

Romanian Forerunners and Supporters of the Idea of a European Union

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“My people has always been pro-Europe. My people has full maturity and sufficient historical information to support the creation of a united, free, and democratic Europe.”
(G. Ciorănescu)

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THE IDEA of a united Europe has been present on the continent since ancient times, stemming from the reflections concerning the collective destiny of Europe’s nations. From ancient Greece and Rome to Charlemagne’s Empire and to the Kingdom of France, there have been experiments—from a political and conceptual point of view—with various designs and projects for a United Europe. The history of the European idea as a premise to the current European construction comprises not only the contributions of great states; it also includes the more modest contributions coming from the countries of the central region of Europe. This is also the case of Romania, where the European idea took several forms, and in the modern era it was supported with interest and passion by a Romanian elite educated in Western countries.

As these Romanian ideas concerning the federal organization of a part or even of the whole of Europe are little known, our aim is to show them

in a concise manner. We shall start with a statement belonging to the great thinker George Ciorănescu, who considered that “My people has always been pro-Europe. My people has full maturity and sufficient historical information to support the creation of a united, free, and democratic Europe.”¹

The revolutionary year 1848 provided, due to the upsurge in the European spirit of freedom, the optimal context for new projects concerning the future organization of states, from the perspective of the federal idea and also of the idea of unity on the continent. For the Romanians living in three powerful empires (Habsburg, Ottoman, and Tsarist), the main credo was emancipation and the creation of a unitary state, covering all Romanian-inhabited territories. Thus, their major political ideal was a remaking of Dacia, through the endeavors of all Romanians. At the same time, realizing that this wish was difficult to achieve at that moment, the Romanian political leaders embraced the European idea of regional federations. As G. Sion pointed out in his memoirs, the Romanian revolutionaries of 1848 promoted, alongside other important ideas, the idea of a European republic: “All nationalities have risen; there have been revolutions everywhere and all they needed for a universal republic in Europe was understanding amongst people.”² In an anonymous letter from Bucharest (sent to a periodical on 13 October 1848), an exceptionally significant question was formulated and it received a response one century later: “Will the kingdoms founded on absolutism and tyranny last, or will most of Europe be based on equality and brotherhood? This is the burning question for peoples and kings.”³ We have to bear in mind not only the republican spirit animating the author of such a formula, but also the idea of a European confederation based on the revolutionary principles of equality and brotherhood, which became a genuine mobilizing credo in the Romanian Principalities.

Another representative figure of the 1848 Revolution was the revolutionary democrat A. G. Golescu, who discussed with Ioan Maiorescu—the envoy of the revolutionary government in Wallachia to Frankfurt (seeking to conclude treaties with the Germans)—the need to establish a European federation in 1848. He concluded that history “only created division” in Europe, and the future “can only unite” nations. For this general “interest,” the “federal connection is enough.”⁴ If the Transylvanian Orthodox Bishop Andrei Șaguna considered that the central place in this European federalization project could have been occupied by Austria, Ioan Maiorescu granted the same role to Germany. Dimitrie Brătianu, one of the founders of modern Romania, considered the idea of a Danube confederation that could be the “achievement of our age.” Therefore, he called to all nations in the area, particularly the Hungarians, in the following terms: “Let us join our hands, brothers, over our martyrs’ graves and may this great work [the Danube confederation] bring us glory.”⁵

For almost a decade after 1848, the Romanian exiles in the West had the opportunity to directly know all the plans for a European federalization. They joined the project, as suggested by Victor Hugo, who in 1849 expressed his subsequently confirmed conviction that “There will be a day when we see these two large groups, the United States of America and the United States of Europe, facing one another, reaching out over the seas.”⁶ Obviously, the French writer was an exceptional visionary whose plea for a United Europe under the name of United States of Europe influenced the political thought of several Europeans concerned with the fate of the continent and desirous of peace, complete freedom, and democracy.

The Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini exerted considerable influence over the Romanian exiles. He imagined a new revolution in Europe, followed by the establishment of a European federation, as a republic. The Romanian political leaders thought of a federalization project in the Lower Danube region. Nicolae Bălcescu drew up a memorandum concerning the federal organization of Eastern Europe, based on the principle of national equality. He used the expression “United States of the Danube” to describe a part of the united Europe. The memorandum was sent to some European revolutionaries, such as Mazzini and Kossuth. The latter sent a reply supporting the idea of a Hungarian unitary state. Nicolae Bălcescu foresaw the federalization of the three nations neighboring the Danube: Romanians, Yugoslavs (Serbians, Croats, Slovenians, and Dalmatians) and Hungarians. “Each nation will organize internal administration, religion, justice, local finances, and public instruction under the authority of the national state, with no interference from the federal government.”⁷ The latter was to deal with foreign policy, defense, and general commercial and financial issues. The members of the federal government (the executive body) were to be appointed by a central Federal Assembly made up of 150 deputies (50 for each nation). It is obvious that Nicolae Bălcescu thought on a regional scale about the way in which a European federation might work. In his opinion, if the Danube federation were to include the Romanian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), it would be a federal state with 22 million inhabitants and with access to the Black Sea. In fact, N. Bălcescu wished that, within such a federation, the Romanians in the Carpathian-Danube area (Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania) would become a single national political body. This federal solution aimed at establishing the political and territorial unity of a Romanian people that at the time lived in three separate empires.

Another militant for a “great fraternity of the Danube peoples” was Dimitrie Brătianu, who confessed in an article that the Romanians were willing to be part of a “great Danube association” built by the peoples in the area. He urged those supporting “this wonderful idea for the future”⁸ to make it a reality. It

must be said that he saw this Danube federation as a means to achieve the national unity of the Romanians.

Exiled in Vienna, General G. Magheru became the supporter of a United States of Greater Austria, and thus a forerunner of the idea of a federation around the Danube. The Habsburg Empire was multinational in nature and could adopt an internal federal organization (by granting significant autonomy to all nationalities). Due to the political compromise of 1867 (the dualist pact), it turned into a dual monarchy with two capitals (Vienna and Budapest). Nevertheless, some politicians considered that the initiative was only a temporary postponement of its collapse. The establishment of a two-nation (Austrian and Hungarian) rule over the others was not meant to last long. The Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary were against it; as early as 1848, they supported the idea of an Austrian federation. In 1869–1876, Professor Alexandru Roman edited in Budapest a newspaper with an explicit name, *Federațiunea* (The Federation), in whose pages he insisted that the empire should reorganize as a genuine federation of nationalities.

THE DEBATE on the federalization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a stage in the process of European federalization was revived at the end of the 19th century, when Archduke Francis Ferdinand expressed federalist thoughts and “reformist intentions for the old monarchy.”⁹ He was supported by several Romanian personalities, such as A. C. Popovici and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. In 1913, in the final hours of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the crown prince wrote the following prophetic words: “I live and I will die for federalism, it is the only salvation for our monarchy, should anything save it. Nowadays, dualism is an obsolete regime; it belongs to the category of absurdities, of anomalies.”¹⁰

Aurel C. Popovici had been a prominent political thinker as a student, when he had drawn up an important document, *Mémoire des étudiants universitaires roumaines de Transylvanie et de la Hongrie* (1891). Criticizing the national oppression policy of the dualist authorities, he received a vehement reply from the Hungarian students. As such, he was compelled to give a response¹¹ supported by several lucid and unmerciful remarks on the way the dualist state was working. In the end, he suggested a monarchic federation where, as he pointed out, “we and other nationalities living here could develop in complete freedom and according to our national spirit.”¹² A redoubtable polemist and a polyglot scholar, A. C. Popovici started to draw up a remarkable work that remains relevant even today. It contained the project for a United States of Greater Austria,¹³ that is, a regional federalization of Europe as a genuine model for the united Europe. Through this proposal, A. C. Popovici became a forerunner of the European Union.

Starting from the observation that in the Austro-Hungarian Empire “nobody is content,” A. C. Popovici reflected with passion and good intentions on its salvation. He proposed the solution of a “federal” constitution “based on national delimitations.” The new internal organization of the empire was to be carried out according to the ethnic criterion, by respecting national individuality.¹⁴ It would be called the United States of Greater Austria,¹⁵ a federal state comprising 15 states of the nations in the empire. For instance, the Romanians, who exceeded 3 million inhabitants, would join the state of Transylvania (to which the Romanians in the eastern part of Hungary belonged). The executive power in the United States of Greater Austria would be exercised by the emperor and a federal government (comprised of representatives of national governments—four for Transylvania, where the majority was Romanian). As far as the legislative power was concerned, it was to be shared between a parliament (senate and house of representatives) and the emperor, who signed all adopted bills. A. C. Popovici opted for the idea that all members of the House of Representatives should be elected from all over the empire (that is, from among all nationalities in the 15 states) on the basis of universal, direct and secret ballot. Of course, it would have meant considerable progress in the life of the federal state, as only free and equal access to political power for all inhabitants, irrespective of their nationality, would have ensured its democratic functioning and the viability of its institutions. There would be as much efficiency, peace and diminishing of hatred and misunderstanding as there would be freedom and democracy in the state. By sacrificing some egos of the politicians (either Austrian or Hungarian), the strengthening and functioning of the federal state of Greater Austria was possible. Its existence could have altered the course of Europe’s history and would have provided future generations with a concrete expression of European construction in the central-eastern part of the continent.

A. C. Popovici also referred to the official languages within the federation. German was to be used in parliament, administration and in the federal army. At the same time, in the 15 states making up the federation, the majority language was to be used. At international level, the representative of the state was the emperor, who—with the approval of the federal government—could declare war and conclude peace. In the United States of Greater Austria the population was to amount to 25 million Germans, Hungarians, Romanians and Italians, and 20 million Slavs.

Through this project of a federal organization of Austria-Hungary, A. C. Popovici gained the trust of the heir-apparent, Francis Ferdinand, who was seeking a way to modernize the empire; federalization seemed to him as a possible alternative. Friends and even statesmen saw A. C. Popovici as the future chancellor of the Austrian state, as he had devised its internal architecture. Some

political leaders from Romania were interested in A. C. Popovici's pro-Austrian action; they expressed their intent to include Romania (independent since 1877) in the Greater Austrian federation. This was acknowledged by Nicolae Filipescu in a discourse delivered on 8 March 1915: "In times of despair and when the fundamental changes in the fate of Europe could not be foreseen, several people thought of a solution called *Gross Österreich* (Greater Austria) to solve the issue of nationalities. They thought this could replace the dualism with a confederation that would provide all nationalities with equal justice under the rule of Austria."¹⁶ These ideas were disseminated in Romania, France and Italy. Moreover, this project was presented by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod in Berlin; however, as we know it, the main blow came in 1914, when Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo; as an immediate consequence, the First World War broke out. It interrupted all attempts at achieving European unity for four years. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was shattered and nation-states replaced it. Central Europe turned to another political configuration, validated by the peace treaties signed in Paris.

In the two interwar decades, the European idea entered an extremely active phase, due to several factors (amongst which the existence of a League of Nations that provided a good framework for its development). The most efficient was the pan-European initiative of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, disseminated all over the continent. In fact, for the Romanian political and cultural elite, the main objective became rendering the westernization of Romanian society and the adoption of new forms of European organization (at all levels). The word "Europeanism" was among the most widely-used by all those concerned with the situation of the country. Due to the initiative of the philosopher C. Rădulescu-Motru, a journal with an explicit title—*Ideea europeană* (European Idea)—began to be published in Romania, having an artistic and social character (the first issue dates back to 25 June 1919). It was expected to be a "democratic magazine intended to show the relations between Romanian culture and the European ones."¹⁷ At the same time, the periodical *Ideea europeană* was considered "an independent organ meant to inform the Romanian public on the ideological trends and social changes in Europe."¹⁸ In its pages important articles were published, signed by Paul Valéry ("Homo Europaeus")¹⁹ and R. N. Coudenhove-Kalergi ("Europa și lumea"/Europe and the world).²⁰

As stated before, the French Government "for the first time took the idea of European unification from the realm of intellectual utopias to the level of state policy through, the European Union project (1929–1930)."²¹ On 17 May 1930, it was supported by Aristide Briand, the French minister of Foreign Affairs and honorary president of the Pan-European Union at the League of Nations. The Romanian Government was informed as early as 1929 of Briand's

plan to establish a European federation called the United States of Europe.²² All 27 European governments, including the Romanian one, were to express their opinion regarding this issue on the occasion of debates that took place at the General Assembly of the League of Nations. Thus, the Romanian authorities, just like the Romanian society as a whole, were called upon to give a definite answer regarding the idea of pan-European integration and on the necessity thereof. The official position of Romania regarding this matter had to be clearly expressed, and this is precisely what happened. Both the governing bodies and the leaders of some opposition parties pleaded for the idea of European integration; it was a salutary understanding of such a project meant to give birth to the European Union, particularly as an economic organization. Although before WWI the Romanians had been less present on the European stage as promoters of the European idea, for well-known reasons (they had not reached their fundamental objective of national unity and consequently they were not concerned with organizing a European federation), in the new context (at the end of the first interwar decade) they felt the reasons of a federal European structure and promptly supported the Briand Project for a European Union. “The Government [led by] Iuliu Maniu understood that they should support France in the construction of a European Union to provide peace, security, cooperation and the stability of borders on the continent.”²³ Through the voice of its government, Romania explicitly expressed “the solemn acceptance of the idea of a united Europe,” which supported the idea that the time of theoretical debates over some projects (devised by some personalities) was presently over. Even King Carol II expressed his pan-European opinions in the State of the Kingdom address presented to the assembled houses of parliament on 15 November 1930, when he stated the following: “Romania has approved the idea of a federal connection amongst the European countries”²⁴ respecting the existing treaties (Paris, 1919–1920), alliances (such as the Little Entente) and the principles of the League of Nations. In the reply given to the Senate of Romania concerning the message of the Crown, we read that “The Senate [of Romania] wishes a quick federal union amongst the European countries, to achieve cooperation for the prosperity of all.” Consequently, the Romanian Parliament and Government, as representative institutions of the country, were united in their decision to support the Briand Project for a European Union. The idea of a united Europe was embraced by the political decision-makers in Romania, and by some well-known personalities of Romanian and international public life.

Referring to the Briand Project to achieve a European Union, Nicolae Titulescu—chairman of the League of Nations Assembly since September 1930, when the European document was discussed—expressed his full support dur-

ing a conference held at Cambridge University: “From the point of view of the present, the European Union thus conceived is the only solution to preserve peace amongst peoples. From the point of view of the future, it may be the seed of a new international life so beneficial that our current mind—a product of fight and suffering—cannot conceive yet.”²⁵ I. G. Duca, another important personality in the country,²⁶ had a pro-United States of Europe position during a press conference, when he also stated his European political credo: “I think, I believe in the United States of Europe” and thus, “I am a partisan of establishing the United States of Europe” as a “federal type” “super-state” with central institutions, such as the government, the parliament and the federal ones. In his opinion, this European federation (called the United States of Europe) did not mean “abolishing the states and ethnic units making up Europe”; the European Union could only be conceived while “fully respecting the autonomy of each of these states.”²⁷ Obviously, I. G. Duca was getting close to the current concepts regarding the political dimension of the European Union, thus joining the gallery of Romanian forerunners of European integration. □

Notes

1. George Ciorănescu, *România și ideea federalistă* (Bucharest, 1996). This text is quoted on the inside cover of the book published in Romania in 1996. Here are some details concerning the biography of George Ciorănescu that seem useful for the exact assessment of his European ideas. Born in Moroeni (Dâmbovița County, Romania) on 19 March 1918, he died in Munich in 1993. In 1946, he defended his doctoral thesis quoted above at the University of Cluj (under the supervision of Professor George Sofronie, a well-known specialist in international law). After settling in the West (1947), he became one of the active militants for a European Union. Thus, he was a (co-founding) member of the federalist organization Nouvelles Équipes Internationales (1948), a member of the first European Parliament (Vienna, 1954), Deputy Director in the Romanian Department of Radio Free Europe station (1965–1970), a member in the Conseil Fédéral du Mouvement Européen (Brussels, 1980) and a member of the European Federalist Movement (1984–2003).
2. Apud *ibid.*, 21.
3. *Anul 1848 în Principatele române: Acte și documente*, vol. 5 (Bucharest, 1904), 138.
4. Apud Ciorănescu, 21.
5. Apud Dumitru Suci, *Anul 1918 în Europa centrală și răsăriteană: Ideea de Europă Unită* (Cluj-Napoca, 2003), 148.
6. Apud *ibid.*, 152.
7. Apud Ciorănescu, 32.
8. Apud *ibid.*, 40.

9. Ibid., 65.
10. Constantin Graur, *Cu privire la Franz Ferdinand* (Bucharest, 1935), 233.
11. The title of the reply was the following: *La question roumaine en Transylvanie et en Hongrie: Réplique de la jeunesse universitaire roumaine de la Transylvanie et de la Hongrie à la réponse faite par la jeunesse magyare au Mémoire des étudiants universitaires de Roumanie*. The document was published in four languages (Romanian, French, German and Hungarian) and circulated in most European countries.
12. Popovici, *La question roumaine*, 203.
13. In original *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Groß-Österreich* (Leipzig, 1906).
14. Ciorănescu, 75.
15. Inevitably, this name makes us consider the American federation that A. C. Popovici had in mind, due to the fact that it became one of the great powers of the world at the beginning of the 20th century and it could offer an example of democratic dual monarchy.
16. Apud Ciorănescu, 79.
17. A. Husar, *Ideea europeană sau Noi și Europa (istorie, cultură, civilizație)* (Iași–Chișinău, 1993), 342.
18. *Ideea europeană*, no. 189 (1926): 4.
19. *Ideea europeană*, no. 192 (1926): 2–3.
20. *Ideea europeană*, no. 202 (1927): 2–4. The name of this promoter of the European Union was mentioned for the first time in the magazine *Ideea europeană*.
21. Simion Costea, “Românii și ideea de Uniune Europeană în perioada interbelică,” *Academica* (Cluj-Napoca), no. 11 (2001): 7.
22. Simion Costea, *România și proiectul Briand de Uniune Europeană* (Târgu-Mureș, 2004), 69.
23. Costea, “Românii și ideea de Uniune Europeană,” 7. The quoted fragment comes from the reply sent to the Romanian central authorities: after studying the *Memorandum* concerning the organization a European Federal Union presented by the French Government, the Romanian Government is happy to agree to the principles underlying this *Memorandum* and states that they will fully support the creation of a European Federal Union. Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Geneva collection, vol. 167, f. 1; apud Simion Costea, *Ideea europeană și interesele statelor* (Cluj-Napoca, 2005), 154.
24. Apud Costea, “Românii și ideea de Uniune Europeană,” 7.
25. Ibid.
26. He was a minister of foreign affairs (1922–1926), prime minister (in 1933) and the president of the National Liberal Party.
27. Apud Costea, “Românii și ideea de Uniune Europeană,” 12.

Abstract

Romanian Forerunners and Supporters of the Idea of a European Union

The history of the European idea has mainly been dealt with by Western specialists, and less attention has been paid to the investigations in the field conducted in the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe, Romania among them. Consequently, we believed it necessary to survey, albeit in a cursory fashion, the Romanian initiatives in this direction: G. Sion, A. G. Golescu, Ioan Măiorescu, Dimitrie Brătianu, Nicolae Bălcescu, and Gheorghe Magheru, most of them leaders of the 1848 Revolution. A major Transylvanian contribution is that of Aurel C. Popovici, who envisaged the creation of a United States of Greater Austria, an idea endorsed by the crown prince, Francis Ferdinand. During the interwar period, reputed Romanian intellectuals established solid contacts with the cultural and political circles of Europe, in an effort to bring about the modernization of the country.

Keywords

European federalization, European idea, Aurel C. Popovici