

# From the National Assembly in Blaj to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia Church and Nationality

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of calling the Romanians  
to confessional unification,  
but to a national one.”*  
*(Simion Bărnuțiu)*

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## Introduction

**T**HE ROMANIAN historians have shown the important role played by the 1848 Revolution in the destiny of the Transylvanian Romanian nation. They have all stressed its positive consequences for the Romanian nation, from the point of view of the social, economic, political, religious and cultural factors existing in 1848–1849. Furthermore, some of those historians simply stated—or rather generally ascertained—that the moment of 1848 actually represented the source of inspiration for the Resolution of 1 December 1918 adopted in Alba Iulia. When Silviu Dragomir—secretary to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, the first great Romanian historian from Transylvania who was not contemporary with the revolution, but who researched and published information on what had happened in Transylvania in 1848–1849—analyzed the 1848 Revolution, he emphasized “the birth of the idea of political unity of all Romanians amid the turmoil of the revolution. This

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idea—timid, at first—became more and more present in the revolutionaries' political plans and actions as the true face of the policies promoted by the great empires was exposed. The historian also noted that the 1918 union was rooted in the political program and in the battles fought by the Romanians in 1848–1849. Otherwise said, this desideratum was put forward by the revolutionaries in 1848–1849.<sup>21</sup>

Almost all Romanian historians stressed the role played by the Romanians' Church in the process of national emancipation in the modern era, a role even more evident during the revolution, as well as well as in the preparation of the Great Union—nothing unusual if one considers the overwhelming influence of the Church over the masses throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Ion Clopoșel, another exegete of the 1918 events, a historian as well as an active participant in the union, subtly identified the Romanian political lines pursued in Transylvania in the modern era. He clearly placed the Great Union within the long and complex process initiated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which culminated in the 1848 Revolution:

*The target of our political efforts has been one and one alone: to fully accomplish the 1848 independence program; therefore, we have our old program of self-determination and self-governance. Educated in the spirit of liberties, endowed—since the time of Șaguna, the great bishop and politician—with religious autonomy, in which the right to vote was exercised, economically strengthened . . . , enlightened by the confessional school in Blaj and by the one given to him by the Șagunian ecclesiastical constitution, informed about his rights as a human being and citizen by his political leaders, the Romanian peasant from Transylvania became a living, long-standing element, protected by the armor provided by the awareness of nation and justice.<sup>2</sup>*

We are going to outline hereinafter some aspects meant to illustrate the role played by the Church in the organization of the two assemblies that were representative for the Transylvanian Romanians in 1848, as well as in 1918.

## **Agents and Means of Communication for the Summoning of the Assemblies**

**F**OR THE purposes of this article, it is important to review the agents, the factors, the means of communication of the message concerning the organization of the national assemblies, as well as the exhortations addressed to the masses encouraging them to participate in large numbers in the assemblies organized in Blaj and in Alba Iulia with a view to validate the decisions to

be taken there. At the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the beginning of the 1848 Revolution, the Transylvanian Romanians only had a few periodicals (*Gazeta de Transilvania*, *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură* and *Organul luminarei*) which published the analyses made by the elite on the state of the Romanian nation in that era, analyzed the revolutionary events within the empire, and communicated social and political messages. That is why the transmission of information, the communication between the elites and the masses, and mass mobilization were carried out with great difficulty. Under these circumstances, pupils and students—especially during their Easter holiday in the spring of 1848—were the ones who actually succeeded in spreading the proclamations of the leaders in Sibiu, Blaj or Cluj throughout the Transylvanian territory. The contribution brought by the youth to the revolution—so evident in 1848–1849<sup>3</sup>—remained a constant element throughout the decades after the revolution, the periodical commemorations of the events that took place in Blaj in May 1848—especially on certain commemoration dates—being just as many opportunities to underline the major role played by the youth in the revolution. The following example is eloquent, as on the front page of the *Unirea* newspaper in 1898 there was a subtitle referring to the “Role of the Youth”: “The youth of 1848 will always represent the ideal of the future generations. True apostolic work was done by the youth in those times of national revival.”<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, the Church represented another important channel for the propagation of information on the strategy of the Romanian revolution. There are many accounts, not only on the priests who used to read the proclamations of the Romanian leaders to their parishioners in church, but who also walked alongside a few peasants to Blaj for the first gathering on the Sunday of Saint Thomas, as well as for the second one held in May.<sup>5</sup> Such a situation appears, for example, in the investigation carried out in Dragu (Doboka County) as of 6 May 1848, where the witness Filimon Zdroba, a serf, declared that from the letter read by the priest he had understood that “the day of the Romanians had come, the kingdom of heaven had opened its gates, and that they would be free of the tyrants.”<sup>6</sup>

In the autumn of 1918, the possibilities for political communication were far more numerous than in 1848. Undoubtedly, in 1918 there were many more newspapers which appeared either daily or every two-three days, or even weekly. According to our estimates, in the autumn of 1918, on the territory of Transylvania and Hungary were printed around 20 publications in Romanian, which were disseminated nationally or locally, and which appeared daily, weekly, etc. Furthermore, in the seven decades after the revolution, the number of literate people and of people who had direct access to the content of the publications doubled. According to the 1910 census, the number of literate people in Transylvania (who were able to read and write, according to the census column) was of approximately 823,000 (28.3% of the Transylvanian population), an

evident increase from 1869 when only 312,000 people had those skills (and they represented 13% of the total number of the population in the province).<sup>7</sup> That does not mean that the role of the social “mediators” ceased in 1918, that there were no opinion leaders, including in the rural environment, who disseminated around them, for the illiterate ones, the information concerning the ongoing events and the messages sent by the Romanian elites.

The youth (especially pupils and students) remained a dynamic element, due to both their physical availability to travel from one Transylvanian place to another in the month of November of 1918 and their involvement in the organization of councils and national guards in the province. Even if secularization had significantly progressed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church remained one of the fundamental institutions for the Romanians living in Transylvania, an institution which, even in wartime, proved it was able to be alongside the people. From the beginning of the military operations, the Church became involved in the support offered to the families whose men were on the battlefield, reiterating in its sermons some of the articles published in the ecclesiastical press, as well as, under other forms, the need for social solidarity.<sup>8</sup> In the summer of 1914, the Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop Ioan Meșianu sent a note with the purpose of stimulating the parishioners’ donations to help the orphans and the families who were unable to support themselves. Consequently, every Sunday, during the religious service, the priests would encourage the people to donate money for the soldiers, but also to help the starving, the ill, the lonely, etc. The metropolitan bishop himself contributed with the amount of 1,000 crowns and expected his example to be followed by as many clergymen as possible. Beyond the financial help, Meșianu used to underline the importance of community service; priests were advised to contact city halls and together with them to draft a money collection plan in each parish.<sup>9</sup> The Orthodox and Greek Catholic metropolitan notes constantly reiterated the same message referring to the collection of donations for those suffering because of the war. Afterwards, in 1916, there was an ample campaign initiated by the Romanian elite (both secular and ecclesiastical) for the support of orphans, an idea which was very successful in the Romanian society in Transylvania.<sup>10</sup> Started by the Orthodox Metropolitan Church in Sibiu, around Christmas time in 1915, the idea of building an orphanage was also embraced, in the summer of 1916, by the (Greek Catholic) Uniate Metropolitan Church in Blaj, both Romanian Churches being actively involved in this demographic and social issue. Despite the declarations of loyalty obtained from the hierarchy of both denominations by the authorities in Budapest through blackmail and pressure, the credibility of the Church among the Romanian population remained at high levels.

As such, in the autumn of 1918, the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic Churches put themselves at the disposal of the Romanian political leaders with

their thousands of priests, deacons, and monks, and became a valuable human resource for mass mobilization. Both metropolitan Churches had their own media outlets (the newspapers *Telegraful român* and *Unirea*), just as the bishoprics had their own publications (*Biserica și Școala*, *Foaia diecezană*, etc.). A significant example for the involvement of the Church in the spreading of messages in support of the national struggle is that, on 8 November 1918, the two churches issued a common *communiqué* of adhesion to the Romanian Central National Council, in which they unequivocally expressed their support for the leading institution of the Transylvanian Romanians: “We acknowledge the great Romanian National Council as the representative political leadership of the Romanian nation in Hungary and Transylvania, feeling entitled and obliged—as faithful sons of our nation—to work together with all our forces for the achievement of our national aspirations.”

The text was signed by the Orthodox bishop of Arad, Ioan I. Papp (metropolitan bishop alternate), by the Greek Catholic bishop of Oradea, Demetriu Radu, by the Orthodox bishop Miron Cristea of Caransebeș, by the Greek Catholic bishop of Lugoj, Valeriu Traian Frențiu, as well as by the Greek Catholic bishop of Gherla, Iuliu Hossu.<sup>11</sup>

## The Preliminary Assemblies of 2/14 May 1848 and of 30 November 1918

**A**NOTHER COMMON element of the assemblies held in Blaj in May 1848 and in Alba Iulia in December 1918 was the organization of some preliminary gatherings, some larger, others smaller, in the eve of the two pivotal moments. As it was to be expected, on 1/13 May and especially on 2/14 May, hundreds of thousands of Romanians, especially from the more remote areas of the province, travelled to Blaj. It was mostly the elites that went to Blaj who felt the need for strategic clarifications, for a preliminary assembly. On 2/14 May 1848, on a Sunday, after the religious service, Simion Bărnuțiu—at that time the main ideologist of the Romanians—presented, for a few hours, in the Blaj cathedral, before roughly two thousand intellectuals, retired officers and non-commissioned officers, craftsmen, merchants, youths, etc. a famous speech entitled “The Romanians and the Hungarians,” a true theoretical and programmatic prologue to the Great National Assembly of 3/15–5/17 May. A new meeting of the elites took place in the afternoon of that day in the same cathedral, while in front of it the youth “taught the people, who listened intently, enlivening and comforting words. That day was one of the most beautiful, clear and sunny.”<sup>12</sup> The importance of the assembly held on 2 May 1848, especially of

the first one held in the morning, during which Bărnuțiu delivered his famous speech, remained imbued in the consciousness of the following generations because it captured the essence of the long history of the Transylvanian Romanians, as well as their main claims, which would be synthesized in the National Petition the following day. It was not accidental that Vasile Goldiș—in his speech delivered in Union Hall, before reading the Union Resolution—also made a historical excursus in which he mentioned Bărnuțiu’s speech: “S. Bărnuțiu spoke the truth in his momentous speech delivered in the Blaj Cathedral on the great day of 1848 when he said: If one cannot imagine the cross the Jews had to bear because of the pharaohs, then one should look at the pharaohs in Transylvania.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the speech delivered by Miron Cristea to the crowd gathered on the Romanians’ Plateau in Alba Iulia invoked the example of Bărnuțiu, who had presented the hardships suffered by the Romanians in Transylvania because of the government in Budapest: “What they have done to us over the past years is intolerable. The injustices we had to bear screamed out for revenge. What hurt badly was mostly the stifling of our Romanian soul and the seizure of our schools, because we have not forgotten the 1848 admonition of the great Bărnuț: the more Romanians study in foreign schools, the more sons our nations shall lose. Each alienated son was a piece torn from our bodies.”<sup>14</sup>

Naturally, the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia had also been anticipated by reunions of the elites, by preliminary meetings. The inhabitants of Banat who had arrived on the day before the assembly convened a meeting; the social-democrat deputies and the workers’ representatives also held a meeting; the youth had their own reunion; naturally, the political elites had their own meeting (apart from the members of the Romanian Central National Council, it was attended by other leaders of the Romanian National Party, the Social-Democratic Party, and intellectuals). There were two such assemblies that made a difference, and they were both held on 30 November 1918. One was that of the political leaders and included two work sessions—one which started in the morning and ended at noon, and the other one which started after lunch and continued until late at night; both meetings were necessary because the talks had been intense on the question of including in the Resolution the issue of Transylvania’s autonomy, of the union with or without conditions, etc. The second assembly of 30 November that is worth mentioning and which somehow influenced the leaders’ reunion and the drafting of the Union Resolution was that of the youth who were already present in Alba Iulia. In the afternoon, while the “seniors” were passionately discussing the text of the Resolution draft, thousands of young people, supervised by professors Andrei Bârseanu and Silviu Dragomir, drafted a call backed by thousands of signatures, in which they asked for the unconditional union of Transylvania with Romania. An eyewitness



ness, Roman Ciorogariu, the future Orthodox bishop of Oradea, noted that state of mind of the youth: “The youth has become enlivened and their rebellion is passing like an electrical current through the sinking hearts that are beating at the entries to and exits from the prepared council; and there is one phrase that is uttered by everyone: ‘no conditions’.” Then, the representatives of the youth walked in the room where the heated discussions of the “seniors” were at their peak, and they presented their point of view; as such, the youth’s attitude created a groundswell of opinion for the declaration of the unconditional union.<sup>15</sup>

## The Issue of National and Denominational Unity

### The Symbolism of Unity

**S**INCE ‘UNITY’ is the central topic of our material, in what follows we shall firstly present the way in which the most important people involved in the events of 1848 and 1918 saw the issue of national unity in connection to denominationalism. Certainly, the two crucial moments in the history of the Romanian nation in Transylvania did not lack in enthusiastic, sincere statements in favor of the restoration of the Romanians’ denominational unity. They have to be taken as such and integrated into the series of events which took place during the 1848 Revolution and in the autumn of 1918. Each of the two assemblies, from 1848 and 1918 respectively, began with a religious procession. Thus, in May 1848, there was first a religious service, a Mass, held only in the Greek Catholic cathedral, because there was no Orthodox church in the city: “At six o’clock in the morning, in the cathedral started the Holy Mass and, after having invoked the Holy Spirit, Bishop Ioan of Lemeni, together with several canons, priests, and deacons, celebrated the liturgy.” Once the square in front of the cathedral became overcrowded, the mass of people moved to the open fields near Blaj, where the Orthodox Bishop Andrei Şaguna celebrated another Holy Mass for the Emperor, so the Orthodox worshippers present in Blaj in those days were also able to see their bishop celebrate a liturgy that was not different from the one celebrated in the Greek Catholic cathedral.<sup>16</sup>

The national imperative determined the Romanian elite in Transylvania to promote unity over denominational differences, over personal and institutional pride. After the gathering held in Blaj on the Sunday of Saint Thomas (18/30 April 1848) it was once again emphasized the need to concentrate all national energies. In his synthesis, George Bariţiu confessed that the day after that first assembly in Blaj “Bărnuţ agreed with Cipariu on the following assembly scheduled for 15 May. Their purpose was to reach a compromise, to leave the past behind, to let

bygones be bygones; canons and all serious men in Blaj were supposed to agree with the members of the consistory in Sibiu. Similarly, bishops were supposed to agree with one another.”<sup>17</sup> It seems that the efforts made by those rational leaders, both Greek Catholic and Orthodox, were successful because the events that took place during the second assembly in Blaj, on 3/15–5/17 May 1848, emphasized the unity between the hierarchs of both denominations, an attitude that was appreciated at the time by the participants in the assembly, as well as afterwards. Therefore, on the occasion of the semi-centenary of the Blaj assembly of May 1848, the *Unirea* newspaper of May 1898 published an ample material dedicated to that moment, and the last subheading of the article was “Uplifting Moments.” The article expressed the admiration of the editorialist of the official publication of the Greek Catholic Metropolitan Church towards the wise attitudes exhibited by the two hierarchs in the spring of 1848: “Quite uplifting was the moment when the two bishops, Lemenyi and Şaguna, embraced each other fraternally in front of the tens of thousands of participants. That embrace sealed once and for all the unity in feelings and the national unity without which a people cannot aspire to a better future. The priests, wearing skoufias or kamilavkas, led this peaceful procession on the plains of freedom, and from the seeds they sowed we would reap the greatness of our nation, if we treasure our church and our nation.”<sup>18</sup>

A similar assessment on the importance of the unity of feelings over denominationalism was given by an important Orthodox political leader, long after the 1848 Revolution. Thus, in the speech delivered in Blaj on 29 August 1911 during the annual reunion of the Society for the Romanian Theatre Fund, Ioan Mihu expressed his admiration for the 1848 generation:

*Numerous, great, and dear are the memories connecting us to this part of our Transylvania . . . there is one event I cannot omit because I find it far too important, far too instructive, and because it is dear to all Romanians, from what I understand: the great example of Romanian solidarity that was given to us on that memorable day that will last forever, 3/15 May, when our parents—who understood the demands of that time, who put aside any narrow considerations and petty ambitions, and who came here from the valleys and the plains, under the wise leadership of the two sister churches, of the two bishops, Şaguna and Lemenyi, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, in brotherly good cheer—consulted one another and then struggled in order to enact what is now the gospel of our national redemption.*<sup>19</sup>

The events occurred at Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918 unfolded in the same manner. Since in the city there were Greek Catholic and Orthodox parishes, the bishops of the two denominations celebrated the Holy Masses in the two protopresbyterian churches, “after which the endless procession walked towards the field of Michael the Brave’s fortress.”<sup>20</sup> In recognition of the role played by



the Church in national history, in Union Hall, after the adoption of the Resolution, the floor was given to the eldest bishop, the Orthodox one from Arad, who cumulated the duties of alternate metropolitan bishop, as the Metropolitan Bishop Vasile Mangra had died in autumn. In his speech, the Bishop of Arad, Ioan I. Papp, stressed the spirit of national unity which dominated not only the Romanian elite, but the also the masses:

*We are present today, in this great national assembly, in complete numbers, similarly to the complete number in which we participated in Blaj seven years ago [ASTRA's jubilee half a century after its establishment] . . . to prove to the world that every time our Romanian language and literature come into question we are aware of the truth that, just like any other nation, the Romanian nation does not live only through the greater or smaller number of its sons, but lives through its very language and literature . . . let us celebrate the joyous day when the sun of justice rose for us, embodying our guarantee for a future life as a free and united Romanian nation, entitled to take in its own hands its present and future fate.<sup>21</sup>*

Extremely suggestive for the state of national fraternity and for the symbolism of the image is one of the few photographs we have from Alba Iulia, namely, the one taken on Horea's Field by the "photographer of the Union," Samoilă Mârza. The photograph immortalized the moment when the Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu, standing at one of the first four tribunes prepared for the announcement of the union to the masses (afterwards, other tribunes were also improvised due to the need of spreading the joyous news of the union to all those present), held a speech and read the Union Resolution to an impressively large crowd; by his side was Miron Cristea, the Orthodox bishop of Caransebeș, who also delivered an ample speech justifying the long journey of the Romanian nation until the moment celebrated in Alba Iulia.

## The Issue of the Romanians' Religious Unification

**A**NOTHER INTERESTING aspect in the 1848 and 1918 nation-denomination equation was the issue of the Romanians' religious unification. This request, clearly formulated during the 1848 Revolution, as well as in the autumn of 1918, proves the acuity and sensitivity of the issue, as well as the national vulnerability in the context of the Romanians' dual denominationalism. Firstly, the issue of the religious unification appears as a result of the youth's requests from the spring of 1848, debated within small gatherings by Constantin Romanu Vivu, August Treboniu Laurian, Simion Bărnuțiu, George Barițiu, and others. At a certain point they also drew up a national program which included the

request made by a general synod of clergymen and laymen, also demanding that “all Romanians be of only one law: the Romanian one.”<sup>22</sup> In the speech delivered on 2 May, Simion Bărnuțiu also invoked the same topic, outlining the importance of national unification to the detriment of denominational divisions, for the full assertion of the Romanian nation: “My purpose is not that of calling the Romanians to confessional unification, but to a national one. If the Romanians maintain this national unification, then, with their combined forces, they will be able to establish national funds, schools, academies, art institutes, scientific societies, and it is through these that the Romanian nation will earn respect and praise throughout the world.”<sup>23</sup> The National Petition adopted in Blaj the following day—the official program of the Romanian revolution—was not as radical as the young leaders expected. Thus, the second point of the petition included a rather general and ambiguous reference to the desideratum of religious reunification and to the restoration of the single Romanian Metropolitan Church, which practically was a step back from the accomplishments of the previous weeks.<sup>24</sup> The evolution of the revolutionary events in the context of the existing social, political and interethnic tensions made the issue of the religious reunification less important as compared to other, completely different priorities. It was not a priority to have it on the agenda of the Romanian revolutionaries as long as the social, economic, political and national objectives were far more important.

In the autumn of 1918, the issue of the religious reunification was once again brought into discussion and was rather a singular initiative which did not generate ample debates among the Romanian elite in Transylvania. Therefore, right before the meeting of 1 December 1918, the political leader from the region of Orăștie, Ioan Mișu, a representative elected to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, revived the idea of unifying the two denominations of the Romanians. On 25 November 1918, he drafted a material called “Un crâmpeiu de gânduri în preajma adunării naționale de la Alba Iulia” (Thoughts in the eve of the national assembly in Alba Iulia), in which he synthesized some of the juridical, administrative and economic problems of the future unified state. Because of his vast juridical, economic and administrative training and experience, he became involved in the plans for a future Romanian society to be implemented after the union: “Finally, from the national point of view, a desideratum would be for the political unification of Romanians in a single state to be made at the same time as the reunification of the Romanian Churches into a single national and autocephalous Church, since disunion, followed by times of misery, was not based on spiritual beliefs and needs, but rather on political and material reasons, which have lost their meaning today.”<sup>25</sup>

We believe that the rather obvious primacy of the national cause in the days preceding the Great Assembly in Alba Iulia did not help Ioan Mișu mobilize too many comrades for the debate on the Romanian religious reunification. The po-

litical maturity exhibited by the Romanian nation in the autumn of 1918 made most of the Transylvanian leaders disregard the possibility of national vulnerability due to a denominational bivalence. Quite praiseworthy, however, is Ioan Miḥu's sincere and honest attempt to solve a problem which, after the union, risked triggering sterile disputes between Romanians—as it unfortunately happened, and the (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) ecclesiastic media offer enough examples in this regard.

### **The “Denominational Equilibrium” in Positions between 1848 and 1918**

**D**ESPITE CERTAIN personal and institutional divergences that appeared in the modern era between the two Romanian denominations, both religious and secular leaders strove to ensure some sort of equilibrium in what concerned the public visibility, the holding of positions in the Romanian cultural and political movement. Such a responsible behavior can be seen from the 1848 Revolution until the Great Union. As it is already known, during the second national assembly in Blaj held in May 1848 a National Committee was set up—a body meant to coordinate the activity of the Romanian militants and to represent the nation in its relationship with the local authorities and the Viennese ones. The president of the aforementioned committee, elected in Blaj in May 1848, was the Orthodox Bishop Andrei Șaguna, while vice-president became the Greek Catholic Simion Bărnuțiu (other members were Al. Papiu Ilarian, George Barițiu, Aron Pumnul, Constantin Romanu Vivu, etc., some of them Orthodox, others Greek Catholic).

This symbolism of a balanced representation of the two denominations was also reflected in the Romanian civil society in Transylvania. Over the years, for tactical reasons, the elected presidents of ASTRA (the most important cultural institution of the Romanian Transylvanians until the union) were both Orthodox and Greek Catholic, starting with Bishop—later Metropolitan Bishop—Andrei Șaguna (1861–1867) and continuing with the Greek Catholic Vasile Ladislau Pop (1867–1875), the Orthodox Iacob Bologa (1875–1877), the Greek Catholic Timotei Cipariu (1877–1887), the Greek Catholic George Barițiu (1888–1893), the Greek Catholic Ioan Micu-Moldovan (1893–1901), the Orthodox Alexandru Mocioni (1901–1904), the Greek Catholic Iosif Sterca-Șuluțiu (1904–1911), and the Orthodox Andrei Bârseanu (1911–1922). The same alternation was applied in the case of the vice-president, i.e. if the president was Orthodox, then the vice-president was Uniate. In 1905, Nicolae Iorga rightfully stated that “from the very beginning, the Association belonged to Șaguna, to Șuluțiu, to the inhabit-

ants of Blaj, to the inhabitants of Sibiu, to the Uniates and to the non-Uniates at the same time. And this is its most precious leadership feature.”<sup>26</sup> The statement was a clear recognition of the fact that the national idea had defeated denominationalism, confirming what Simion Bărnuțiu had asked of the Romanians in his speech delivered in Blaj cathedral on 2/14 May 1848, in which he had advocated for national unification to the detriment of denominational divisions. The leaders in Arad copied ASTRA’s model for the first general assembly for the establishment of the Arad National Association for the Culture of the Romanian People, held in the spring of 1863. Therefore, the Orthodox Bishop of Arad, Procopie Ivacicovici (Prokopije Ivačković), was elected president of the Arad National Association, while its vice-president became the Greek Catholic canon from Lugoj, Mihail Naghi. The national character of those cultural institutions was also understood and perceived as such by the contemporaries. Since they did not participate in the general assembly for the establishment of the Arad National Association held on 30 April 1863, a group of Romanian leaders from Zarand sent a congratulatory letter to the association, which included the same ideas of national and social solidarity: “This new association belongs neither to the Uniates nor to the non-Uniates, neither to the aristocrats nor to the democrats, but to all Romanians, irrespective of social class.”<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, it is not a coincidence that in the autumn of 1918 that denominational equilibrium functioned in what concerned the public area. Thus, of the six members of the Romanian Central National Committee (who had been elected from among the most important members of the Romanian National Party), a national political body that governed Transylvania until the Great National Assembly held in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, three were Orthodox (Vasile Goldiș, Aurel Vlad, Aurel Lazăr), and the other three were Greek Catholic (Teodor Mihali, Ștefan Cicio Pop, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod). Remarkable was also the preservation of that symbolism in the structure of the delegation who was to present the Union Resolution to King Ferdinand. Thus, at the beginning of December, two bishops (the Orthodox Miron Cristea and the Greek Catholic Iuliu Hossu) and two laymen (an Orthodox, Vasile Goldiș, and a Greek Catholic, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod) travelled to Bucharest. Afterwards, the number of delegation members increased, but what is important is the fact that after the union, when the decision to send the delegation to Bucharest was made, the composition was strictly balanced from the denominational point of view. At this stage of the research it is difficult say for sure whether that was deliberate or not. We believe it was rather the result of many decades of well-balanced management of public office-holders within the Romanian nation in Transylvania, an example of maturity and responsibility given by the Romanian political elites in the province.



## Notes

1. Sorin Şipoş, *Silviu Dragomir—istoric*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, preface by Ioan-Aurel Pop (Deva: Ed. Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, 2018), 410.
2. Ion Clopoșel, *Revoluția din 1918 și Unirea Ardealului cu România* (Cluj: Ed. revistei Societatea de Măine, 1926), 169–170.
3. Bogdan Alin Florea, “Tineri români ardeleni în revoluția de la 1848–’49 (o listă publicată de Silviu Dragomir),” *Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studențești* (Alba Iulia) 10 (2004): 119–122.
4. *Unirea* (Blaj) 8, 19 (1898).
5. See Mircea Păcurariu, *Revoluția românească din Transilvania și Banat din anii 1848–1849: Contribuția Bisericii* (Sibiu: Ed. Arhiepiscopiei, 1995); *Revoluția transilvană de la 1848–1849: Date, realități și fapte reflectate în documente bisericești ortodoxe 1848–1850*, ed. Dumitru Suciu (Bucharest: ASAB, 2011).
6. *Documente privind revoluția de la 1848 în Țările Române. C. Transilvania*, vol. 3 (30 aprilie–14 mai 1848), ed. Ștefan Pascu (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1982), 343.
7. Ioan Bolovan, *Transilvania între Revoluția de la 1848 și Unirea din 1918: Contribuții demografice* (Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Culturală Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2000), 235.
8. See the article “Văduve și orfani” published in the *Unirea* newspaper 27, 71 (November 1917): 24.
9. Florin Bengean, *Filantropie și asistență socială în activitatea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania în perioada 1868–1918* (Târgu-Mureș: Ardealul, 2009), 252 sq.
10. Daniela Mârza, “Demografie și asistență socială în Transilvania (1916–1918): înființarea orfelinelor destinate orfanilor de război,” in *Mișcări de populație și probleme demografice în România în prima jumătate a secolului XX: Lucrările conferinței internaționale “Mișcări de populație în Transilvania în timpul celor două războaie mondiale,” Cluj-Napoca, 24–27 mai 2006*, eds. Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, Rudolf Gräf, and Corneliu Pădurean (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), 93.
11. Clopoșel, 74.
12. George Bariț, *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei pe două sute de ani în urmă*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited, notes, commentaries and index by Academician Ștefan Pascu and Professor Florin Salvan, Ph.D., vol. 2 (Brașov: Inspectoratul pentru Cultură al Județului Brașov, 1994), 184.
13. Z. Sandu, *Măreța adunare de la Alba Iulia unde s-a hotărât unirea Ardealului, Bănatului, Crișanei și Maramureșului cu România-mamă* (Săliște: Ed. Librăria Săteanului, n.d.), 29–30.
14. *Ibid.*, 47. The entire speech was recently reproduced in the book *Marea Unire de la Alba Iulia 1 Decembrie 1918*, printed with the blessing of His Eminence Father Irineu (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2018), 86–92.
15. Ștefan Pascu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1983), 181–182.
16. *Documente privind revoluția de la 1848 în Țările Române. C. Transilvania*, vol. 4 (14–25 mai 1848), ed. Ștefan Pascu (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1988), 37–38.

17. Bariț, 179.
18. *Unirea* 8, 19 (1898): 147.
19. Dr. Ioan Mișu, *Spicuri din gândurile mele politice, culturale, economice, publicate cu un studiu biografic de Silviu Dragomir, membru al Academiei Române* (Sibiu: Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1938), 389.
20. Clopoșel, 119.
21. *Ibid.*, 126–127.
22. Nicolae Bocșan, Ioan Lumperdean, and Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Etnie și confesiune în Transilvania (secolele XIII–XIX)* (Oradea: Cele Trei Crișuri, 1994), 143–144.
23. Cornelia Bodea, *1848 la români: O istorie în date și mărturii*, vol. I (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982), 479 sq.
24. Bocșan, Lumperdean, and Pop, 145.
25. Mișu, 369.
26. Apud Ioan Lupaș, “Înființarea Asociațiunii și conducătorii ei,” *Transilvania* (Brașov) 42, 4 (July–August 1911): 332 sq.
27. Arad County Division of the National Archives, Fond ASTRA–despărțământul cultural al județului Arad, file 6 (1863), 28 sqq. The same idea was expressed by Vasile Goldiș, during the general assembly of the National Association in Arad in 1910: “All Romanians . . . who love Romanian culture can meet here [at the Arad Association]. The Association is not a denominational institution. Its members can be all Romanians irrespective of their social class, from a bishop to a serf.” Cf. *Tribuna* (Arad) 14, 1 (1910).

### **Abstract**

From the National Assembly in Blaj to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia:  
Church and Nationality

The article discusses the role played by the Church in the organization of the two assemblies that were representative for the Transylvanian Romanians, in 1848 (Blaj) and 1918 (Alba Iulia). It provides an overview of the agents, the existing circumstances, the means of communication of the message concerning the organization of the national assemblies, as well as of the exhortations addressed to the masses encouraging them to participate in large numbers in the assemblies organized in Blaj and in Alba Iulia with a view to validate the decisions to be taken there. Also discussed is the manner in which the most important people involved in the events of 1848 and 1918 saw the issue of national unity in connection to that of religious affiliation, and the attempts to ensure a balanced representation of the two Romanian denominations (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) in those crucial moments.

### **Keywords**

Transylvania, Revolution of 1848, Great Union of 1918, Orthodox Church, Greek Catholic Church