

“Autumn Reschedules” The Student Movement in Cluj at the Start of the Academic Year 1923–1924

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University clinics of Cluj, period photo

WHEN THE Senate of Cluj University had hurriedly, ahead of time and forced by circumstances, let the curtain fall over the previous academic year, it had also left the path open for those students who wished to reschedule the classes and exams they had not attended. “Completion courses” and a “re-examination session” were to be introduced, as decided by the “Faculties’ Councils.”¹

The “reschedules” were decided by each individual faculty. This meant that the rescheduled classes would not all take place at the same time, much to the dissatisfaction of the students’ leader, Ion I. Moța.² At a meeting of the Petru Maior Committee on 1 September 1923, Moța stated the following: “The situation in Cluj is worse than elsewhere because our university authorities have decided that classes should start on different dates, and this tactic does not suit us.” (He was probably referring to the difficulty of upholding the Iași Congress of Delegates’ decision that Romanian students should not attend classes alongside Jews.) Moța appeared to be very well

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informed about the first-year medical students' dissections program, which was to be resumed on Monday, 3 September. He was therefore preparing for action:

*On Sunday, at 10 a.m., we will convene the students who are in Cluj, especially the medical students, to an assembly. The students are going to take an oath that they will carry out our decisions, and I think the majority will be on our side. In the next meeting we will set up an activity schedule so that the guys may have something to work on.*³

It becomes clear that the first stage of the work plan was to take place on Monday, at the Faculty of Medicine, which is why a preparatory assembly was convened for Sunday. Subsequently, at a future meeting, the students would receive other assignments that would keep them in activity. The quasi-military terms in which the preparation of the mission is described alternate with terms suggesting a high degree of familiarity (from “take an oath” and “will execute” to “so that the guys may have something to work on”). That is also what the results, described a few days later by the newspapers, looked like: the work of organized thugs.

On the day he made such preparations, Moța addressed himself (in French) to the secretary of the Grand Council of the League of Nations in Geneva, asking him to present to this organization the petition submitted by the General Congress of the Delegations of All Romanian Students, which had taken place in Iași on 22–25 August 1923. He had even adapted his signature: “Jean Motza.”⁴ The problems of “all Romanian students,” on whose behalf he spoke, had to be brought to the attention of the Grand Council of the League of Nations because, he said, the institution had competence in this sphere! The national institutional limit from which a favorable answer could be expected was thus overstepped: the Romanian state, through its government. Hence, the next higher authority from which Moța expected a resolution was the League of Nations. We do not know if the international institution answered him in any way, but years later Moța vehemently reacted against it.⁵ The change in the register adopted by the leader of the Cluj students in one and the same day is astonishing: from staging an act of pure violence to requesting help from a highly respected international organization, to which he sent an entirely legal document, a petition.

The events that took place in the laboratories of the Institute of Anatomy on 3 September, the Monday when dissection work was to resume, were reported by the local newspapers, with small differences in tone and involvement. *Patria* (The Country) tersely described the events as “further scuffles at the University”: “About 30 Jewish students attended the opening classes. At one point, a group of students armed with sticks jumped in and started a hell of a fight, the Jewish students being forced to rush out of the anatomy institute and seek refuge in the

streets, where they were followed by the Christian students.⁷⁶ As a result, the Police ordered the re-stationing of sergeants at the university's entrances.

Other newspapers provided slightly better-informed reports, based on sources in the student environment and with a more insightful grasp of the students' point of view. *Înfrățirea* (The Brotherhood) knew that the "incident" had followed "in the footsteps of the Iași resolution,"⁷⁷ and *Clujul* stated that the violent episode was "an implementation"⁷⁸ of that decision. Specifically, this was the resolution of the congress of delegates, which had laid down the line to be followed that autumn. In addition to continuing the strategy of passive resistance (non-attendance of classes, exams, laboratory works), the "delegates have decided that all students should pursue an active struggle in order to achieve the desired results as quickly as possible."⁷⁹ Such manifestations were therefore aligned with this new "active" orientation. They were meant to remind the rector (and, most of all, the Jewish community) that "he has not kept his promise to provide corpses for dissections,"⁸⁰ which is why the "approximately 25 Christian students" had served (as a reminder) "an unparalleled bludgeoning to the Jewish students. The chase continued on the stairs of the clinics and outside, into the Mico and Iorga streets."⁸¹

The new academic year had not even begun, but the problems that had led to the closure of the previous year had returned. Even the measures aimed at rescheduling some of the courses and exams were now in jeopardy. Faced with new violence and challenges, the university leadership (caught in a kind of interregnum) reacted, trying to save the situation. The preamble of the communiqué announcing the measures described the state of affairs: "I, the vice-rector of the University of Cluj, in the absence of the University Senate and motivated by the pressing circumstances, decide the following . . ." ⁸² The first point of this communiqué reinforced the prohibition to disturb the peaceful conduct of academic activity and reiterated that the guilty parties would be brought to justice. The second point noted that the leader of the turbulent group that had caused the disorder "was a former student, expelled from all Universities, who signs his name as President of the Student Center in Cluj, Mr. Ion I. Moța; we therefore find that the student center has infringed university regulations."⁸³ Consequently, it was decided that "the Petru Maior Student Center shall be immediately dissolved and the doors of the rooms assigned to it shall be sealed shut."⁸⁴ Any document subsequently issued by the center was to be sent to the Prosecutor's Office. The communiqué was signed by Vice-Rector Dimitrie Călugăreanu, representative of the Faculty of Sciences.

In the meantime, a notice posted at the Faculty of Medicine required that Jewish students should be provided with corpses for dissection by 15 September, as the Jewish community had previously pledged to do.⁸⁵ Otherwise, those students would no longer be entitled to participate in dissections.

It all seemed like a return in time, to the situation of almost one year before. The problem of the bodies for dissection, the soul-body relationship in the afterlife and its reflection in the two religions (Christianity/East-European Judaism)—all those issues were brought back into question, alongside the accusation that the university and the Jewish community in the city had not kept their promises. The difference was that what had been a spontaneous outburst the previous year was now a premeditated, organized action, with a history behind it.

The day after the violent attacks at the Institute of Anatomy, which had wrecked the laboratories and had driven out the Jewish students, Moța wrote to the rector for the first time since his expulsion, signing as “President of the Petru Maior Student Center.”¹⁶ (The same text, with a changed title, was addressed “To The Minister of Public Instruction, Bucharest.”)¹⁷ Another letter to the rector, dated on the same day of 4 September, demanded answers to older petitions and was signed, just like before (in May–August), by “substitutes”: Emil Pascu, “p. president,” and, more recently, Corneliu Georgescu, “p. secretary general.”¹⁸ The letter to the rector aimed to describe, in its own terms, a state of fact: “The kikes have (again!) been made to dissect Christian corpses, as if this issue had not been resolved last year, both through the solemn promise of the Minister of Instruction and through the repeated commitments made by Vice-Rector Iacobovici (the then rector).”¹⁹ The severe reproach that the authorities had failed to keep their promise was accompanied by a similar protest:

*These commitments have been broken, the victory we had won—on the matter of the corpses—has been stolen from us, without any reason or justification. I therefore wish to protest desperately, Mr. Rector, against this failure to execute a formal commitment, a non-execution that terrifies us with its deep moral significance. Mr. Rector, whom can we, students, trust, if we can no longer trust our Minister and our Rector?*²⁰

nr 180/4 Sept. 1923.

5 Sale
Domnului Rector al Universității
Cluj

Domnule Rector,

La 3 Sept. a. c. deschizându-se Institutul de Anatomie, studenții jidani au fost puși (din nou!) să diseca pe cadavre creștinești, ca și cum această chestiune nu ar fi fost rezolvată încă din anul trecut atât prin promisiunea solemnă a Ministerului Instrucției, cât și prin repetatele angajamente făcute de dl. prorector Iacobovici (pe atunci rector) care a spus în repetite rânduri în ședințele plenary ale Consiliului nostru: „Dece înveți aduce cadavre atunci diseca; degeț nu aduce, atunci nu diseci”, garantând cu conștientul și autoritatea școlii seriozitatea acestor angajamente. Nimeni nu se gândea atunci

Scrap paper register, Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5851, no. 180, 4 September 1923.

The pejorative slur “kikes,” the pathetic tone, the accusation of lack of morality, terms such as “despair,” “terrifies us” showed that Moța had set all caution aside in this ultimately official context in which, as a student, he addressed himself to an academic authority. Moreover, he did not end his letter without slipping in a threat that he would no longer be held “accountable” for his future deeds: “Mr. Rector, please receive our word of warning for what is to come. For pressure will always (sooner or later) give rise to a reaction: the heavier the pressure, the stronger the reaction. And the burden on our souls is very heavy, Mr. Rector.”²¹

Moreover, as one who assumed no responsibility for the situation that had emerged and for what had happened (on 3 September, at the Institute of Anatomy, for example), Moța wrote to Vice-Rector Călugăreanu, who had decided to dissolve the Petru Maior Center and seal off the premises it had occupied in the University.

*We hereby protest, Mr. Vice-Rector, with inexpressible feelings, against this act You have committed, which is the second abolition, this year, of our Center. After a lucid legal inquiry into the situation, we hereby ascertain that this act is illegal, a conclusion substantiated by so much evidence that, under the norms of the criminal code, we are entitled to consider that the attack perpetrated against us by sealing and locking our headquarters amounted to a home invasion and we shall accordingly act in self-defense.*²²

The vehement protest, in contrast to the “lucid legal inquiry” and its findings (the “home invasion” that the university had allegedly committed on its own premises!), was meant to cover future actions (premeditated, after all), such as the breaking of those seals and the theft of some documents.²³ The letter to the vice-rector was intended as a quick lesson in law coming from a specialist (a would-be specialist, since the sender was just a law student). After explaining why his act was “illegal” (based on articles from the university regulations), Moța applied the coup de grace to the vice-rector. “It is based on wrong premises”: “that I am allegedly not a student and president of the Center, and yet I have been tolerated at the helm of the Center.”²⁴ It was only when he approached such a personal matter that Moța became terribly outraged, proving that an extremely sensitive nerve had been touched. Indeed, in his communiqué, Călugăreanu had dared to reaffirm publicly what the university administration had already stated on a different occasion: that a person expelled from the university could not be president of the Petru Maior Center.

In order to rebut such evidence, Moța rebuilt his case and rewrote a parallel (and personal) history, claiming that: “I am the recognized president of the

Center.” This recognition had seemingly occurred through the intervention of Marin Ștefănescu (a professor of philosophy who supported the student movement), who had allegedly obtained approval from the rector’s office for an extraordinary session of the Center, which Moța had attended as “president.” He distorted and interpreted the reality in such a way as to benefit him: “I will conclude by saying that the Rector’s Office has acknowledged that I shall remain president of the Center and that it has tacitly, albeit not formally, reconsidered its decision to expel me.”²⁵ In fact, the rector’s office had never approved of Moța serving as president of the Center, so it could not acknowledge that he “remained” in office; neither had it reconsidered the expulsion measure by the time the petition was submitted (8 September), but Moța did admit as much: “tacitly, albeit not formally.” Moța was not president of the Center even according to the organization’s rules: validation through elections. He and his committee had not gone through such elections. They were rather a “revolutionary committee,” in which elected members (remainders of the old “George Alexa Committee”) were mixed with members designated/appointed by the faculties. Moța himself had been directly involved in changing some of the members. After the meetings began to be held at his home (the university was under curfew and he had been expelled), even students from outside the university became members of the board. Thus, the group of leaders included an Agronomy student, Aurelian Vernichescu.²⁶ This would have been impossible before, due to the firm opposition of the university leadership, which did not allow representatives of other higher education institutions in the city into its own student body. Moța had taken care to secure the loyalties of the Center’s leaders and to bring in his own “people.” Some of the committee members who became undesirable were quickly replaced: after the removal of the much too insistent Gheorghe Ionescu—the one who had asked for clarifications about the amounts the Center had received for postcards and leaflets and had taken an interest in the situation of the newspaper *Dacia Nouă* (The New Dacia)—from the position of secretary general, the position was occupied by another student, Corneliu Georgescu.²⁷

Regarding the abovementioned meeting that had presumably taken place on 13 May at the initiative of Professor Marin Ștefănescu, there is no telling if it actually took place. There is a report confirming that a meeting of the Committee of the Petru Maior Center started “at 3 p.m.” on 13 May, with “just one item on the agenda, namely the scheduling of an evening meeting.”²⁸ After discussing the possibility of holding a meeting “on the initiative of Prof. Marin Ștefănescu,” the committee concluded that the proposal “is hereby rejected by a majority of votes.”²⁹

Moța did not cease to plead his cause which, he deemed, was also the cause of the Petru Maior Student Center, even though, according to the university

hotărârea nr 10/1923-24 a ...
 sau studenții clujeni. E nedreptăți dintr-o necesitate
 et. de fine nobilități și generozități, care a mers și va merge
 mai puțin la manifestările noastre pentru căreia trebuie să
 lăm, această studenție nu trebuie să fie manifestată pro-
 feritorului care și-au dat un asemenea suflet frumos, în
 un obiectiv mai abăt de crunte lozuri. Lozurile
 studenției nu dori în la astăzi numai din partea
 viajurilor, un și din a parților ei. E din abia
 de director și de hirt conflictul (alcan, urmat de
 apăsarea naturală) dintre profesorul și studentul un-
 versității românești! Studentii o întelep necesitate; ne-
 fiind în mări și cauza acestui conflict, un depinde
 de ei întreținerea lui. Sărbii în atitudinea studen-
 țării față de autoritatea universitară, în aceste zile
 de mare luptă națională, și un fapt de necesitate
 al unor cauze pe care nu studenții generozități și
 patriotici le-a prezentat. E de aceea, sufletul nostru
 se schimbă tot mai dureros în fața unor și con-
 tinuă! Continui redrepte ce ni-se dau, și pe care nu

Scrap paper register, Lucian Blaga
 Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca,
 Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5851, no. 188,
 14 September 1923, fol. 3.

But Moța insisted most of all on the “unfairness” of the decision. This sense of injustice—more than the accusation of “illegality” or the threat that there would be practical consequences for the “tranquility of the University”—gave Moța the opportunity to unleash a violent tirade that no longer referred strictly to a university decision. The injustice itself was triple. First:

It is unfair because these noble and generous students, who have gone all the way and will not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the common good, these students should be the pride of their teachers who gave them such beautiful souls and not the object of such cruel blows. The students would much rather be struck only by their enemies, not by their parents. The conflict between the professors and the students of the Romanian university is so painful and sad (the attack, followed by the natural defense). The students realize this; however, because they are not the cause of this conflict, it is not up to them to quell it. We consider that the students’ attitude towards the university authorities, in these days of great national struggle, is an undisputed effect of some troubles that these generous and patriotic students did not cause. And that is why our soul bleeds more and more in the face of the new and relentless, unjust blows we receive but have not asked for.³¹

authorities, this center had been dissolved and seals had been placed on the locked doors of its former headquarters. He reiterated his arguments in an ample petition, asking the Senate not to confirm the decision of Prof. Călugăreanu, “because we rightly consider it inconsistent with the laws of the University, unfair to the Romanian students in Cluj and injurious in terms of nurturing the spirit, as desired by the Hon. university authorities.”³⁰ While the arguments supporting the idea of “illegality” had already been outlined in the letter to Călugăreanu, Moța’s plea was now enriched with two new themes. One of them was a form of blackmail: the authorities’ refusal to reconsider their decision meant they would have to assume dire consequences “for the tranquility of the University.”

This evokes the frustration the students experienced as a result of the inability of their professors and parents to understand them; a trans-generational conflict, in which only one generation—the adult one—bore all responsibility. If it reconsidered its behavior, its attitude, things could work out. The students obviously had no fault in this conflict. It was not up to them to resolve it. They had nothing to reproach themselves or to correct.

Secondly:

The closure of the old Petru Maior Society, founded by the historical generations of 1862, is an injustice, because it cannot be said that today's students have decayed and degenerated so much as to justify this impiety. We consider ourselves as worthy as our founders, whose example we have followed in all our actions.³²

The closure of the student center was not only unfair, it was downright offensive to a generation that was at least as grand as that of the founders. The self-image Moța projected competed with that of the great forefathers. There was no room for modesty here.

Things became even more obvious when the third argument was clarified:

But this decision is an injustice also for another reason: it would have sufficed for the university authority to reconsider its recognition of the current president and to inform the Center that in the event of his disobedience, if he was not removed from office, the given authorization would be revoked: this prior notice would have sufficed for the work to be fulfilled and the Petru Maior Society would have been spared from introducing this new and painful conflict in its annals.³³

The offence was not just a generational one, it was also very personal. This intensely felt injury led Moța to disavow what he had so strongly argued until then, namely that he had been recognized as president by the leadership of the university, through the approval given in the meeting of 13 May: “It would have sufficed for the university authority to reconsider its recognition of the current president.” This recognition had, in effect, not been granted.

The petition submitted to the Senate was an act of personal revenge rather than a genuine request to a respected institution whose authority Moța recognized. It was a sort of settling of scores, a heated reprimand, whose extremely vehement tone echoed the “love” of olden times. In fact, Moța had already acted as he saw fit, as if the decision he so severely criticized had already been abolished, not by the Senate, but by his own will. He had broken the seals and recovered the “assets of the Center”:

These were the reasons why our Committee considered the decision of Prof. Călugăreanu as null and void, and impossible to implement. By virtue of this, I, the undersigned, acted in keeping with the rights provided by the law, saving the property of the Center, the property that belongs to the students and for whose safe-keeping our committee is responsible (This right which the law gives us is stipulated in Art. 360 of the Hungarian Criminal Code, still in force; see Illés, vol. III, ed. 1889, p. 202.)³⁴

It was not the first time Moța had pleaded, judged and applied “justice” on his own. He had done so in the case of his colleague Ionescu, the former secretary general of the Center. But now he did it before an authority that was yet to reach a decision about him, about his expulsion, for instance. And yet, in the absence of what we might call an instinct of self-preservation, he defied academic authority. In its session of 28 September, the University Senate concluded tersely: “The Petru Maior Student Center did not comply with its statutes in accordance with the Regulations in force, so it shall remain dissolved.”³⁵

BESIDES HIS violent acts (the destruction of laboratories, the mistreatment of some students, the breaking of seals and the recovery of the Center’s assets), the letter he sent to Professor Călugăreanu and the petition he submitted to the Senate reveal just how radical Moța’s stance had become by September 1923. They also show how willing he was to take major public risks, in line with a “revolutionary” logic whereby his own cause was always right and that, in its name, he could overstep the limits of the common law (i.e. the law that was applicable to all others).³⁶ On 17 September, Moța left on a delegation to Iași and Bucharest, in an attempt to solve various issues on the agenda he shared with the students there. The resolutions of the Congress of Delegates in Iași guided his steps: frequent meetings of delegates from the major university centers and efforts to regulate local issues together. While in Iași the request that the professors’ congress (held there) should support their demands had been turned down, in Bucharest things went better: some editors of *Cuvântul studentesc* (The Voice of the Students) found to be “unsuitable for our movement” were removed, and there were “purges” in the Bucharest Student Committee with a view to changing previous positions.³⁷ Moreover, the students enthusiastically welcomed the peasants from Câmpulung who had come to Bucharest to voice their grievances and to support, much to the surprise of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, who had received them in audience, not only his own suffering caused by the Jewish exploitation of Bukovina’s forests, but also the idea of the “*numerus clausus*.”³⁸ The favorable impressions in the capital led Moța to state at the meeting of the Petru Maior Committee that “the students are not as weak as the government thinks they are and as we think they are.”³⁹

The days he spent with his comrade Corneliu Zelea Codreanu on Mount Rarău strengthened his hope that the student struggle which had lasted almost a year would find a worthy apotheosis, one that would save the honor of the movement. Without going into details, he informed the members of the committee: “The last assault we will mount this autumn will bring us either victory or honorable defeat. In the coming days there will be a new congress of delegates in which I will take part and where we will decide what we think is for the better.”⁴⁰

The discussion on Mount Rarău was recounted by Codreanu, to whom Moța proposed a solution he deemed honorable. They could not continue to ask all students not to attend classes (that would have meant wasting another academic year), nor would they risk a “shameful surrender” by simply returning to school:

*It is better to encourage them to attend classes and we, who have led them, will give the movement a beautiful end by sacrificing ourselves, but will make sure that all those who are guilty of betraying Romanian interests will fall with us. Let us buy revolvers and shoot them, setting a terrible example that will remain entrenched in our Romanian history. What will become of us, whether we will die or stay in prison for the rest of our lives, is of little consequence.*⁴¹

As Codreanu agreed, the following people met again, “shortly thereafter,” in Iași: “Ion Moța, Corneliu Georgescu and Vernichescu from Cluj, Ilie Gârneață, Radu Mironovici, Leonida Bandac and I from Iași, Tudose Popescu from Cernăuți.”⁴²

Moța left Cluj at the beginning of October, on the day (or very shortly after) when, for a handwritten receipt, he removed from the treasury of the Petru Maior Center “4,000 (four thousand) lei for a delegation of 5 (five) members, going to Iași and Bucharest to serve the supreme interests of the national student movement. The delegation will last about 10 (ten) days—Cluj, 2 October 1923,

1109/12
 Chișinău.
 Inscrisurii prezente al Centrului
 au primit de la orice Centrului „Petru Maior”
 Lei 4000 (patru mii) pentru o delegație
 de 5 (cinci) membri, plecată la Iași și
 București în folosul unor supreme interese
 ale mișcării naționale studențești. Dele-
 gația va dura aproximativ 10 (zece) zile,
 Cluj, 2 octombrie 1923.
 Treacă la prof.
 suma a fost
 restituită mișcării
 de către Șt. Moța
 la 22 Oct. 1923
 Ion I. Moța
 prezente al Centrului.
 10.10.1923

Handwritten receipt of 2 October 1923,
 Lucian Blaga Central University Library
 of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5988.

Ion I. Moța, president of the Center.”⁴³ One could say that he had a good reason to “retrieve the assets of the Center” when he had broken, three weeks before, the seals on the headquarters of that organization. In fact, it was not the first time he had generously covered the expenses of his colleagues in the country from the same source. He had done it at the Congress of Delegates in late August.⁴⁴

In Iași they met “in the houses of Mr. Butnaru” and decided “that the first and greatest culprits are the villainous Romanians,” “more so than the enemies, for they are traitors.”⁴⁵ Of these they selected a group of six ministers “headed by George Mârzescu.” Then they switched to the “Jews,” and here the choice was difficult: “Which of the two million should we take?,” especially since “we were few and took only the important ones in Bucharest.”⁴⁶ They decided on three socio-professional categories, identified as the most dangerous: rabbis, bankers (Aristide and Maurice Blank) and journalists (Jacob Rosenthal, Wilhelm Filderman, Samuel Honigman/Emil D. Fagure, directors of the newspapers *Dimineața*, *Adevărul*, and *Lupta*).⁴⁷ They went from Iași to Bucharest one at a time, not all at once, with the feeling that they would never return, and wrote letters to their parents and comrades, like they were about to commit suicide.

They did not get to kill others or themselves, because on the evening of 8 October 1923 they were all arrested in the house on 13 September St., where they had gathered for the latest preparations. Asked to surrender their weapons, only two of them did so (according to the same source): “Only Moța had a Browning 6.35 and so did Vernichescu.”⁴⁸

Over the following days, local newspapers published fragments of information taken over from the central press. The plot was discovered “thanks to a student who had experienced qualms of conscience and denounced the plot to a prefect.”⁴⁹ Titus Oroveanu (the prefect of Buzău) immediately alerted his government. Among those who were arrested were Codreanu Jr. and Moța, who “have already confessed.”⁵⁰ Although the students’ plot was not carried out, another assassination attempt, on “the director of *Adevărul*, Mr. Rosenthal,” did take place. An unknown man “hit him in the head with an iron club.”⁵¹ He was in hospital, in very serious condition. A wave of astonishment, reactions and counter-reactions, information and denial or relativization (what weapons did the attackers have?; how vast was the action supposed to be?; how far spread out in the territory?; who was truly responsible? etc.) filled the pages of those periodicals. Among them was a fragment of *L’Indépendance Roumaine*, taken over by *Patria*, which provided an analysis of this episode:

We cannot insist enough, on this occasion, on the moral responsibility of all politicians and agitators without a conscience, who strive through every means to trouble the spirits of exalted or naive youth, successfully at times. The criminal—or child-

*isb—plot is the fruit born of a poisoned seed, which is spread far and wide among the young students by professional and self-serving agitators. This discovery must serve as a reminder to all those who, under the pretext of exaggerated nationalism, attack the moral fiber of some of the students, directly or indirectly pushing them to commit criminal or childish acts.*⁵²

The newspaper article described a state of confusion between the impulse to condemn violence in whatever form and the predicament of not knowing how “opportune” it was to do so because its source was difficult to identify: “This obscure fascism is mistaken for the student movement, the party of Mr. [A. C.] Cuza, a few Leagues, or the movement of retired officers—so it is difficult to distinguish it in this mosaic.”⁵³ For the time being, it was difficult to define precisely, but the new political trend had steadily insinuated itself in the Romanian public landscape.

Struck by the news of their leader’s arrest, the students in Cluj reacted. With the Petru Maior Center dissolved for more than a month, they could not close ranks, as before, in the university. They gathered at the Mănăştur brewery in order to elect a vice-president and add new members to the committee. “On its own initiative, a committee of 15 people took the lead of the student movement.”⁵⁴ A telegram sent to the king said that “the arrests and plot accusations have been staged by the government, so we demand the release of those arrested.”⁵⁵ Paradoxically, the students wanted to rob the young plotters of something very precious and to label it the government’s “fantasy”: the idea of organizing the attacks. (But as it would become clear during the ensuing trial, these plotters were very proud of what they had set out to do.) The government itself was warned in a petition that it should immediately release those arrested and that the students were “determined to proceed with the fight even it meant losing their lives.”⁵⁶ This was the end or the beginning of an era in the history of the Cluj Student Center.

Noui amănunte asupra complotului fascist

Arestările -- Comunicatul guvernului -- Descoperirile

Am anunţat şi noi în numărul de ieri câteva ştiri la legătură cu complotul fascist descoperit la Bucureşti. Revenim astăzi cu noul amănunte.

Guvernul şi Siguranţa generală cunoşteau încă mai de mult organizaţiile fasciste din Capitală. Nu se bănuia, însă, că s'ar plănuia mişcări violente sau comiterea vre-unor asasinat.

Prima dovadă s'a primit la Ministerul de Interne asupra complotului chiar în ziua descoperirii lui.

Investigaţiile au fost făcute de Parchetul general de Ilfov, şi Serviciul de siguranţă. Arestarea complotiştilor s'a operat chiar în aceeaşi zi.

Între numele celor arestaţi în prima zi: Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion I. Moja, Aurel Vernişteanu, avocat, Nicolae Dragoş, Teodosie Popescu, Manolovic Radu şi Georgescu Corneliu.

Ieri, Siguranţa din Cluj a arestat pe studentul Traian Bressu, pe care l-a trimis sub escortă la Bucureşti.

Alătăieri guvernul a dat următorul comunicat:

Un complot cu scop de a asasina mai mulţi miniştri a fost descoperit în seara zilei de 8 Octombrie.

V. novaţii, printre care se găsesc Zelea Codreanu, fiul, şi Moja, au fost arestaţi şi au făcut mărturisiri. Instrucţia continuă.

“Noui amănunte asupra complotului fascist” (New details about the fascist plot), *Patria*, 12 October 1923, 1.

Notes

1. Cluj County Branch of the National Archives, Universitatea din Cluj coll., “Ședințele Senatului Universitar,” file 4, fol. 112 (sitting of 8 June 1923).
2. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 6011, Minutes of 1 September 1923.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., Ms. 5851 (Scrap paper register), no. 178, 1923.
5. Ion I. Moța, *La Securité juridique dans la Société des Nations* (Bucharest: Imprimerie “Bucovina,” 1932). The text was a fierce critique of the institution, blamed for its failure to ensure the legal security invoked.
6. “Noi bătaii la Universitate,” *Patria* (Cluj), 5 September 1923, 2.
7. “Incidentul de ieri de la Universitate,” *Înfrățirea* (Cluj), 5 September 1923, 3.
8. “O nouă violare a Centrului Studențesc din Cluj,” *Clujul*, 9 September 1923, 1–2.
9. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5993, incoming posters, resolutions of the Student Congress in Iași (newspaper cutouts pasted on white sheets).
10. “Incidentul de ieri de la Universitate,” 3.
11. “O nouă violare a Centrului Studențesc din Cluj,” 1–2.
12. “Un grav conflict la Universitate: Dizolvarea centrului studențesc ‘Petru Maior,’” *Înfrățirea*, 9 September 1923, 1.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. This request would, of course, cause a reaction from the local Jewish community, which argued that it had no bodies, that it could not provide such a “flow of supply” and that it was not its duty to do so; it was the duty of the university to provide “teaching material.” An old discussion, a rekindled dispute...
16. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5851 (Scrap paper register), no. 180, 4 September 1923.
17. Ibid., no. 181, 4 September 1923.
18. Ibid., no. 182 and 183, 4 September 1923.
19. Ibid., no. 180, 4 September 1923.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., no. 185, 8 September 1923.
23. “Instrucția președintelui Centrului studențesc la parchet,” *Clujul*, 16 September 1923, 3. After breaking the seals and removing the documents from the Petru Maior Center, Moța was called “again” to the prosecutor’s office.
24. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5851 (Scrap paper register), no. 185, 8 September 1923.
25. Ibid.
26. At the committee meeting of the Petru Maior Center, held on 23 May 1923, “in Mr. Moța’s place,” as noted in the minutes, Aurelian Vernichescu also appeared among those appointed “to prepare the thematic arrangement of the congress” (the con-

- gress that should have been held in Cluj during the summer but was eventually canceled). Ibid., Ms. 6011, Minutes of 23 May 1923.
27. The meeting in which Ionescu (secretary general) confronted Moța had taken place on 1 September. The first documents in which Georgescu's name was listed instead of his appeared a few days later, on 4 September. See *ibid.*, Ms. 5851 (Scrap paper register), no. 183, 4 September 1923. Ionescu was informed that he had been removed (without the right of reply) only at the end of that month, in a Committee meeting mistakenly dated 31 September (September obviously has only 30 days): *ibid.*, Ms. 6011, Minutes of 31 September 1923.
 28. *Ibid.*, Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 6011, Minutes of 13 May 1923.
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *Ibid.*, Ms. 5851 (Scrap paper register), no. 188, 14 September 1923, fol. 1.
 31. *Ibid.*, fol. 3.
 32. *Ibid.*, fols. 3–2.
 33. *Ibid.*, fol. 4.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. Cluj County Branch of the National Archives, Universitatea din Cluj coll., “Ședințele Senatului Universitar”, file 5, fol. 5v. (sitting of 28 September 1923).
 36. In Traian Sandu's words: “The young generation claimed to be the sole radical social vigilante and assumed the right to transgress the laws in the name of a higher moral, founded on a transcendence whose norms it imposed on its own.” *Istoria Gărzii de Fier: Un fascism românesc*, trans. Simona Modreanu (Chișinău: Cartier, 2019), 44.
 37. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 6011, Minutes of 30 September 1923.
 38. The meeting of some National-Christian Defense League members with the peasants from Bukovina took place in Câmpulung, on 17 September 1923. This is considered the beginning of the organized A. C. Cuza's movement in Bukovina. See Radu Florian Bruja, *Extrema dreaptă în Bucovina* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 108–109. It is told extensively by Codreanu, who also talks about the delegation that left for Bucharest for a meeting with the prime minister at the Council of Ministers. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari* (Sibiu: Totul pentru Țară, 1936), 163–167.
 39. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 6011, Minutes of 30 September 1923.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. Zelea Codreanu, 168.
 42. *Ibid.*, 169.
 43. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5988, supporting documents, handwritten receipt of 2 October 1923.
 44. A list of expenses found in such documents: coffee, cheese, hansom cabs, telegrams, letters, trams, tips, car gasoline, funeral cakes, requiems, cockades, food: Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, Petru Maior coll., Ms. 5993, Balance sheet of the Congress in Iași, 4 September 1923.

45. Zelea Codreanu, 169.
46. Ibid., 169–170.
47. Ibid., 170.
48. Ibid., 171. The newspapers of those time debated intensely to what extent the group was armed. Some researchers would compare the action to a belated childhood game, where the protagonists believed themselves to be their favorite characters: “musketeers” or “Captain Storm.” See Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului,”* trans. Wilhelm Tauwinkl (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 72.
49. “Complotul contra guvernului,” *Înfrățirea*, 12 October 1923, 4.
50. “Noui amănunte asupra complotului fascist,” *Patria*, 12 October 1923, 1.
51. “Atentatul contra dlui Rosenthal,” *Înfrățirea*, 12 October 1923, 4.
52. “Noui amănunte asupra complotului fascist,” 1.
53. “Cum trebuie judecat complotul,” *Patria*, 13 October 1923, 1.
54. “O întrunire studențească,” *Patria*, 14 October 1923, 3.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.

Abstract

“Autumn Reschedules”: The Student Movement in Cluj
at the Start of the Academic Year 1923–1924

The paper presents the events that took place within the student community of Cluj in the autumn of 1923, when classes resumed after having been suspended for a whole academic year on account of the previous student unrest. Ion I. Moța, the former president of the Petru Maior Center and a principal artisan of the unrest of the previous year, made successive attempts to revitalize the Center, closed down by the university, and reignite the protests, believing that the authorities had not kept their promises. That the leaders of the student movement had become increasingly radical is shown by the fact that, after consultations with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion I. Moța chose the path of assassination portrayed as self-sacrifice. The actual outcome was his arrest, after a student with a guilty conscience informed the authorities about the violent plans of the radical leaders.

Keywords

Cluj University, interwar period, student unrest, anti-Semitism, Ion I. Moța