

Economic and Political Aspects Pertaining to the Romanian National Movement from Transylvania

VASILE DOBRESCU

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its own special features,
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(*Vasile C. Osvadă*)

Vasile Dobrescu

Professor at Petru Maior University of Târgu-Mureș, specializing in the modern history of Transylvania. Author, among others, of the books **Elita românească în lumea satului transilvan (1867–1918)** (Romanian elite in the Transylvanian rural world, 1867–1918) (1996) and **Sistemul de credit românesc din Transilvania (1872–1918)** (The Romanian credit system in Transylvania, 1872–1918) (1999).

THE RELATIONSHIP between the institutionalized national political movements—which began with the activity of the national Churches and continued with the initiatives of the “Astra” Cultural Association and especially of the Romanian National Party—and the economic situation of Transylvania has long been in the attention of specialists, and the social-economic history of the modern era has seen the publication of many studies dedicated to general or more particular aspects concerning these realities, accompanied or not by statistical evidence.

From various doctrinarian or ideological angles, and in various forms, Romanian historiography has highlighted the manner in which political and cultural goals combined with the need for economic progress among the Transylvanian Romanians. Quite often, this interaction sought to produce a distinct network of economic relations defined along national lines. The political agen-

da of the Romanian National Party—set out in the programs adopted at the national conferences of 1881 and 1905, in the Memoranda of 1882 and 1892, and in the statements and the initiatives of Romanian members of parliament between 1905 and 1918—indicated considerable concern with the economic situation of the Romanians, and especially with the agricultural sector, since the rural world was being dominated by an overwhelming Romanian majority. The actions taken in various sectors of the modern capitalist economy by the members of the Romanian political elite considerably expanded and enriched the objectives and the initiatives of the national movement. For instance, the establishment of the national banking system,¹ coordinated by a center such as the “Solidaritatea,”² the movement for the creation of rural cooperative associations,³ or, in the urban environment, the desire to promote trade and manufacturing by way of professional associations⁴ saw the active involvement of political leaders and therefore came to shape the very nature of the national movement. Indeed, the major theorists of the national movement, Vicențiu Babeș, Alexandru Mocioni, Aurel C. Popovici or Vasile Goldiș included material values among the values that define all nations in general and the Romanian nation in particular.⁵ Also, intellectuals known for the role they had played in public life, but who were also active in the industrial or financial sector, considered that economic activities were “the cornerstone of the national edifice” (George Barițiu) or “the most important agent of progress, in whose absence all political struggle is but in vain” (self-taught politician and economist Visarion Roman). Similarly, in 1913, Vasile C. Osvadă, a specialist in cooperative organization and in crediting, associated the idea of economic progress with that of national specificity: “Each nation has its needs, its own special features, and therefore every nation plays an important and significant role as an economic factor.”

The presence among the leaders of the Romanian National Party of people who had also played a major role in economic life, such as George Barițiu, Visarion Roman, Partenie Cosma, Eugen Brote, George Pop de Băsești, Ioan Mihu, Aurel Vlad, Amos Frâncu, etc., supported by a sizable number of economists, engineers, technicians, priests or schoolteachers, driven by the desire to build a national economy through their own efforts and means,⁶ comes to perfectly illustrate the development and the features of the modern national movement. Within this movement, economy and politics became complementary rather than mutually exclusive, with one dimension supporting the other, in a binomial relationship that shaped the organic development of the Romanian nation.

The first authors to speak about the relationship between economy and politics within the Romanian national movement were in fact the very promoters of national ideas. They were both involved in the social and political struggle and, at the same time, judges of their own actions, which made it so that some

of their contributions or value judgments were later called into question. Among them we find the intellectuals of the generation associated with the Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath, their most illustrious representative being George Barițiu, whose syntheses and numerous solutions proposed for the modernization of Transylvanian economy remained unparalleled at that time. G. Barițiu analyzed the transition of Transylvanian society from the Old Regime to a capitalist economy, and published his observations in the periodicals he led, *Gazeta de Transilvania* (The Transylvanian Gazette) and *Observatorul* (The Observer). His studies and articles opened a debate surrounding the need for the Romanian intellectual elite to become involved not only in the public and cultural life, but also in the economic one. It was called upon to stimulate the development of trades, manufacturing (paper, textiles, wood, metallurgy, etc.), to encourage a reorganization of peasant farms along rational and efficient models, to assist in the establishment of financial institutions and become aware of the importance played by a modern economy in the pursuit of political and national goals.⁷ As the press of that time was publishing hundreds of articles with a precise and pragmatic economic content, in 1876 G. Barițiu's *Gazeta de Transilvania* introduced a series called "The best policy—a national economy," meant to explain the importance of industrialization within the process of Romanian national emancipation. As a historian, in his *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei. Pre două sute de ani în urmă* (Aspects of Transylvanian history: The past two hundred years), G. Barițiu focused on various social-economic structures, especially those pertaining to the field of agriculture.⁸ In the same pieces, he indicated the present and future significance of the new credit institutions, and especially of the "Albina" bank, to whose establishment he had directly contributed by way of sustained propaganda.

His contemporaries, specialists in agriculture or in economic science, approached various sectors of the modern Transylvanian economy, comparing the Romanian social and economic structures to those of the other nations living in the province and offering solutions meant to help modernize the former. Thus, George Maior,⁹ a specialist in agronomy, performed a first synthesis of Romanian agricultural organization by drawing on the data found in official statistics. Eugen Brote¹⁰ analyzed the economic situation of Romanian society in the larger framework of the national political movement associated with the *Memorandum*. Other specialists interested in agrarian relations discussed the reorganization of the entire economic system of the Romanian rural world, in keeping with the principles of a market economy, arguing that traditional methods had to be changed so that small and medium-sized farms could become more productive. The most interesting contributions in this respect are those of Ștefan Pop,¹¹ Demetriu Comșa,¹² Ioan F. Negruțiu,¹³ Ioan Georgescu,¹⁴ Aurel Coșciuc,¹⁵ Romul Simu,¹⁶ Eugen

Brote,¹⁷ etc. Among the solutions and the alternatives proposed by them for the economic revival of the Romanian village we find the associative models and the various forms of agrarian cooperation, ranging from credit institutions and production and commercialization units to the means of obtaining livestock and agricultural equipment and machines. Among the promoters of the cooperative model we find Visarion Roman,¹⁸ Aurel Brote¹⁹ and Eugen Brote,²⁰ Vasile C. Osvadă,²¹ Victor Tordășanu,²² and Cornel Aisner.²³

The role and the importance of credit institutions for the economic and political life of the Transylvanian Romanians were well understood and highlighted by those advocating the establishment of national credit institutions, from self-taught specialist Visarion Roman²⁴ to Nicolae Petra-Petrescu,²⁵ Eugen Brote,²⁶ Pompiliu Cioban,²⁷ Constantin Popp,²⁸ Corneliu Diaconovici,²⁹ and to financial expert Ion I. Lapedatu.³⁰ The theoretical and practical observations from the pieces dedicated to the development of the national banking system until the year 1918 were not limited to quantitative aspects, but also highlighted the importance of financial and banking institutions in the economic life of the Transylvanian Romanians, indicating the advantages of the transfer of assets from the large Hungarian feudal estates to the small farmer holdings.

IN SPITE of the positive developments occurred in the fields of Transylvanian agriculture and banking, the authors of studies in the fields of economic analysis and policy or of economic history never completed the investigations concerning the political impact of economic phenomena. Their conclusions, albeit pertinent, remained rather general in nature, failing to fully indicate the significance of economic initiatives for the political activity of the Romanian elites prior to 1918. This restraint can be somewhat understood if one thinks of the aggressive economic literature and policies cultivated by the Budapest authorities, worried by the economic progress of the Transylvanian Romanians, seen as directly connected to the revival of a national-cultural movement that advocated a separation from the political and economic structures of the Austrian-Hungarian state.

After the Great Union of 1918, during the interwar period and continuing even as late as 1947–1948, economic historiography approached with new methods and from a different angle the interrelation between economic progress and the objectives of the national movement in the modern era, focusing on the unitary economic development of Greater Romania. The authors of such studies came from the fields of general, agrarian, or financial political economy, and to a lesser extent from among the major historians of that period. In spite of the fact that most attention was being given to political initiatives, there were writings dedicated to economic aspects, writings which essentially high-

lighted the Transylvanian orientation towards the economic life of the Old Romanian Kingdom. For instance, Ioan Moga published a study³¹ concerning the disastrous effects which the customs “war” of 1887–1891 between Romania and Austria-Hungary had had over the industry and the agriculture of Transylvania, suddenly isolated from their trading partners in the Romanian provinces. Towards the end of that period, the historian Ioan Lupaş analyzed the economic and financial policies pursued by the Transylvanian Romanians,³² and also completed the manuscript of a sizable study dedicated to the activity of the “Albina” bank from Sibiu.

The investigations concerning the economic life of the Transylvanian Romanians prior to 1918 were mainly carried out by economists such as Ion Luca Ciomac, Petru Suciu, Gheorghe Dragoş, Nicolae N. Petra, Alexandru Bărbat, Victor Slăvescu and Victor Jinga, etc. Drawing on new sources of information, they broadened the scope of the debate concerning the relations between economy and politics within the Romanian national movement, making comparisons and correlations with the contemporary economic situation of the Hungarians and the Germans. Landmark studies, of interest even today, such as the ones devoted to the financial and banking system (Nicolae N. Petra,³³ Victor Slăvescu³⁴), to the initiatives and the results of rural cooperation (Gheorghe Dragoş,³⁵ Nicolae Ghiulea³⁶), to social and real estate structures (P. Suciu,³⁷ I. L. Ciomac³⁸), indicate the involvement of the Romanian elite in the development of a national economic life, of a national economic body, representative within the structures of the Austrian-Hungarian state. These achievements were completed by the interdisciplinary investigations of Victor Jinga, published under the title *Probleme fundamentale ale Transilvaniei* (Fundamental problems concerning Transylvania). Jinga analyzed the demographic, economic, cultural and political development of the Transylvanian Romanians from the creation of the Romanian people to the Second World War. The book was written under the impact of the territorial losses suffered by Romania in 1940, and his main arguments concerned the idea of unity across the entire Romanian space, also reflected by the synchronous economic development of Transylvania within the same space.³⁹

The ideology of the communist period made it so that the investigation of such matters was conducted on the basis of an artificial set of values and criteria, assigning a central role to economic factors by twisting and distorting the Marxist dogma and by completing it with Leninist and Stalinist elements. Between 1948 and 1960, the entire Romanian history—the modern history of Transylvania included—would be mutilated in this fashion. The role played by the political elites was not only questioned, but actually condemned, and the activity of political leaders was approached selectively, the only criterion being the convergence between their interests and those of the classes deemed to have been exploit-

ed and oppressed by the capitalist regime. Furthermore, the very word 'national' and the ideas of national spirit and national movement were often disparaged and criticized as belonging to the bourgeois capitalist society.

The exaggerated importance given to the social significance of economic elements led to artificial, inaccurate, excessively general and indiscriminating conclusions. Thus, the Romanian Transylvanian elites, especially those active in the economic field, were included under the generic label of capitalist exploiters belonging to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. They were seen as a negative factor influencing the economic and social situation of the masses, in their turn perceived as a homogeneous social organism, knowing no material, cultural, demographic, and national differences. According to such interpretations, the social-economic movement of the exploited groups and classes was defined as the source of the general progress that had led to the major moments in history, such as the one marking the dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

The reduction of ideological constraints in the 1960s and the 1970s allowed for a return to the interwar historiographical investigations concerning the national movement from Transylvania. It was not so much a renewal in terms of concepts and ideas, but rather in what concerned the investigated topics and the historiographical style itself. The main moments in the modern history of the Transylvanian Romanians were thus described in the light of more comprehensive information, but also by means of new comparative, structuralist, and even interdisciplinary approaches, requiring the involvement of economists, sociologists, and specialists in historical demography. The analysis and the interpretation of the social-economic realities of Transylvania became thus more detailed and minute, gradually revealing the important role played by the Romanian intellectuals in the modernization of Transylvanian social structures and in the promotion of national interests. Quite notable are the writings of historians Bujor Surdu,⁴⁰ Iosif Kovács,⁴¹ Liviu Botezan, Simion Retegan,⁴² Hilde Mureșan, Aurel Răduțiu,⁴³ Nicolae Cordoș, Mihai Drecin⁴⁴ and others. They highlighted the role played by the elites in the national movement, in spite of the fact that the official censorship sought to suppress the references to a number of personalities targeted by the communist regime, especially the former political prisoners who were deemed enemies of the new order.

At the same time, through the efforts of specialists noted for their studies in the field of economic thought, a new life was given to the investigations dedicated to those elements of economic history and doctrine that were directly related to the importance of the Romanian Transylvanian elite in the modern era. Costin Kirițescu,⁴⁵ Costin Murgescu,⁴⁶ and especially Gheorghe Zane,⁴⁷ historians of economic relations, turned towards the Transylvanian society of the modern era and discussed either the emergence of an economic literature of nation-

al relevance, or the economic and financial achievements of the Romanian elite prior to 1918. The investigations carried out in the field of economic history in Cluj and Bucharest focused on the contribution brought by reputed economists belonging to the national movement from Transylvania. Such are the studies of Nicolae Ivanciu-Văleanu,⁴⁸ Toader Ionescu,⁴⁹ Ioan Tiberian, Victor Axenciuc,⁵⁰ etc., who sought to identify the beneficial influence of economic progress over the political actions aimed at achieving the unity of Romanian territories.

The radical shift occurred in our national historiography after 1989, when new topics were approached and the old ones were revisited from an entirely new perspective, with the help of the methods and techniques currently used in Europe, opened unlimited horizons to the researchers working in the field of history. Under these circumstances, the analysis of the elements that defined the Romanian Transylvanian national movement in the modern era once again highlighted the value of the national elites, outlined the ideas and the ideologies of that time, the social and economic doctrines, and the mentalities of various social groups. The history of the institutionalized forms and of the various aspects pertaining to the economic life of Transylvania deserve to be investigated from the vantage point of the new economic models and doctrines, which take into account the role played by individuals and nations as dynamic and innovative producers of new assets, in support of societies experiencing a process of political integration and economic globalization.

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Notes

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4. Bartolomeu Baiulescu, *Despre necesitatea promovării meseriilor la români* (Sibiu, 1884).
5. Nicolae Bocșan, *Ideea de națiune la românii din Transilvania și Banat: Secolul al XIX-lea* (Reșița, 1997).
6. Gheorghe Zane, *Studii* (Bucharest, 1980), 287–360; Vasile Dobrescu, *Elita românească în lumea satului transilvan (1867–1918)* (Târgu-Mureș, 1996), 33–92.
7. From the considerable bibliography on this matter, see Radu Pantazi, *Viața și ideile lui George Barițiu* (Bucharest, 1964); Toader Ionescu, "Probleme ale dezvoltării economice în opera lui G. Barițiu," in *Din gândirea economică progresistă românească* (Bucharest, 1967), 285–340; Vasile Netea, *George Barițiu, viața și activitatea sa*

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 11. Ștefan Pop, *Economia rurală* (Sibiu, 1873); Teodor Pavel, "Economul—primul periodic economic al românilor din Transilvania," *Studii* (Cluj-Napoca), Series Historia, 1967, fasc. 1: 65–76.
 12. Demetriu Comșa, *Pomăritul* (Sibiu, 1887); id., *Prăsierea pomilor* (Sibiu, 1890); Dobrescu, 80–86.
 13. Ioan F. Negruțiu, *Împărțirea, lucrarea și îngrijirea unei moșii* (Sibiu, 1905); id., *Cultura și îngrijirea grâului* (Brașov, 1909).
 14. Ioan Georgescu, *Cartea plugarilor* (Gherla, 1899).
 15. Aurel Coșciuc, *Nutrirea animalelor de casă* (Sibiu, 1909).
 16. Romul Simu, *Cartea stuparilor săteni* (Sibiu, 1897).
 17. Eugen Brote, *Ținerea vitelor* (Sibiu, 1888); id., *Trifoiul* (Sibiu, 1890).
 18. Vasile Netea, *Noi contribuții la cunoașterea vieții și activității lui Visarion Roman* (Bucharest, 1942); Bujor Surdu, "Societatea de păstrare și împrumut din Rășinari," *Acta Musei Napocensis* 3 (1966): 317–328.
 19. *Însoțirile de credit împreunate cu însoțiri de consum, de vânzare, de vineri, de lăptărie și instrucțiunile trebuitoare . . . de F. W. Raiffeisen*, trans. Aurel Brote (Sibiu, 1895).
 20. Eugen Brote, *Însoțirile de credit Raiffeisen* (Sibiu, 1891).
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 24. I. N. Ciolan and Vasile V. Grecu, *Visarion Roman pedagog social* (Bucharest, 1971).
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 27. Pompiliu Cioban, *Creditul nostru: Studiu financiar* (Arad, 1912).
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39. Victor Jinga, *Problemele fundamentale ale Transilvaniei*, 2 vols. (Brașov, 1945); from the writings published by the same author, see also *Dincolo de burghezie și capitalism* (Brașov, 1944); *Dinamica economiei capitaliste* (Brașov, 1941).
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Keywords

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