against the pull and the pressure of Eastern socialism. Which is a policy and an ideological conviction most probably realistic in its perceived, preconstructed context, yet quite anti-socialist in its premises, and un-pragmatic in its outcomes.

Notes

1. See, e.g., from a thousand titles, Craig and Elliott 2009.
4. See on this Marsh 1984; Romano 2014; Kansikas 2014; Broad and Kansikas 2020; and especially Godard 2014.
5. Communist Romania’s, and in general the socialist bloc’s relations with the other main geopolitical actor of the time, the Global South or the “non-aligned movement,” has recently began to be discussed more consistently—see e.g., Mark, Iacob, Rupprecht, and Spaskovska 2019; Mark and Betts 2022; Djagalov 2020. I will only touch very briefly this aspect here, seeing it strictly as an element and a consequence of Romania’s stance and great strategy towards the other two main geopolitical actors, the socialist bloc and the Western capitalist camp.
10. Dragomir 2022, 1: 121.
11. I leave here aside the whole discussion about the *supranational* nature of the EEC and the *intergovernmental* one of the Comecon. On the one hand, the Romanians were quite sensitive to this distinction—witness their repeated attempts, documented by Dragomir, to address the European Council (thus the intergovernmental body of EEC) only to be repeatedly sent to the Commission (its supranational body). But on the other hand, for what concerned the Comecon, the distinction did not matter at all for Romanian negotiators, since everything pertaining to the Comecon, any small step towards inter-governmental coordination was perceived as a supranationalist menace.
13. It might sound slightly awkward to praise one’s capacity to translate her/his convictions into her/his behavior—as this should be quite banal and obvious. Yet communist Romania’s own foreign policy towards the Eastern and Western bloc is precisely—as the rest of the article will show—a case of erratic behavior that confirms the accuracy of its avowed convictions in the exact same measure in which it ignores or outrightly defies them.
14. Kansikas (2014) sums up well the position of the smaller socialist states: “if they negotiated alone against the EEC they would be very weak and they knew it. If they had the backing of the Soviet Union, the CMEA (COMECON)—and thus its members—would be stronger. On the one hand, they had to accept that the Soviet Union would have more control; on the other, they could at the same time hope to affect Soviet policy choices.”
15. The integration of the EEC was still, throughout the ’60s, a highly contested and uncertain project. It was only from the turn of the ’70s, with de Gaulle’s removal as the last strong representative of the idea of “national sovereignty’ in Western Europe and the ensuing enlargement and consolidation of the EEC, that it acquired the truly ineluctable, irreversible aura that its fait accompli presents to us today. It is also worth remembering that the mid–1960s EEC crisis of the ‘empty chair’ of France—the highpoint of de Gaulle’s opposition to the ‘supernational’ integrationist push by the EEC—was provoked by France’s refusal to cut down and abide by Community standards on its trade with the communist states, especially its grain exports to China (see Ludlow 2007 on this).
18. See Kansikas 2014 for a brilliant reconstruction of this process at the turn of the 1970s.
19. As the Romanian leaders acknowledged in an internal meeting: “on all the issues in which we could not introduce our point of view, we got away by using this formula: only the interested parties,” Dragomir 2019, 133.
22. Dragomir 2022, 1: 111.
23. Dragomir 2022, 1: 166.
24. “In Romania’s opinion, the developing countries did not have the capacity to truly influence the international milieu.” Despite this awareness, or rather because of it, Romania was hoping that the developed countries would “end voluntarily the system of commercial discriminations,” and that they had to be “persuaded to assume their collective responsibility that they had towards the developing countries”—which Romania tried, and obviously failed. The utmost naivety of this “anti-colonialist” approach, hoping to eradicate the world’s divisions through mere persuasion and voluntary renunciation by the imperialist camp, voids again of all content the notion of Romania’s “pragmatism.”
25. Dragomir 2022, 1: 156.
26. “Both in the West and in the East, it was argued or suggested that Romania was a developed socialist country, which should therefore be a donor and not a beneficiary of preferences. Bucharest responded with its own concept of generalized customs preferences. According to it, Romania was a socialist developing country entitled to preferential treatment on the same terms as the rest of the developing countries. As a developing country itself, Romania was not a donor of preferences to other developing countries” (Dragomir 2022, 1: 178).
27. In the tragic context of the 1977 earthquake, the European Community made a gesture of humane solidarity by granting Romania export licenses for a series of products worth 7.6 million dollars. Though, as the Romanians bitterly noted, this was exactly the same amount and the same products already agreed on in the previous negotiations (Dragomir 2022, 1: 279).
29. For a reconstruction of the history of communist Romania’s foreign debt from the perspective of international capital, see Grama 2019–2020.
32. Dragomir 2022, 1: 385.
33. Dragomir 2022, 1: 260.
35. See Mureșan 2008; Stanciu 2013, but also even the staunchly anticommunist Cioroianu 2013, chapter 10.
37. See Ban 2014, 41–82 for a reconstruction of the disastrous unfolding of this economic and foreign strategy.
38. Not to mention the fact that the focus on creating a self-sufficient national heavy industry is not at all—as Dragomir claims—a sine qua non of communist policy. This developmentalist, “import substitution industrialization” effort is (and was at that time) quite common to states that did not claim to be socialist; while important socialist states—see China under Deng, or Yugoslavia—opted instead for a strategy focused more on the production of means of consumption.
41. One should not make out too much of this “pragmatic” and peaceful approach of the eec towards the socialist states. It was not at all a sign of its ability to transcend Cold War divisions but, on the contrary, as for instance Ludlow 2007 shows, an expression of its (temporary, now lost) ability to exploit the entrenched divisions of the postwar world and profit from the security arrangements of its position in the Western camp.
42. I thank Adrian Grama and Vali Stan for these critical comments.
43. In this respect, it should be stressed though that all through the 1960s and early 1970s the Romanian press abounded in stories about the dollar crisis and its instability as global currency—hence, the imprudence of contracting huge credits in such currency should have been quite visible. See, for instance, Tănăsescu 1962; Comisioneru 1965.
44. For such views on Western Europe as a possible alternative sovereign power to the us, see e.g., Brucan 1968; Câmpeanu 1968; Aldea 1973; Șerbănescu 1973.

References


**Abstract**

Forging Europe Under Communist Eyes: The European Community, the COMECON, and Socialist Romania

This article aims to critically discuss the foreign policy of communist Romania, especially towards Western Europe and the socialist bloc. It does this firstly by reviewing Elena Dragomir’s recent ample analyses of communist Romania’s foreign policy. Its second section consists in a critical problematization of the allegedly “pragmatic” and “adaptative” nature of communist Romania’s dealings with its Western and Eastern partners, as established both by Dragomir’s recent contributions, as well as the traditional scholarship. The paper ends with some more general methodological and conceptual reflections on the role, weight, and meaning of “pragmatism,” “realism,” “context” and “ideology” in historiographical reconstructions.

**Keywords**

communist Romania, foreign policy, COMECON, European Community, pragmatism, ideology, integration, state monopoly capitalism
“Let no one imagine that if Albania is small, if the Albanian Labor Party is a small party, it must do as someone dictates to it, when it is convinced that this someone is wrong.”

On 4 June 1954, Nikita S. Khrushchev addressed a letter to the communist and workers’ parties in which he announced his intention to normalize relations with the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY). The letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) must have surprised decision-makers in Tirana in an unpleasant way. However, given Albania’s economic dependence on the Soviet Union, on 21 June 1954, the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA) agreed to the Kremlin’s actions. Of course, Moscow’s positive attitude towards Yugoslavia and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) deeply displeased Enver Hoxha, given that the Soviet–Yugoslav split of 1948 had given the Albanian leader the opportunity to purge the pro-Yugoslav PLA group led by Koçi Xoxe.

In May–June 1955, after an extensive exchange of letters, a Soviet delegation led by Nikita S. Khrushchev...
visited the FPRY, marking the abandonment of the Stalinist view promoted within the Cominform since 1948. The decision of the Soviet leader to visit Yugoslavia further disappointed the Albanian side. In addition, on 23 May 1955, Khrushchev addressed a letter to the communist and workers’ parties proposing the annulment of the resolution on Yugoslavia adopted by Cominform members in November 1949. Initially, Albanian decision-makers expressed reservations about the proposal of the Central Committee of the CPSU, stressing that such a decision could only be adopted after an extensive debate within Cominform. But the Albanian opposition manifested itself only behind closed doors, and at the end of May 1955, in a speech to the People’s Assembly of the People’s Republic of Albania (PRA), Enver Hoxha publicly approved the steps initiated by the Soviets towards Yugoslavia. Subsequently, on 24 June 1955, the Albanian communists sent the Kremlin a second reply to the letter of 23 May 1955, this time agreeing with the Soviet stance towards Yugoslavia. Regarding the first negative answer, the Albanian side justified its stance by the “subjectivity” resulting from Yugoslavia’s hostile activity towards the PRA. The Albanian letter of 24 June 1955 also stated: “We also apologize once again to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for our grave mistake and promise that we will make no more mistakes in this matter.” Moreover, on 18 July 1955, a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the PLA was convened during which the Soviet letter of 25 June 1955 was discussed (the letter in question detailed the course of Soviet-Yugoslav negotiations). According to Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, the plenary unanimously approved the results of the Soviet delegation’s visit to Yugoslavia. Also, at the 3rd Congress of the PLA in May 1956, Enver Hoxha praised the Soviet efforts aimed at normalizing relations with Yugoslavia.

On 6–11 January 1956, a conference of communist and workers’ parties of socialist states was convened in Moscow to discuss economic and foreign policy issues. In his speech on 7 January 1956, Enver Hoxha spoke of the need for other socialist countries to provide economic aid to Albania, again agreeing with the Kremlin’s foreign policy (including normalizing relations with Yugoslavia). Only a month later, the 20th Congress of the CPSU was convened. At a secret meeting on 25 February 1956, Nikita S. Khrushchev delivered his famous speech condemning Stalin’s abuses (including the cult of personality). The Soviet leader’s secret report was viewed with skepticism by the communist leaders in Central and Eastern Europe, as Stalinist epigones feared being purged on the orders of the Kremlin. However, none of them dared criticize the new stance promoted by the Kremlin, publicly expressing their agreement with the decisions adopted at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. In his ideologically contaminated memoirs, Enver Hoxha argues that although Soviet attempts to
normalize relations with Yugoslavia had strained relations between Tirana and Moscow, the Soviet–Albanian split began with the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Thus, referring to the secret report delivered by Khrushchev on 25 February 1956, the Albanian leader pointed out the following:

After we had read it we immediately returned the terrible report to its owners. We had no need for that package of filthy accusations which Khrushchev had concocted. . . . We returned to Albania heartbroken over what we had seen and heard in the homeland of Lenin and Stalin, but at the same time we returned with a great lesson that we must be more vigilant and more alert towards the activities and stands of Khrushchev and the Khrushchevites. Only a few days later the black smoke of the ideas of the 20th Congress began to spread everywhere.13

However, the statements of the Albanian leader are false. In reality, in 1956, Enver Hoxha had done the same as the other communist leaders in Central and Eastern Europe, publicly supporting the decisions adopted at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. For instance, in November 1957, during the meeting of the communist and workers’ parties in Moscow, Enver Hoxha stated the following:

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is a shining example; it fought heroically and creatively against the mistakes in its work, especially against the mistakes committed in the last period of Stalin’s life. And we have learned and will always learn from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.14

Between 14 and 19 April 1956, a conference was held in Tirana during which several communist leaders criticized the PLA’s political line. While on vacation, Hoxha urgently returned to the capital, succeeding through some skillful maneuvers to isolate the leaders who had challenged his authority.15 In his memoirs, the Albanian leader identified two culprits for his difficulties in April 1956: Khrushchev, who had instigated the revolt, and Josip Broz Tito, who had masterminded the plot. According to Hoxha:

The attempt to attack the leadership of our Party at the Tirana Conference in April 1956, an attempt which failed, was the work of Belgrade revisionists but, at the same time, it was also the work of Khrushchev and the Khrushchevites. With their revisionist theses and ideas, the latter were the inspirers of the plot, while the Titoites and their secret agents were the organizers.16

Still, the stance adopted by the Albanian leader in 1956 was diametrically opposed. Thus, on 21 April 1956, in a letter addressed to party organizations,
Hoxha considered that the main instigators for the developments that characterized the Tirana conference were “anti-party elements” within the PLA.\textsuperscript{17}

In terms of the relations between the People’s Republic of Albania and Yugoslavia, the first half of 1956 brought no change. But the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution would cause a deterioration in relations between the CPSU and the LCY, with the two sides beginning an extensive exchange of letters regarding the Yugoslav request that Imre Nagy and his collaborators be allowed to leave for the FPRY.\textsuperscript{18} The strained relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia must have been well received in Tirana. For now, however, Hoxha refrained from taking his own stance on the Yugoslav attitude towards the Hungarian Revolution. Thus, the political line adopted by the Albanians was one of ideological conformity. To the disappointment of the leaders in Tirana, Soviet–Yugoslav negotiations were held in Romania in August 1957, at the end of which a joint document was drafted stipulating the unity of opinions of the two sides regarding the international situation.\textsuperscript{19}

The difficulties encountered by the Soviets in Hungary and Poland in 1956 convinced the Kremlin leader of the need to adopt a Declaration of the communist and workers’ parties. Therefore, on 16–19 November 1957, an International meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties was held in Moscow, the purpose of which was to reaffirm the ideological primacy of the Kremlin, seriously affected by the Hungarian Revolution. At the end of the meeting, a Declaration of Communist and Workers’ Parties of Socialist Countries was to be adopted, containing the principles of the international communist movement, so that events similar to those of 1956 would never occur. In fact, CPSU leaders drew up a draft Declaration to be debated at the conference. To Moscow’s surprise, the leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC) opposed the draft Declaration, stressing that only the peaceful path of transition from capitalism to socialism was mentioned.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, a joint Sino–Soviet draft of the Declaration was prepared, which included the non-peaceful path of transition from capitalism to socialism. As for Enver Hoxha, he fully agreed with the joint Sino–Soviet draft Declaration, adding the following:

\begin{quote}
We also fully agree with Comrade Mao Zedong who said that the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, not only saved us, liberated us, not only defends us, but also has a huge historical revolutionary experience, as well as the experience of building socialism, experience by which we must be guided. The enemies of socialism are trying to cut us off from the Soviet Union, so that we remain, as our people say, like fish out of water. But that’s never going to happen.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}
To Albanian satisfaction, 1958 would witness a further strain on Soviet–Yugoslav relations. Thus, the Kremlin condemned, through letters addressed to the Yugoslavs, the ideological misconceptions promoted by Belgrade in the Program of the 7th Congress of the LCY. Therefore, all communist and workers’ parties from the socialist states, at Moscow’s request, condemned “Yugoslav revisionism.” At the beginning of 1959, present in Moscow at the 21st Congress of the CPSU, Hoxha showed his total obedience to Moscow. Thus, at this congress, the Albanian leader stated the following:

The Albanian people and the Party of Labor of Albania have delegated us, their representatives at this congress, to express to you, dear comrades, from this high rostrum and through you to the Communist Party and its Central Committee, the Soviet people and its government, our deepest gratitude for all they have done and are doing for the good and happiness of the small Albanian people. The freedom and national independence of the Albanian people, their happy life today and their bright future are due, in large part, to the brother Soviet people and the dear Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In all they gave the Albanian people help and support, with all the nobility of their great hearts.

In May 1959, a delegation of the Central Committee of the CPSU visited Albania. In their memoirs, Nikita S. Khrushchev and Enver Hoxha mention the Kremlin’s request that the Albanian hosts refrain from publicly condemning the LCY during the visit. The authorities in Tirana accepted Moscow’s request, during the visit the Albanian press refraining from publishing polemical articles. The joint declaration, signed on 30 May 1959, stipulated unity of opinion on the international situation. Although the joint statement condemned revisionism, it made no direct reference to the LCY. Moreover, the two parties indicated their intention to develop relations with the FPRY. If in his memoirs, Khrushchev describes the visit to Albania as a pleasant one, the discussions being conducted in a friendly atmosphere, Hoxha, in his memoirs, described the visit as an unpleasant one, marked by disagreements between the two sides regarding the economic policies pursued by the PRA.

In February 1960, while in Moscow, Hoxha was informed by Anastas I. Mikoyan about the increasing intensity of Sino–Soviet dissensions. The Albanian leader called for a meeting between representatives of the CPSU and the CPC aimed at resolving differences between the two sides. Subsequently, relations between the CPSU and the CPC became significantly strained. In April 1960, Beijing published the booklet Long Live Leninism on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Lenin’s birth. Although it did not directly name the Soviets, it
promoted ideological views contrary to those promoted by the CPSU on issues such as the aggressive nature of “imperialism,” “the main characteristic of the contemporary period,” the paths of transition from capitalism to socialism, or the doctrine of peaceful coexistence. Moreover, the 11th session of the General Council of the World Federation of Trade Unions, held on 5–9 June 1960 in Beijing, would witness the ideological dissensions between the CPSU and the CPC. Interestingly, the Albanians considered the Chinese attitude during the meetings in Beijing to be unjust, a sign that in early June 1960 the PLA leadership had not adopted a final decision on the Sino–Soviet differences.

The deterioration of Sino–Soviet relations determined the leaders of the CPSU to send, on 2 June 1960, a letter to the communist and workers’ parties of the socialist states during which they advocated for a conference on the international situation arising from the failure of the Paris summit. The Kremlin also proposed the adoption of a joint declaration of the communist and workers’ parties, adding that the conference could be held in Bucharest, where the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers’ Party was scheduled to take place in June 1960. Decision-makers in Beijing refused to participate in such a conference, citing the untimely nature of the convocation. Therefore, on 7 June 1960, in a new letter addressed to the communist and workers’ parties of the socialist states, Moscow, stressing that some parties had decided to postpone the conference, added that this did not exclude the exchange of views in Bucharest, without any decision being taken.

Therefore, at the request of the Soviets, between 24 and 26 June 1960, the Conference of Representatives of Communist and Workers’ Parties was organized in Bucharest. On the eve of the meeting, the Kremlin disseminated among the participants a comprehensive note on the Sino–Soviet ideological differences. The Soviet note of 21 June 1960 condemned the Chinese ideological views on issues such as “the main characteristic of the contemporary period,” the problems of war and peace, the paths of transition from capitalism to socialism, or the doctrine of peaceful coexistence. The Bucharest Conference saw the plenary manifestation of the Sino–Soviet differences, with most communist and workers’ parties rallying behind the ideological visions promoted by the Kremlin. However, the communist and workers’ parties of North Korea, Vietnam and Albania adopted a stance of neutrality. In his memoirs, Enver Hoxha claims that he had anticipated that Sino–Soviet differences would be discussed in Bucharest and therefore he had preferred to send Hysni Kapo as a PLA representative. Given its dependence on Soviet economic aid, the stance adopted by Albania during the Bucharest conference was incomprehensible to Khrushchev. In his memoirs, the Soviet leader claims that Hysni Kapo
spoke openly in favor of China. Nevertheless, the statement of Khrushchev is untrue. During the debates at the Bucharest conference, Kapo expressed his regret regarding the Sino–Soviet differences, calling for their resolution through bilateral talks.

After the Bucharest Conference, on 9 August 1960, the Central Committee of the CPSU invited Hoxha and other PLA leaders to spend their vacation in the Soviet Union. Albanian communist leaders refused to comply with the Soviet invitation, stressing that preparations for the 4th Congress of the PLA required their presence in the country. Also, on 13 August 1960, the Central Committee of the CPSU addressed a letter to the Albanian communist leaders, during which they called for bilateral meetings to discuss Soviet–Albanian differences. The response of the decision-makers in Tirana was negative, claiming that the planned Soviet–Albanian negotiations were aimed at condemning the CPC, which would represent a violation of Marxist-Leninist norms. Moreover, on 27 August 1960, the Central Committee of the PLA addressed a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Central Committee of the CPC during which it emphasized that the conference in Bucharest had been premature and inconsistent with Leninist norms. According to the Albanians, the Sino–Soviet differences should have been discussed in bilateral meetings between the CPSU and the CPC. If these meetings failed, only then could the Sino–Soviet differences be discussed in a conference of the communist and workers’ parties. Therefore, between July and August 1960, the stance of the PRA changed from neutrality to an obviously pro-Chinese one.

In November 1960 an International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties was held in Moscow. In October 1960 a drafting commission was created (consisting of representatives of 26 communist and workers’ parties) to debate the draft Declaration prepared by the Central Committee of the CPSU. During the 6 October 1960 meeting, the Albanian representative, Hysni Kapo, rallied behind the Chinese ideological views, arguing that the accusation in the draft declaration that the CPC had denied the possibility of peaceful coexistence was wrong. The November 1960 Conference marked a resurgence of Sino–Soviet differences. As already mentioned, in June 1960 the Central Committee of the CPSU had disseminated among the participants in the Bucharest Conference a comprehensive note on the Sino–Soviet dissensions. On 10 September 1960, the Central Committee of the CPC distributed among the communist and workers’ parties from the socialist states its response to the Soviet note of 21 June 1960. In this tense context, on 5 November 1960, during the Moscow Conference, the Central Committee of the CPSU disseminated among the participants its response to the Chinese letter of 10 September 1960. The vast majority of delegations of communist and workers parties present in Moscow
supported the ideological views of the letter of the CPSU, while representatives of Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, and North Korea adhered to the stance promoted by the CPC and the PLA.

On 12 November 1960 negotiations were held between the delegations of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the delegation of the Central Committee of the PLA, but they failed due to the refusal of the Albanian communist leaders to discuss the differences between the two sides.44

On 16 November 1960 Enver Hoxha delivered an extensive speech to the Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties. From the very beginning, the Albanian leader sent a message to Khrushchev:

*Let no one imagine that if Albania is small, if the Albanian Labor Party is a small party, it must do as someone dictates to it, when it is convinced that this someone is wrong.*45

Referring to the Bucharest Conference of June 1960, Hoxha accused the Soviets of having requested the delegations of the communist and workers’ parties present in Bucharest to condemn the CPC.46 The Albanian leader also claimed that, after the Bucharest Conference, Albania had asked the Soviets for 50,000 tons of grain, but Moscow had agreed to supply only 10,000 tons. According to Hoxha:

*Once, Comrade Khrushchev used to tell us: “Don’t worry about the bread, what you consume in a year, the rats eat here.” Thus, the rats in the Soviet Union could eat, but the Albanian people could starve until the leadership of the Party of Labor of Albania submitted to the will of the Soviet leadership.*47

Addressing the Yugoslav question, Hoxha criticized the annulment of the November 1949 Cominform decision, considering Khrushchev’s policy towards Yugoslavia to be wrong.48 The Albanian leader would also criticize the secret report49 delivered by Khrushchev on 25 February 1956 at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. According to Hoxha, Stalin should be considered a “glorious Marxist.”50

After the speech delivered by the Albanian leader, representatives of the communist and workers’ parties from Poland,51 Bulgaria,52 Hungary,53 and Czechoslovakia54 criticized the stance adopted by Enver Hoxha and Deng Xiaoping. In this context, on 24 November 1960, the representatives of the PLA disseminated among the delegations of the communist and workers parties a statement expressing their regret for the anti-Albanian stance adopted by some participants during the conference.55

Following Enver Hoxha’s speech, the Central Committee of the CPSU distributed a note on the main issues raised by the PLA leader. According to the Soviets,
the Bucharest Conference had been organized with the unanimous consent of the participants, and within it representatives of the communist and workers parties had freely expressed their opinion and reached “unanimous conclusions.”56 Regarding the Yugoslav question, the Soviet note emphasized that since 1954 Albania had agreed with all policies adopted by the Central Committee of the CPSU towards the LCY.57 Referring to the Albanian leader’s statement that Stalin should be considered a “glorious Marxist,” the Soviet note stated that in 1957, at the Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties, Hoxha had congratulated the Central Committee of the CPSU for exposing Stalin’s mistakes.58

If in November 1960 the Soviet–Albanian dissensions were disseminated among the communist and workers’ parties, 1961 would witness the total split between the two sides. Thus, on 20 January 1961 the Soviet government decided to withdraw the Soviet specialists from the Albanian oil industry within 7–10 days.59 In February 1961, the 4th Congress of the PLA was convened in the presence of 24 foreign delegations. The authorities in Tirana emphasized that the PLA’s political line was Marxist-Leninist, in line with the Declaration of the Communist and Workers’ Parties of 1960. In fact, the Albanian communist leaders would take credit for having contributed decisively to the drafting of this Declaration, stressing that the draft Declaration drawn up by the Central Committee of the CPSU was a non-Marxist one.60

Also in 1961, major disagreements between the two sides arose regarding the military base at the Bay of Vlorë. Thus, on 27 March 1961, Andrey Antonovich Grechko, supreme commander of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, wrote a letter to Beqir Balluku, minister of Defense of the PRA, during which he discussed a series of incidents between Soviet and Albanian soldiers at the Vlorë naval base. The Soviet official stated the following:

*The facts prove that lately, contrary to these statements, an intolerable situation has been created in Albania, to our regret, in terms of the attitude towards Soviet soldiers, Soviet specialists and their families. This situation is, in our opinion, a consequence of the line taken by some officials in Albania in order to strain relations with the Soviet Union.*

In order to de-escalate the situation, the Soviet marshal proposed that all warships from the Bay of Vlorë be served exclusively by Soviet military personnel. If the Albanian side refused the Soviet proposal, all warships would be withdrawn from the Bay of Vlorë.62 On 28 March 1961, Beqir Balluku responded to the Soviet letter of 27 March 1961, rejecting the accusations that Albanians had shown a hostile attitude towards the Soviet military.63 Regarding the possibil-
ity of withdrawing the Soviet warships and military personnel from the Bay of Vlorë, Beqir Balluku stressed that this would have meant a violation of agreements between the two sides and an attack on the sovereignty of the PRA.64

As a result of this exchange of letters, on 29 March 1961 the Political Consultative Committee (PCC) of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) adopted the decision that the military ships in the Bay of Vlorë should be served by the Soviet military under the command of the Unified Soviet Command, subordinate to the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization.65 If the Albanian side refused to implement the decision of the PCC, the Soviet military forces would be withdrawn from their base.66 On 5 April 1961, Mehmet Shehu addressed a letter to the PCC in which he emphasized:

*If the Soviet government does not agree to observe existing agreements about the Vlorë naval base and decides to remove its military forces from that base in accordance with the abovementioned decision of the Political Consultative Committee, the government of the People’s Republic of Albania—although it opposes such a decision—will not interfere and will be prepared to render assistance to the Soviet Union in evacuating its naval forces from the Vlorë naval base.*67

On 26 April 1961, the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) responded to the Albanian letter of 5 April 1961. Regarding the naval base at Vlorë, the Soviet government announced its intention to withdraw the Soviet military personnel and their equipment. According to the Soviet letter:

*In view of the fact that the Albanian Government has adopted a negative attitude towards the decision of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the Soviet Government is regretfully forced to withdraw all submarines, surface ships, auxiliary ships and other means of combat deployed at the naval military base at Vlorë.*68

On 27 April 1961, in a letter addressed to the Soviet military in the PRA, the Central Committee of the CPSU mentioned the differences between Tirana and Moscow, informing them of the decision to withdraw the Soviet troops and equipment.69 In the note of the USSR embassy in Tirana of 3 June 1961, the Soviets accused the Albanians of refusing to participate in negotiations on how to evacuate the Soviet troops from the Vlorë naval base.70 Moreover, the Soviets accused the Albanians of piracy. Thus, the Soviet note of 3 June 1961 stated the following:
A proof in this regard is also the fact that, so far, only a part of the Soviet maritime military forces and equipment has been evacuated from Vlorë, and 4 submarines, the floating dock Nemchinov, 10 small surface ships, 22 auxiliary ships and a considerable amount of weapons, equipment, materials and other items have been seized by the Albanian side. The Albanian government did all this despite the fact that in its letter in response to the decision of the Political Consultative Committee it promised to assist in the evacuation of Soviet naval military forces and equipment from Vlorë.\textsuperscript{71}

On 6 July 1961, the Council of Ministers of the PRA responded to the Soviet letter of 26 April 1961. According to the Albanian authorities, in accordance with the agreements concluded with the USSR on 12 September 1957 and 3 May 1959, the military equipment from the Vlorë naval base had become the property of the Albanian state.\textsuperscript{72} Meanwhile, between 3 and 5 August 1961, a conference of representatives of the member states of the WTO was convened in Moscow. Although the other states were represented by delegations led by first secretaries, Albania decided to send a delegation consisting of Ramiz Alia, a member of the Politburo of the PLA, and Behar Shtylla, foreign minister of the PRA. At the meeting of 3 August 1961, Walter Ulbricht proposed sending a letter to the Albanian side stressing the need to send a delegation at an appropriate level. The first secretary of the Socialist Unity Party also informed the Albanian delegation that it could not attend the conference. Despite protests from the representative of the People’s Republic of China, the Albanian delegation was forced to leave Moscow the following day.\textsuperscript{73} On 14 September 1961, the Albanian government drafted a note protesting against discriminatory acts by the governments of the member states of the WTO, accusing them of not allowing Albanian representatives to attend the meetings of the organization.\textsuperscript{74}

On 17 October 1961, at the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev publicly condemned the Albanian ideological heresy.\textsuperscript{75} A few days later, on 20 October 1961, Albanian communist leaders circulated a statement accusing the Soviet leader of violating the principles of the Moscow Declaration, according to which differences between communist and workers parties should be addressed “in the spirit of proletarian internationalism.”\textsuperscript{76} Finally, in December 1961 the USSR broke diplomatic relations with the PRA.

Thus, the PLA’s stance towards the CPSU evolved from ideological conformity (1955–1960) to neutrality (June–August 1960), while starting with August 1960 the Albanian communist leaders adopted an openly pro-Chinese stance, engaging in a polemic with the CPSU.
Notes

1. Romanian National Historical Archives (ANIC), Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (cc of RCP), Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 140.
5. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 81.
7. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 84.
9. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 84.
10. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 84.
11. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 84.
14. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 86.
19. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 9U, fol. 175.
23. ANIC, cc of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 70.
25. Hoxha, 370.
32. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 33/1960, fols. 3–68.
33. Hoxha, 392–393.
34. Khrushchev, 522.
36. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 72.
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38. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 72.
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45. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 10.
46. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 21.
47. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 31.
49. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 23/1956, fols. 64–122.
50. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fol. 54.
52. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 80/1960, fols. 119–133.
53. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 80/1960, fols. 156–166.
55. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fols. 61–63.
57. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 76/1960, fols. 80–84.
60. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Chancellery, File 81/1961, fols. 1–2.
68. ANIC, CC of the RCP, Foreign Relations, file 11U/1961, fol. 120.
Abstract
Soviet–Albanian Political and Diplomatic Relations (1955–1961)

The normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1955 was viewed with suspicion in Tirana. Dependent on Soviet economic aid, Albania publicly endorsed the new Soviet foreign policy, maintaining the line of ideological conformity. The secret report delivered by Nikita S. Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union worried decision-makers in Tirana. But again, Enver Hoxha did not protest, publicly supporting the decisions adopted during this congress. The emergence of Sino–Soviet differences during the June 1960 Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties led to a change in Albania’s stance within the international communist movement. Thus, unlike the other communist and workers’ parties, the Party of Labor of Albania adopted a stance of neutrality towards the Sino–Soviet polemic. Starting with August 1960, Albanian communists openly supported the stance of the Communist Party of China.

Keywords
Marxism-Leninism, Nikita S. Khrushchev, Enver Hoxha, Party of Labor of Albania, Communist Party of the Soviet Union
THE RESEARCH strategy on the history and culture of the Romanians in the Intra-Carpathian Arc—as developed by the Metropolitan Nicolae Colan Ecclesiastical Documentation Center (CEDMNC) and the European Center for Covasna-Harghita Studies (CESCH) of Sfântu Gheorghe (Sankt Georgen, Sepsizsentaúgyörgy)—includes among its priorities the support for the development of works on the history, ethnography, demography, and sociology of the Romanians in the Intra-Carpathian Arc and on the main aspects of interethnic coexistence and Romanian-Hungarian cultural exchanges over the centuries, as well as the publication of these works by Eurocarpatica and Grai Românesc publishing houses, as well as by other partner publishing houses.

Between 2000 and 2022, 400 works related to the history and culture of the Romanians in the Intra-Carpathian Arc and their coexistence with the Szeklers/Hungarians and other nationalities appeared at the publishing houses Eurocarpatica, Angvstia, Acta Carpatica, Sangidava, Grai Românesc and other partner publishing houses, of which 14 doctoral theses, 100 volumes in the “Centenary of the Great Union” collection, 35 volumes in the “Our Professionals” collection, etc.

The volume The Romanians in the Intra-Carpathian Arc and Their Identity Institutions (17th–20th Centuries) is part of the project “Promoting Cultural Identity Through Romanian Representative Works from Southeastern Transylvania,” a project co-financed by the General Secretariat of the Government of Romania, through the Community Development Service. The main objective of the project is to introduce into the public circuit some works related to the history, culture and evolution of the region of Southeastern Transylvania, from the perspective of the presence of the Romanian population in this region. The published works are just as many opportunities to learn about the complex realities of Southeastern Transylvania and the specific contribution of the Romanians, along with the Szeklers/Hungarians and other communities in this part of the country, to the national and universal cultural heritage.

Numerous articles and studies on the history and culture of the Romanians in Southeastern Transylvania, signed by the researchers Ana Grama and Ioan Lăcătușu, have been published in the collective volumes and in the Angvstia, Acta Carpatica, Sangidava, Grai Românesc yearbooks. The publication of a selection of these valuable
documentary sources in one volume, under such a comprehensive title, offers specialists as well as the history-loving public the opportunity to find out more about the history of the Romanian communities living in the former Szekler counties, in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environment specific to an area which is, as a rule, reticent towards otherness.

The two authors are well known and appreciated for their research on the history and culture of the Romanians in the southeast of Transylvania, as well as for their involvement in numerous cultural-scientific and civic projects implemented in the counties of Sibiu, Covasna, and Harghita, and, on a wider scale, in Transylvania and the other historical Romanian provinces.

The CEDMNC archive holds a rich correspondence between Ana Grama and Ioan Lăcătușu spanning several years, documents which, with the passage of time, will surely increase in informative value and national significance.

One of the leading experts in the complex realities of Southeastern Transylvania is the distinguished researcher Ana Grama, from Sibiu. In the climate of freedom after 1989, the Romanian scholar Ana Grama (b. 1940) became a steadfast and dedicated supporter of the Romanian minority in Covasna and Harghita counties, amid the efforts undertaken by their representatives to preserve and assert their national identity. Ana Grama is part of a group of researchers who have been constantly and pragmatically involved in researching the history of the Romanians in Southeastern Transylvania. Since 1992, from the first events organized by the Andrei Șaguna Cultural-Christian League and the Covasna National Archives, Ana Grama has participated in numerous conferences, symposia and other scientific and cultural events organized in Sfântu Gheorghe, Arcuș, Miercurea-Ciuc, Covasna, Izvoru Mureșului, and Toplița.

The results of this laborious research on the Romanians of the Intra-Carpathian Arc were published in the yearbooks Augustia, Sangidava, and Acta Carpatica, in the Grai Românesc magazine, as well as in other secular and religious publications. Ana Grama’s studies and articles introduced into the scientific circuit new information regarding the Orthodox communities, their churches and schools, the local leaders and their relations with the secular and church authorities, and even their daily life. Ana Grama also initiated a research project devoted to the specific “dynasties” of Transylvanian intellectuals in the Intra-Carpathian Arc. Ana Grama understood the importance of the apparently minor “everyday fact” for local and regional history, and she highlighted the results of Orthodox solidarity by inventorying the numerous donations and mentioning the founders and benefactors coming from the entire Romanian space. Her research is recognized for its interdisciplinary approach, for its presentation and interpretation of documents from a historical, demographic, ethnographic, anthropological, linguistic perspective, etc.

Through rigorous documentation and a balanced approach, Ana Grama has contributed to demolishing some clichés and prejudices regarding the Transylvanian Romanians and their coexistence, as equals, with the Hungarians, the Transylvanian Saxons, and the Szeklers. Ana Grama is an excellent connoisseur of the language of
documents, whether they were written in Cyrillic characters or in the difficult “translational alphabet.” Without the documents researched and published by Ana Grama, we would be much poorer, deprived of the chance to know the pulse of daily life, the main dimensions of the collective mind in the Romanian communities living in the villages of Transylvania. The documents presented by Ana Grama speak convincingly about the vital role of the Orthodox Church and of the religious schools in preserving and affirming the linguistic, cultural, confessional and national identity of Romanians in Transylvania, until 1918.

We owe to the researcher Ana Grama the knowledge of the life and activity of some personalities who profoundly changed the life of the Romanian communities in the Intra-Carpathian Arc in the nineteenth century. These authentic leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians were not inferior to their fellow citizens, be they Saxons, Hungarians, or Szeklers. On the contrary, through their education, culture, strength of character and their activity in the service of the Romanian communities in the studied area, they successfully managed numerous difficult moments and contributed decisively to the material and cultural progress of the main identity institutions: church, school, culture (Holy Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, Bishop Vasile Moga, Archpriests Petru Pop, Ioan Petric, Ioan Moga).

Whenever he speaks about his research—a publishing and editorial activity carried out within the cultural and civic institutions and associations of Sfântu Gheorghe, where he has worked for the last 30 years—Dr. Ioan Lăcătușu (b. 1947) always points out that the results obtained came from the teamwork done in the company of his main collaborators, with the blessing and support of His Holiness Bishop Ioan Selejan, after the establishment of the Orthodox Bishopric of Covasna and Harghita (1994), and since 2014, of His Holiness Bishop Andrei.

From the very outset, Dr. Ioan Lăcătușu and the group of intellectuals gathered around His Holiness Bishop Ioan Selejan were concerned with the founding of institutions intended to promote the Romanian identity: the National Museum of the Eastern Carpathians (1997, Sfântu Gheorghe); the Metropolitan Nicolae Colan Ecclesiastical Documentation Center (1996) (within the Orthodox Bishopric of Covasna and Harghita); the Covasna-Harghita European Studies Center (1999, in Sfântu Gheorghe), etc. These institutions organized annual cultural-scientific events, with the participation of numerous researchers from all over the country; under these circumstances, there was a clear need to establish Romanian publishing houses and publications belonging to the aforementioned institutions (the publishing houses Eurocarpatica and Grai Românesc, the publications Angvstia, Acta Carpatica, Grai Românesc, etc.).

Ioan Lăcătușu instituted, together with his collaborators, “moral rewards awarded to personalities who support the Romanian survival in the Intra-Carpathian Arc,” such as the annual awards I. I. Russu, Fr. Ilie Moldovan, Vasile Lechințan, and the title of Honorary Citizen of the Romanian community in Sfântu Gheorghe. His achievements include the establishment of the CEDMNC Archive, the Metropolitan Nicolae Colan Public Library, with over 10,000 volumes, and the Eurocarpatica Digital Library.
The selected bibliography of the archivist, sociologist, publicist and editor Ioan Lăcătușu includes over 30 authored/co-authored volumes in various fields (history, sociology, demography, ethnography, journalism), to which are added over 180 volumes edited or prefaced, 250 studies in history, archival science, sociology, demography, journalism, ethnography (in specialist magazines) and over 2,500 articles (in the local, regional, and national press). All this recommends him as one of the leading specialists in the history, culture, traditions and complex issues of the Intra-Carpathian Arc area.

From the works of Mrs. Ana Grama, the present volume features the piece titled “Transylvanian Syntheses,” with direct and essential references to the Romanian communities in Southern and Southeastern Transylvania. We owe to the distinguished researcher Ana Grama the transliteration from the Archives of the Transylvanian Metropolitan See and the Transylvanian Metropolitan Library of documents such as the Protocols of the consistorial sessions.

The general preliminary studies, such as “The Dramatic Fate of a Siberian Archive (March 1849),” “The Message of the Romanian Writing in Transylvanian Village Documents (1780–1850)” etc., are particularly valuable, capitalizing on the new information introduced into the public circuit.

From the more than 250 studies bearing the signature of Ioan Lăcătușu, with the approval of the author, the present volume features those that pertain to the theme of the volume, namely, the identity institutions of the Romanian communities in Covasna and Harghita counties. Thus, we find here pages from the history of the Romanian churches in the Orthodox Diocese of Covasna and Harghita, until the establishment of the diocese; episodes in the life of the Orthodox Diocese of Covasna and Harghita (1994–2023); information about the religious and state education in Romanian in Covasna and Harghita counties (19th century), the main coordinates of the cultural institutions and associations (museums, memorial houses, cultural centers, archives, libraries, publishing houses), cultural-scientific events, publications, research activities, the authors of literary texts and monographs, Romanian-Hungarian cultural exchanges, etc.

Thus, whereas Ms. Ana Grama’s studies are chronologically circumscribed to the 18th and 19th centuries, those of Mr. Lăcătușu mostly refer to the end of the 19th century, the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century.

In the pages of this volume, the Romanian communities living in ethnically mixed localities, limited in numbers and permanently subjected to the Hungarization process, but also those numerically strengthened, integrated into the Romanian society, sharing the same ideals of freedom and affirmation, with the same respect for the sacrifices of the ancestors, are presented as steadfast in their ancestral faith, eager for cultural emancipation and seeking a peaceful interethnic coexistence.

Although numerically a minority when compared to their fellow Hungarian/Szekler citizens, the Romanians from this corner of the country have benefited from the solidarity of their brethren in faith and ethnicity from the entire Romanian space. At the same time, they have given the country valuable personalities: academics, hierarchs, researchers, university profes-
sors, specialists in all areas of public life, whose professional achievements can also be found in this volume.

The volume comes to complement the other collective works that include studies on the history and culture of the Romanians in the Intra-Carpathian Arc, signed by Ioan Ranca, Vasile Lechințan, Cornel Sigmirean, Liviu Boar, Ana Dobreanu, Elena Mihu, Ioana-Cristache Panait, Dorel Marc, Mihai Racovițan, Nicolae Bucur, Constantin Catrina, Costel-Cristian Lazăr, Ilie Șandru, et al.

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