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Between Abstinence and Prohibition Actions for Combating Alcoholism in Transylvania during World War I



Alcohol commercial, *Furnica*
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OVER TIME, World War I has prompted the interest of many specialists. Approached from various perspectives, the subject is always current, being complemented by new sources and researched under new aspects. In general, in the Romanian historiography, the problem of the use, production and regulation of alcohol has been little researched. That is why the starting point of our scientific research was to draw a picture of the situation of the anti-alcohol movement on the continent, then focus on the one in Transylvania.

Measures to Combat Alcoholism in Europe (1914–1918)

IN EUROPE, it was considered that the Great War was also a war against alcoholic beverages, which was illustrated by the fact that during the conflict some of the most drastic anti-alcohol measures of the last two centuries were taken. The global con-

flagration changed the direction of the anti-alcohol movement in Europe, and the changes were echoed in Transylvania, too. Alcoholism as well as the anti-alcohol movement behind the front line were not by any extent “isolated” realities specific to the Southeast European area, and caused serious actions and legislative changes at the end of the war all over the world. After 1918, at the international level, attempts were made to control and regulate the drug and alcohol commodity markets, which before 1914 had been largely unregulated. For many states, the war itself was a triggering factor in intensifying such internal regulatory processes regarding alcohol use.

On 15 March 1915, Lloyd George, the British War Minister at that time, declared: “We are fighting Germany, Austria, and drink; and, as far as I can see, the greatest of these three deadly foes is drink.”¹ One reason that explains this fight against alcohol in England in the early years after the outbreak of World War I was the increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages among the workers in weapons factories, and especially among women. After the latter started to work, they began to earn money and acquire financial independence, so they started to frequent pubs more often. Women’s drinking of alcoholic beverages in public produced embarrassment and was considered offensive to English society. A series of legislative measures followed to regulate the opening hours of pubs.

The difficult situation can also be understood by looking at the British officials’ speeches. Thus, many times, the British War Minister Lloyd George said that “Drink is doing us more damage in the war than all the German submarines put together.” Counting on the power of example, King George V of England pledged that he would not drink alcoholic beverages (wines, spirits or beer) during the war. Moreover, wine, beer and all kinds of liquor disappeared even from the king’s residences. The sovereign tried to make the whole of England follow his example, requiring bars to be closed after 21:30. The length of time they were open decreased from 19.5 hours to just 5.5 hours a day. According to the *Daily Mail*, strong beer disappeared, and all beverages were diluted with water. Moreover, the pubs around the ammunition factories were closed or their opening hours were restricted. Generally, punitive methods were amplified. The number of arrests for the disruption of public order—68,000—has never been exceeded since. The alcohol tax was increased progressively and the alcohol concentration in beer was considerably reduced.² These decisions of the government and of King George V were accompanied by an anti-alcohol campaign called “Follow the King’s Lead.”³ One of its consequences was that, in 1917, even more drastic measures were discussed (in the sense of being implemented) going as far as prohibiting alcohol altogether.

If the authorities tried to limit alcohol consumption everywhere, the trenches were out of these bounds. Soldiers needed alcohol to face the reality of the bat-

tles and to keep on fighting. In France, for example, a soldier received one liter of wine a day. In some cases, this amount was insufficient, since some soldiers always sought to obtain more than their ration.⁴

The anti-alcohol movement in the UK had visible results during the war, but all statistics showed that the decline in the abstinence movement began immediately after the end of the armed conflict, and no further measure could match its effects during the war.

Measures against alcoholism were also taken on the Eastern front, in Russia. Here, on 31 July 1914, Tsar Nicholas II issued a decree prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol on the territory of the empire. Initially, the ban had to be carried out only during mobilization. However, almost immediately, the measure was extended for the entire duration of the hostilities. Then the right to ban alcohol was handed over by the central authorities to the local ones: cities, rural communities and district councils.⁵ This resulted in some towns and districts allowing the sale of wine and beer, but vodka was still forbidden. The immediate consequence was the closure of 400 distilleries and 28,000 wine and spirits shops. Thus, the decision was a truly radical step, as revenues from vodka sales accounted for no less than one third of the state budget. However, for the budget for the year 1915 and despite the fact that Russia was at war, the State Duma totally excluded the revenues acquired from the sale of vodka. If, on the one hand, there was a drastic decrease in crime and in the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals, there was also the other side of the coin, namely the increase in the production of counterfeit drinks and makeshift distilleries. At first, it was thought that only hopeless alcoholics were using all sorts of substitutes, but it was found that even in the big cities vodka substitutes were being drunk.

Only in August 1914, about 230 Russian drinking saloons were destroyed by people demanding vodka. In some of these incidents, the police had to open fire on the rioters. As a compromise solution, the Perm Governor urged the tsar to allow for alcohol sales for at least two hours a day “in order to avoid bloody clashes.” As the vodka distilleries had to be closed, nearly 300,000 people stopped working, and the state had to pay them compensation from the state budget.

Another unfortunate consequence of the war and of the ban was the massive increase in drug addiction, especially in St. Petersburg. Previously, cocaine and heroin had been sold in pharmacies, but, at the same time, many substances classified as dangerous narcotics were banned. However, as early as 1915, traffickers managed to create supplies of opium from Greece and Persia, while cocaine was brought in from Europe. The latter became inseparable from the image of not only the decadent youths of St. Petersburg but also of the Bolshevik commissar in his leather jacket.

The Soviet authorities abolished the prohibition of alcohol 11 years later, in 1925, for economic reasons, as they needed money for the modernization of the economy. They based their position on studies showing that the ban had caused a 30% loss in state revenue.⁶

The Case of Transylvania and the Anti-Alcohol Movement

AFTER THE 2000s, Romanian historiography paid special interest to the situation of the society and the population behind the front lines of the war. In our paper we will focus on a less known reality of this period, namely the anti-alcohol movement in Transylvania during the Great War. The sources we used for this research were the press of the time, both secular and ecclesiastical—*Gazeta Transilvaniei* (The Gazette of Transylvania), *Drapelul* (The Flag), *Cultura creștină* (Christian Culture), *Revista teologică* (The Theological Journal), *Biserica și școala* (Church and School), *Unirea* (The Union), *Foaia Poporului* (The People's Sheet), *Foaia diecezană* (The Diocesan Sheet), *Românul* (The Romanian), *Transilvania* (Transylvania), *Cosânzeana*—and the general historiography. We sought to highlight, in particular, the position of the authorities towards this scourge which threatened society.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the increased impact of the media, especially on intellectuals, made it easier for the debates in the European countries on alcohol and alcoholism to be known in Transylvania as well. However, the issue became a particular press topic in this province during the outbreak of World War I. Fears of an explosion in excessive alcohol consumption, against the background of the horrors of the conflagration, generated discussions, projects, but also the adoption of measures by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The uneasiness was explainable if we consider the fact that after 1914 there was an increase in the number of pubs selling alcoholic beverages of poor quality. Both in Transylvania and Banat, as well as in Wallachia, in areas where fruit trees did not grow, the peasants were making cereal spirits, producing very bad quality spirits which were harmful to the body.⁷

In the process of combating alcoholism, the main role was played in Transylvania, as well as in the Kingdom of Romania, by the state institutions and the Church, which in fact coordinated the mechanisms of limiting its use.

The first reactions appeared, as it could be anticipated, from the side of the Romanian ecclesiastical institutions. This was natural, if we start from the premise that the priests, who had direct contact with the realities of the village world,

directly faced the changes in the daily life of the faithful. But the outbreak of the conflagration radically changed the family universe. The individuals behind the front line had to deal not only with personal and family problems, but also with the difficulties caused by the war, having to contribute to the collections, to the requisitions, and also to the various tasks imposed by the authorities. All these drudgeries, doubled by an uncertain situation and by the disorganization caused by the lack of teachers and priests, eventually led to a mental overload for individuals.⁸ In the face of these transformations, which often rocked the existence of entire communities, they expected the clergy to guide and watch over people in their civic as well as moral lives. The action of the priests was therefore demanded, all the more so since there had been a moral relaxation in the villages, illustrated by the large number of illegal marriages and births,⁹ but also by the increase in the phenomenon of excessive alcohol consumption.

In general, war changed an individual's attitude towards life. The individual lived as if he was constantly on the edge of a precipice. That is why the clergy's speeches focused first on reconfiguring the values of life. The theology professors who published in the official journals and newspapers of the two Romanian Churches in Transylvania, *Unirea*, published in Blaj, and *Revista teologică*, published in Sibiu, were seeking, through advice addressed to the priests in the two metropolises, to point out precisely these aspects. As early as 1914, the clerics were made attentive to the fact that the population, having faced the horrors of the war, was more prepared to listen to and to learn lessons, in comparison to the previous period. In this context, the scourge of alcoholism was mentioned, which at that time could be fought more effectively, including through sermons, according to the editors of the *Revista teologică*.¹⁰

The servants of the altar were supported by the hierarchs of the two Romanian Churches. Through directives, they not only set directions to be followed, but also stated their support. On 18 July 1915, for example, the Bishop of Caransebeș, Elie Miron Cristea, through a directive order, told priests in his diocese what books to buy in order to fight more effectively against alcoholism.¹¹

A clear acknowledgment of the presence of the phenomenon in the world of the Romanian Transylvanian village was recorded in April 1914, at the synod of the Greek Catholic Deanery of Cluj. During its sessions, as reported by the *Românul* newspaper, the main issue discussed was alcoholism. The priestly body started from the premise that alcohol addiction was "the greatest nuisance, which afflicts the faithful people, more often in the villages, damaging them both in their moral life and in their material, economic and social condition," and adopted a few measures to diminish this scourge. These included: banning spirits during the celebration of the Holy Sacraments, during baptisms, weddings, other religious services and requiem services, forbidding priests from

participating in events to which this rule did not apply, investigating the clergy guilty of violating the provision by the synod of the deanery and then fining them with various amounts. The day when this directive was to be published by the archpriest was specially chosen, and quite symbolic. Thus, the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ was also presented “as the beginning of the great struggle for the regeneration of our people” through the campaign against alcoholism.¹²

The situation depicted during the deanery meeting was real, if we take into account the alcohol consumption figures in Transylvania. In 1914, Professor Traian Suciú from Brad published in the *Románul* newspaper official statistics, drawn up by the society of Saxon doctors in Transylvania.¹³ According to it, during the period 1910–1911 in the county of Târnava Mare (Nagy-Küküllő) County, 10,676 liters were consumed per person, in the Mureş-Turda (Maros-Torda) County—10,539, in the Făgăraş (Fogaras) County—8,617, Hunedoara (Hunyad) County—6,995, Sibiu (Szeben)—4,707, Târnava Mică (Kis-Küküllő)—4,058, Alba de Jos (Alsó-Fehér)—3,488, Bistriţa-Năsăud (Beszterce-Naszód)—2,821, Turda-Arieş (Torda-Aranyos)—2,429, Solnoc-Dăbâca (Szolnok-Doboka)—2,266. Of these beverages, spirits were consumed in large quantities in the Romanian counties of Făgăraş and Mureş-Turda, beer in Braşov, and wine in Sibiu. The concentration of alcohol present in the beverages consumed by the Romanians in Transylvania explains the campaigns against alcoholism. Thus, the wine had as much as 8% alcohol, similarly to beer, the spirits had between 24–40% alcohol, sweet spirits—35%, cognac and absinthe—60%.

Alongside the ecclesiastical institutions, the central political authorities also took measures. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Interior Minister János Sándor gave an order prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in railway stations.¹⁴ This directive was primarily aimed at soldiers preparing to go to the front. The alternative offered was herbal tea. The same official drew the attention of local authorities to this again a year later, in 1915, insisting that the measure be applied, a sign that it had not been applied in all localities.¹⁵ Moreover, the same senior official banned the use of wheat and rye in distilleries and breweries, while allowing some other cereals and potatoes, but in a very small proportion. The explanation of this last rule was pragmatism, as cereals were needed to feed the population.

Regulations aimed at soldiers were adopted as a result of previous experiences. Drinking alcoholic beverages on some front lines had affected some campaigns. That is why, based on medical and military research, alcoholic beverages, including wine, were forbidden on the grounds that they primarily affected the mental state of the soldiers and only secondly their physical condition. The *Gazeta Transilvaniei* reporter reminded readers in their analysis of this topic of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), during which it was shown that

wounded soldiers who had consumed alcohol were developing complications, some incompatible with survival.¹⁶

The nefarious influence of alcohol on soldiers was also addressed in several articles as a main topic. It was an attempt by journalists to indicate a silent but imminent danger. The titles of the articles were suggestive, meant to attract attention. For example, the article “The Most Dangerous Enemy of the Soldier Is Alcohol: Anti-Alcohol Sayings and Thoughts,”¹⁷ in which quotes were provided by military strategists who had faced this problem. The ravages of alcohol on the soldiers were also highlighted in the article “Caring for the Soldier at War,” which made a real demonstration in favor of banning alcoholic beverages on the front line.¹⁸

The measures adopted in this part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were not unique, as some had already been adopted in most European countries. In Germany, for example, it was forbidden to serve alcoholic drinks to soldiers; absinthe had been banned in France; in Russia, the anti-alcohol league had proposed prohibition, arguing that it would increase the citizens’ savings; in Norway and Switzerland, the use of cereals and potatoes in the manufacture of alcohol was prohibited; in Sweden, the measures adopted drastically reduced the consumption of alcoholic beverages during the war. Against this background, the editors of the *Revista teologică* offered the example of England, considered the most “abstinent country” among those who “fight the biggest and bloodiest war ever mentioned.” According to the piece of news published in the Sibiu periodical, the English authorities offered to each soldier, on leaving for the battlefield, a copy of a leaflet highlighting the effects of drinking alcohol. Among the most important were: “The weakening of the faculties to observe the signals; the soldier’s inability to find their bearings, to find shelter from the enemy attack; the compromising of shooting precision; increased tiredness; decreased resistance to disease and cold; aggravation of complications due to wounds received in battle.”¹⁹

The vast majority of journalists considered it a good time to adopt a firm position against alcoholism. Indifference to this “monstrous” scourge was labeled “real murder, an act of social betrayal.” That is why the whole society was called upon to participate. The editors of the *Revista teologică* were convinced that the “common enemy: alcohol”²⁰ could be overcome through a close collaboration between doctors, magistrates, priests and politicians, teachers (including primary school teachers), women and young people.

Moreover, the scourge did not spare any Romanian province, as the authorities or the newspapers of the time recorded. There were quite a few articles in the press that signaled the expansion of the phenomenon. That is why they aimed for the news to have an impact in order to sensitize communities. How-

ever, the association of alcoholism with the spread of various diseases was quite common in the analyses published in the press, which often highlighted this specific aspect.

In addition to various neurological diseases associated with alcoholism (epilepsy, hysteria), it (alcoholism) was also considered a major cause of the outbreak of the cholera epidemic. The tragic example offered by the Transylvanian journalists was that of the Nepos village, where there were 50 deaths among cholera sufferers in a very short period, between 18 July and 5 August. Other cases of deaths reported and mentioned by the newspaper *Unirea* were recorded in Nășăud (1), Ilva Mică (10), Ilva Mare (10). Against this background, the author of the piece of news mentioned that according to “medical research . . . alcoholics were more vulnerable to cholera.” His demonstration, moreover, leads to this conclusion. His conviction was that in the case of the deceased individuals in Nepos, only 3 “did not suffer from the passion for alcohol.”²¹ Subsequently, the author of the article added that many had digestive problems as well.²² The central idea of his remark reiterated, however, that alcoholics were prone to various diseases, and therefore urgent action had to be taken.

The body affected by alcoholism was considered fertile ground for exanthematic typhus. In support of this theory, the editors of the newspaper *Biserica și școala* published the findings of research carried out by a German physician, Friedrich Schürer von Waldheim. According to him, “drunkards always get sicker than non-drinkers.”²³ In his opinion, the evil role of alcohol, consumed in large quantities, was unquestionable. It was the main cause of the widespread epidemics in wartime, because poverty and hunger caused by the conflagrations were accompanied by misery and the excessive consumption of brandy. European sociologists interpreted alcoholism in the same key at that time. In their view, the most visible effects of alcohol abuse were increased crime, mortality, and poverty.²⁴ The data confirmed this theory, including on the territory of Romania. The situation recorded in 1925, albeit later, expressed a reality that had already existed for some time. Thus, statistics showed that 60% of the total number of crimes committed in rural society had been committed by intoxicated individuals. Moreover, another figure caused concern. Of the young people who attended conscription events, 40% were rejected, being considered unfit for military service because of alcohol-related illnesses.²⁵

The number of clerical voices raised against the scourge that had spread since the outbreak of World War I was on the rise. There were quite a few who, besides direct pastoralism, tried to sound the alarm through the press as well. Thus, the newspaper *Unirea* published a large number of articles sent by its correspondents from across the Greek Catholic Church Metropolis. The message of the priests who were directly confronted with the effects of alcoholism was

meant to be of great impact. By rhetorical questions such as “How long shall we postpone the abolishing of the evil in our people?”²⁶ or by the clear statements “Against alcoholism,”²⁷ the correspondent priests not only highlighted the reality that Romanian villages were confronted with this vice, but also tried to mobilize society in order to eradicate it. In their pertinent analysis, some of the clergy thought that the fault was also theirs, because they had not put into practice what they had learned or read. This self-criticism was assumed and clear-cut: “No matter how much has been written in the columns of the various journals and magazines about the holy wish of the priests, i.e. to cut off or at least reduce the consumption of alcohol, we only considered this duty while we read about such things, and then we passed on to the order of the day.”²⁸

Along with this assumption of guilt, the priests were searching for and proposing solutions. One of these, identified by Ioan Oltean, was the creation of religious associations or societies, such as the Marian Associations, but also cultural and economic unions. His conclusion was that only through trained people, who possessed moral, intellectual and economic culture, could victory against alcoholism be achieved. He drew attention to a pragmatic aspect. According to his experience in the rural world, alcohol consumption was highest on holidays and Sundays. However, the solution he invoked, namely the creation of associations coordinated by priests, in order to carry out activities just in those days, required involving a large number of individuals. Thus, an alternative was created for a constructive socializing environment that would counterbalance the individual’s desire to spend time in the pub.²⁹ Important in this context were the fixed or mobile libraries, organized according to the model of those in Romania, said the article’s author.³⁰

During the same period, the Romanian periodicals reported various episodes of intoxication with various substances present in alcohol and which resulted in deaths. Such a case, reported by the *Unirea*³¹ and the *Revista teologică*,³² occurred in Maramureș (Máramaros), where 63 individuals died due to drinking alcohol in which the presence of methyl was discovered. The tragedy was used by newspaper editors to give another alarm signal. Not only was this news given generous space, but they also insisted on the disastrous effects of excessive alcohol consumption in general. In order to get a strong impact, the episode was drawn up in moralizing terms: “You cannot have a wedding without drinking tens of liters of brandy, until the people are so drunk that they lose their heads and then pay with their life the orgy of a night of feasting.”³³ The priesthood was also not omitted from this indictment. The clergy were called upon to take a stand, to become more active and to promote the fight against alcoholism, not only in theory but also in practice.³⁴ The clerics were urged to do their “duty,” especially in those difficult times, when thousands of soldiers “were dying and

suffering on the battlefield.” Moderation and temperance were often invoked in these articles.

As time passed, the articles in the newspaper *Unirea* become increasingly sharper, with stronger messages, with apocalyptic images which showed that the phenomenon of alcoholism had increased in intensity in the Romanian villages in Transylvania. If in 1915 the tone was moderate, with moralizing messages, in 1917 it became sharp, drastic, dramatic in some places. Articles dealing with this topic would occupy the front pages in the last years of the war.

The eradication of this scourge turned into a profession of faith for some priests. That’s why the messages they were sending were meant to be impactful, and the terms used were serious, with the clear intention of shocking the reader.

The definition of alcoholism and the outlining of its effects offered the possibility for an editor of the newspaper *Unirea* to paint an apocalyptic image.³⁵ This time the piece was aimed at women who drank alcohol. The scourge had spread to them, too, and the effects were immediate. In the opinion of the author, the number of people with various disabilities had increased. Even if the phenomenon was not a new one or the consequences were not as serious as presented, it is certain that the female population of the villages was experiencing this phenomenon. The author, through his article, first aimed at the priests, whom he was trying to convince to make additional efforts in order to restore the moral life of the faithful women, in particular. In his opinion “Under this modern name hides drunkenness with all its derivatives. And these derivatives are many. Body and soul degenerations are just as many as the effects of alcohol. . . . I never thought this sort of people so fierce as in this wartime.”³⁶

So, the journalists’ records were a statement of fact. Alcoholism was increasing in the Romanian communities in Transylvania and, consequently, urgent measures had to be taken.

Society also reacted to the impetus of the Church. For instance, in Blaj was created the Blaj Abstinence Meeting of Theologians,³⁷ structured according to the pattern of the unions organized under the patronage of the Catholic Church in Western Europe. This influence must not be surprising, especially since a similar movement had appeared in the Habsburg Empire in the early 19th century, more precisely in the Tyrol area. Later, this type of association was also noted in the Eastern parts of the Dual Monarchy at the end of the 19th century. The results, even if not spectacular, led to the adoption of a law in 1877 aimed at combating alcoholism.³⁸

The first report, written in 1915, was published by the newspaper *Unirea*.³⁹ The report is, however, a true programmatic article of the society. Its purpose was clearly highlighted: to be “in united power, as a single individual, to enter the arena of the struggle against alcoholism as the group of old gladiators who

cried: Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant.” Society members were convinced that “flag bearers in such a noble struggle” were the clergy. And, as noted by the secretary of the union, Simion Gizdavu, the explanation lies in the fact that theologians, priests in general, were meant to look after each individual as a member of the flock entrusted into their care. Christian teachings and morals based on love had to be promoted and supported with everything that this entailed. It is precisely at this point that the priest was supposed to promote morality and, in particular, to remove evil or its triggering factors, including alcoholism, considered as the “source of all evil,”⁴⁰ “the ruin of bodies and souls.”⁴¹ It was not an unusual thesis, because at the first congresses of the Abstinence Meetings in Europe starting with 1885, the starting point of the debates was precisely Origen’s dictum, *Ebrietas est mater omnium vitiorum*.⁴²

Although the initiators of the project were realistic about its impact on the Romanian Transylvanian society, they made every effort to raise awareness of this scourge. During the union meetings, there were lectures about the effects of alcoholism on the body and the soul, but concrete measures were also discussed, meant to reduce alcohol consumption in rural areas. The union also wanted to lead a campaign to raise awareness of the ravages of alcoholism and, implicitly, to draw attention to the importance of society’s support for such actions, projects and associations. The union members also noticed the very low impact of these initiatives. The speeches were meant precisely to generate reactions. The message was simple and penetrating: alcohol “steals parents from their children, children from their parents, the husband from his wife, peace and happiness from the parents, bread from the children.” The same liquor “divests the young man of his powers . . . and makes solace go away from the old man’s soul.”⁴³

In parallel with the clergy’s approach, the echoes of the temperance movement in Europe, supported by laymen, were also felt in Transylvania. In 1914, such an initiative was recorded, meant to create an abstinence union, at the initiative of the *Românul* newspaper contributor, V. Radu. Despite the fact that he was skeptical about the impact of this society, the initiator proposed that the nucleus be constituted in a first phase of the representative intellectuals of the Transylvanian Romanian society. In his view, the first impetus was to be given by the “educated class,” and only then the actions of the association were to target and to co-opt the “people.” He was convinced that once the mentality of the “educated” class changed, the whole of society would change, by the power of example. Like other demonstrations, his also ended by expressing the conviction that in the fight against alcoholism, in fact, they offered guarantees for the survival of the Romanian people.⁴⁴ The necessity of setting up such unions was also highlighted by Professor Ioan Bojor, from the Năsăud Foundational Higher Gymnasium. In a very well-grounded demonstration, he addressed the hierar-

chy, but also the political leaders of the Romanians, asking them to get involved in the organization of the temperance movement. In his approach he gave the example of the European states but also of the United States of America, where this movement, supported by the authorities, had had beneficial effects for society.⁴⁵

Another solution proposed at this time by the clergy was the involvement of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and for the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA) in the fight against alcoholism. The society was required to use its entire structure to combat the scourge that threatened to ruin Romanian villages.⁴⁶ The answer was prompt, if we analyze the activity of the ASTRA divisions in 1914. Thus, during that year, over 28 communications were issued about the harmful effects of alcoholism.⁴⁷

The activity of anti-alcohol societies was criticized in quite a few cases because it was considered to have no impact and, consequently, no effects. However, with the spread of the scourge even the most skeptical or the greatest critics supported the actions of these unions. For example, in October 1917, one of the editors of the *Unirea* was compelled to admit: "In the face of such a sad situation, we are compelled to call again for the support of anti-alcoholic unions. And as these, as a rule, are represented in the villages by one man, who is the priest, we call upon our priests and we actively draw attention to this great problem of our people." It was imperative to put an end to that scourge.⁴⁸

The priests were not excluded when advocating moderation in alcohol consumption. Among the advice addressed to them in the columns of the newspapers published between 1914 and 1918, there were also those concerning the attention that young people especially need to give to their behavior in society, including the use and abuse of alcoholic beverages.⁴⁹

Another segment of the population targeted by the articles on alcoholism published in this period were young people. Policies and measures to limit the consumption of alcoholic beverages in European countries were also used as examples for the Transylvanian society. The exceptional measures taken during a special period, one of war, in the German city of Kassel were also supported and promoted by the editors of the *Biserica și școala* newspaper published in Arad. Prohibition measures were meant to eradicate the alcoholism that had spread among young people. Any violation of this would result in imprisonment for up to one year or in severe fines.⁵⁰ Saving young people from alcoholism was an important point on the agenda of temperance unions. Their discourse was not an isolated one, but had been taken over by most movements because it was thought that once the young people were saved, the nation was saved.⁵¹

The Budapest government's policy to increase alcohol and tobacco taxes was welcomed by the publisher of the journal *Unirea* who considered the effects

of this measure beneficial, especially from a moral and humanitarian point of view.⁵² But quite a few were also expecting actions from the local (civilian) authorities. That's why various episodes were reported in the press. An example of this was the measure of the protopraetor Károly Ujvári of the Csákigorbó Circle (today Gârbou, Sălaj County), who decided among other things to close the pubs on Sundays and holidays. It was an important provision, especially since those days saw the highest levels of consumption.⁵³ Agreeing with this measure, some of the priests believed that sermons were insufficient, and that only the state could reduce consumption using its levers and, at the same time, exercise control over alcohol production.⁵⁴

Any measure adopted by the political or ecclesiastical authorities aimed at removing this scourge was welcomed and considered beneficial. In many cases, directly or indirectly, the newspapers began their demonstrations from the premise that alcohol killed more people than war. That's why stopping this vice was considered to be particularly important, especially since, once achieved, "it would obviously change the state of life of our villagers and workers. . . . The country would gain a lot, as individual forces, as strength of arms, if it cut off this worm that chews at the foundation of our society."⁵⁵ At this point, however, the journalists were on a divergent position from the political authorities of the state. The state generally laid down regulations in the field of alcoholic beverages. About 10% of Romania's national budget, for example, came from alcohol-related taxes, and rural budgets were even more dependent on the taxation of alcohol sales.⁵⁶ Being aware of this impediment, Constantin Arsenie, editor of the *Biserica și școala* pointed out in an article in 1916 the ultimate goal that all decision makers had to envisage: "We should not have in mind the money that comes out of this dangerous object of commerce, but the People, the Land."⁵⁷ With such a goal on the agenda, the authorities would secure the future of the state by supporting a healthy population and at the same time reduce crime rates and other criminal offenses that were caused by alcoholism, according to many priests and journalists of the time.⁵⁸

In the same spirit, Dr. Augustin Schuster, a member of the Patronage Society of Transylvania, asked the state for a part of the revenues collected from the alcohol trade to be channeled towards preventing the spread of the scourge and counteracting the negative effects of the abuse. His proposed solution was the creation of healthcare homes with trained personnel, in which professional support was provided to addicts.⁵⁹

Conclusions

THE LARGE number of articles dealing with the topic of alcoholism present in the Transylvanian newspapers during 1914–1918 support the assertion that the Romanian society on this territory was confronted with this scourge. The ways of approaching the subject differed, but alcoholism continued to be traditionally perceived as a moral issue par excellence.

Timidly, civil society representatives started to take action to combat this vice. In this respect, many ideas already promoted in Western European countries by abstinence movements, well organized at the beginning of the 20th century, were adopted. Various initiatives were undertaken to promote the fight against excessive alcohol consumption, to a lesser degree by the political authorities and to a greater degree by the Church. The fear of alcoholism becoming widespread among young people but also among women generated an anti-alcohol movement, whose promoters were mainly the priests. As shepherds of souls, they were asked to intervene and ensure the coordination of this campaign. The most frequently cited solution was, as we have pointed out, the creation of cultural, economic or church unions to operate in each village and to further the interests of the Romanian population. This was intended to provide a viable option for the population, which would represent a way of socializing and, at the same time, of cultural development, supplanting the function of the pub as a place of socialization.

Unlike in the European area, in Transylvania the proposed solutions were aimed at prevention and especially at the reduction of alcohol consumption, and almost not at all at the treatment of those affected. The explanation for this lies in the fact that these movements were coordinated by clerics, not by laymen, as was the case in Germany, England, where such societies advocated for the institutionalization of those affected.

On the Transylvanian territory there were several temperance unions functioning during World War I, but they had a low impact, as well noted by journalists.

Overwhelmingly, those who took a stand advocated for moderation, not for the prohibition of alcohol. The last solution was mostly proposed at the end of the war and was backed by admirers of similar American legislation. Between 16 January 1920 and 5 December 1933 in the United States, according to the 18th Amendment, the production, transportation and selling of alcohol was prohibited.

Although with a lesser impact than in other states in Europe, in Transylvania as well measures were therefore taken to combat alcoholism during World War I. However, the effect achieved in wartime was not what was expected, since crusading voices became increasingly strident in 1918, and subsequent legislative measures again tried to re-address and solve the problem.



Notes

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Abstract

Between Abstinence and Prohibition: Actions for Combating Alcoholism in Transylvania during World War I

Over time, World War I has prompted the interest of many specialists. In our presentation we will focus on a lesser known reality of this period, namely the anti-alcohol movement in Transylvania during the Great War. The sources we used for this research were archive materials, the press of the time, of a secular and ecclesiastical nature, and memoirs. Alcoholism as well as the anti-alcohol movement behind the front line were not in any extent “isolated” realities specific to the Southeast European area, but were part of serious legislative actions and changes that, by the end of the war, occurred all over the world. After 1918, at international level, attempts were made to control and regulate the drug and alcohol commodity markets, which before 1914 had been largely unregulated. For many states, the war itself was a triggering factor in intensifying such internal regulatory processes regarding alcohol use. Making a comparative presentation will help us understand the whole mechanism, especially since such measures had been previously undertaken in Western Europe. We will then analyze the situation of alcohol use in Transylvania during the war, as well as the actions undertaken by the Romanian ecclesiastical and civil authorities regarding the thorny issue of alcohol consumption behind the front line. We will emphasize the changes that took place in Romanian society during the war, and explore in depth whether they had the expected effect or, on the contrary, whether they intensified alcohol abuse.

Keywords

alcohol, World War I, Transylvania, alcohol use