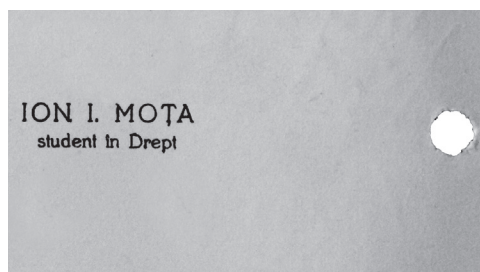


Ion I. Moța

An Atypical Leader of the Petru Maior Student Center in Cluj

MARIA GHITTA



Calling card, Lucian Blaga Central University
Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior,
Ms. 5988, "Acte justificative."

Maria Ghitta

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ION I. MOȚA, a law student, became leader of the Petru Maior Student Center in Cluj under extraordinary circumstances even for an “ad hoc” or “provisional” mandate, as his certainly was. The event occurred on 30 April 1923, when the student organization was faced with an unprecedented situation: it had not one, but two leaders! One of them had been elected, but had meanwhile resigned. His name was George Alexa and his attendance at the festive event celebrated in the Aula Magna, in the presence of the heir to the throne, Prince Carol, had been a makeshift solution to the leadership crisis.¹ The other, Ion I. Moța, had proclaimed himself “ad-hoc chairman of the meeting” during an assembly of the Center’s members that endorsed the radicalization of the student movement.² The “old” chairman was strongly opposed to the “new” path the students had chosen to take.³ Consequently, like revolutions that devour their own children, the nationalist youth disposed, that academic year, of yet another of the Petru Maior Center’s leaders.⁴

The contentious issue was whether students should return to class (or not) after months of disputes with the university authorities and the government. Would they accept proposals that only partially met the demands they had been pressing since the very beginning of their protests or would they carry on with their strike until their sorest grievance, concerning the *numerus clausus*, was answered? The students chose the course of action that Moța himself preferred. He informed the rector about it two days later: “complete solidarity with the other universities,” “total abstention from classes and preventing the Jews (the Jewish students) from entering the University or any of its premises.”⁵

However, this decision, coupled with the violent unrest that broke out at the University on the evening of 28 April (on the eve of Prince Carol’s arrival in Cluj), was not at all to the liking of the institution’s leaders, who would not budge an inch. Meeting in “plenary session” on 2 May, the professors decided “to continue classes even if the police were needed to restore order.”⁶ The Senate, meeting the next day (3 May), decided to expel the most dangerous agitators. The recently elected “ad-hoc” chairman of the Petru Maior Center, Ion I. Moța was among them.⁷ It was an entirely new and unprecedented situation. The University and the entire city of Cluj were under curfew.⁸ The provisional leader of the students was expelled. He could have shared the fate of his colleagues, as described in the students’ official publication:

*most of the seven students who had been expelled were escorted to the police station. On Friday evening, they were transported to Apahida railway station in a lorry. A train arrived and, after a sumptuous three-hour dinner with the agents, sergeants and sentries, each of the students, guarded by an agent and a police officer, was sent back to his native village or town and handed over to the local authorities, to be kept under surveillance.*⁹

Moța was not one of those students. He remained in Cluj, sheltered by “some friends.”¹⁰ Quite a stormy debut as the Student Center’s chairman!

Between the day of the “election” and the day of his expulsion, Moța made time for a quick committee meeting, which he convened at his home.¹¹ He informed his colleagues that “in yesterday’s plenary session” he had been elected “ad-hoc chairman of the ongoing meeting only,” “so, without further delay, we must proceed to the election of the new chairman.”¹² However, there was neither time nor room for that. The situation was far from calm, and in the upcoming months, despite the holiday, the leaders of the committee of the Petru Maior Center had very busy agendas.

The dormitories were closed down on 15 May because the Senate no longer wanted to “saddle the public with the burden of bearing the maintenance

costs for those who, despite all the advice given to them, had continued for six months to receive accommodation without fulfilling any of their obligations” as students.¹³ A petition submitted by the Student Center, requesting that this measure be rescinded, was dismissed: it was considered “unwarranted,” “on account that it was signed by a person who does not have the status of a student.”¹⁴ In other words, it was deemed that someone who was no longer a student could not act as a representative of the Student Center. Without any name being mentioned, it was clear that the reference was to the “ad hoc” elected chairman. The message, in any case, reached its intended addressee. Over the next period, until the beginning of September, Moța no longer signed any petition to the university administration, precisely to avoid rendering it null and void. Such requests were henceforth signed by the other two committee members, Pascu (usually with the phrase “on the chairman’s behalf”) and Ionescu (secretary-general of the Center).¹⁵ Emil Pascu was chairman of the Student Association of the Faculty of Law. By signing the petitions in this fashion, he showed that he had no intention of usurping Moța’s leadership. The latter’s authority was not recognized by the university officials, but that was not the case within the student organization. In other circumstances, for instance, in his rich correspondence with third parties, Moța had no qualms to introduce himself as chairman of the Center, having quickly relinquished his more tentative self-descriptions as “ad-hoc chairman of the ongoing meeting only” and as “provisional chairman,” a sign that he was feeling very comfortable with his role. He had no second thoughts

...multe de ...
 catre studentimea clujana prin comitetul acestuia
 catre in urma sedintei din 30.4.23., - a merge
 la Bucuresti, spre a lua acolo parte la des-
 baterile delegatilor intregii studentii din tara,
 si a reprezenta punctul de vedere al Clujului,
 primit cu manuscrisul nostru la Cluj pe-
 centi la sedinta din 30.4. (aproximativ
 100 studenti), si anume: complexa solidarizare
cu celelalte Universitati. Mai e necesar
 in conditiunile a 500 loc. insusie stude-
 ntilor pentru noi, si cu alte chestiuni admi-
 nistrative pentru care va avea competenta
 va sa.
 Ion I. Moța
 presedinte de sedinta
 dl. Pascu
 membru in comitet

Convocandu-se pe trimitea a doua a.c.
 a conferinta a tuturor delegatilor catre
 lor studentesti la Cluj, in vederea masu-
 rii a Congresului din vara, va rugam sa
 trimiteti a trimite pe atunci un delegat al
 studentimii timisoarene, la Cluj.
~~Intre alte informatii~~
 Cu respectele dragoste si angajam-
 tea de a nu avea deloc nici o singura
 ramina
 Comitetul Central
 stud. a Petru Maior
 (ss) Ionescu Gh.
 secret. general
 (ss) Ion I. Moța
 președinte

Delegation to Bucharest for Mr. Emil Pascu,
 Lucian Blaga Central University Library
 of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851.

Letter to the chairman of the Student Society
 of the Timișoara Polytechnic School, 2 July 1923,
 Lucian Blaga Central University Library
 of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851.

that he might be interfering with the democratic process (the need for elections) and was firmly committed to the revolutionary ideals (the need for action).

Moța did, however, make an exception, in that he put his signature on a document submitted to the rector. He wrote to him to dismiss the rumor that the attack on the rector's home (gunshots had been fired) had been perpetrated by students. He "strongly condemned" such acts, which "could only have been committed by individuals who did not act in the students' best interests and simply wished to compromise them."¹⁶ If, however, it turned out that students had been involved in the attack, the Committee would exclude them from the student association.

The violent episode that took place outside the home of Rector Iacob Iacobovici on the evening of 22 May shows how badly things had deteriorated in the few months since the conflict broke out. The unrest, which had clear anti-Semitic undertones (Jews should only dissect Jewish cadavers, the *numerus clausus*) and was accompanied by numerous social demands (dormitories, canteens, laboratories, books in Romanian), had paralyzed the entire academic year at the new Romanian university, severely undermining the famous solidarity between students and professors. The university authority was preparing to put an end to that situation in which an entire academic year had been wasted. "As for the total waste of an academic year at a time when Romania is facing a lack of people with higher levels of education, it seems to us that this very much resembles the situation of a ploughman losing whole bushels of wheat he has sown in the field . . . Thanks to this precious sacrifice, the harvest of tomorrow may bring a bountiful reward."¹⁷ According to the new chairman of the Petru Maior Center, that was the very point of sacrificing an academic year. As for the harvest that sprung from the seeds sown back then, he was not mistaken. It's just that this had less and less to do with education, and more and more with something else that was looming on the horizon: the dawn of a new nationalism. A radical nationalism, as Moța himself called it, in which the enemies were to be ruthlessly identified and treated, regardless of whether they came from outside or inside the country: "Kikes, Hungarian tycoons, Romanians with a rotten heart."¹⁸

Under these circumstances, the activity of the Petru Maior Center neither subsided, nor ceased despite the upcoming holiday. On 23 May, having gathered for a meeting on "Mr. Moța's premises"¹⁹ (that is, at his house), the members of the committee learned the news brought by the chairman following his delegation to Bucharest. The objectives of the "summer battles" and the "strategy for the autumn" were set. Nothing was to be shut down, nothing was to be suspended during the long summer holidays. The fight would continue. Two new projects were brought to the attention of the comrades. One of them concerned the "Directions and Principles of National Culture," an organization

with an uncertain status at that point, which was to develop in the territory (counties, villages) and help underprivileged students to pursue their studies. It also envisaged a “Suprauniversity Council,” composed of professors who “will openly join us in our fight against the Jews.”²⁰ For now, it was a dim foreshadowing of their future political plans, but it would materialize before long, albeit under a different name. The other work topic proposed by Moța concerned a closer, more pressing issue, already known to the student body: a congress in August. Its venue was not yet specified, but over the next few weeks, arrangements were made to organize it in Cluj, even though the previous one had also been held there, or perhaps for that very reason. The university center in Cluj had organized the first Student Congress in Romania in the autumn of 1920²¹ and it was there that the new student movement emerged two years later. The goals of the impending Congress had not yet been defined, but “a commission consisting of Messrs. Pascu, Mocanu, Vernichescu, and Moța” was to determine “its thematic structure.”²²

Only during the next committee meeting, held on 10 July, could a date for the Congress (20 August) and a well-defined topic be set. Moța came up with the following synopsis: protests against the new regulations; avoiding to make a commitment as regards the autumn semester; showing the doctrinal positions of our movement; never giving up on the *numerus clausus*; bring up material and political issues; proposing a unitary organization for all the students in the country; discussing every aspect of the Jewish question.²³ An almost complete political platform, with a new priority at the top of the agenda: the rejection of the Operational Regulations, which no longer tolerated the “national struggle,” admitting only “sports, scientific and cultural activities within the university.”²⁴

The new topics and old failures fueled the juvenile struggle waged by these students and, with utmost intensity, by their self-proclaimed leader, Ion I. Moța. Preparations for the congress that was to be held in Cluj drove him into a frenzy, almost to the point of paroxysm. He wrote letters across the continent, to universities in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Oxford, etc., asking for details about their internal regulations, “in order to prepare a comparative study between those European regulations and the new Romanian regulations.”²⁵ He sent requests to institutions that could have helped him organize the congress and whose support he needed: the National Theatre, railways, banks, the City Hall, the headquarters of the Cluj Garrison, a stamp factory, which he asked “to make us a stamp with the text ‘The Central Bureau for Organizing the General Student Congress, Cluj 1923’.”²⁶ As he informed his colleague in Bucharest (“Dear Râpeanu, the Delegation of all the centers—except for yours—has agreed to hold the Congress on 20 August”), that the Central Bureau “will prepare everything.” It would be tasked

to make lists of the students who had confirmed their participation in the Congress, obtain funds from the Ministry, discounted ticket fares from the Romanian Railways, open the dormitories, book the Hall of the National Theatre in Cluj and other matters that will be brought to your attention by our Central Bureau. We will send, without any delay, letters to the 150 most important (Romanian) banks in the country asking for funds, so you won't have to do this for now . . . I'll be in Bucharest in 10 days' time at the latest, so we'll discuss the more pressing issues then.

(It was a way of saying to him: we'll do everything, so all you have to do is join us.) He informed him about the important guest speakers who would participate in the public meetings (unlike those to which only student representatives would have access): Goga, Cătuneanu, Amos Frâncu, Cuza, Paulescu etc. He added that “by the time of the Congress, I will have published my book *Protocolul Înțelepților Sionului* [Protocols of the Elders of Zion].”²⁷

There was still something to do for those in Bucharest: tidy up their own backyard, because not everyone in the management structures there had reacted properly. “You will still have to settle the Nazarie & Co. issue and get your hands on the minutes of the 1920 Congress.” He also had a personal, “heartfelt” request: “for the moral preparation of the congress, in our ‘Speech,’ you will write an editorial that will sweep everyone off their feet, won’t you? I would surely write it, with great pleasure, but having run completely out of time, my hands are tied.”²⁸ At long last, he admitted, for once, that he was unable to cope with the workload...

This hyperactive, involved Moța, a jack of all trades, had already insinuated himself in the activity of other student centers in the country. He “coordinated” them with a view to ensuring the success of the congress that was ostensibly to be held in Cluj, in order to further centralize the tactics and objectives of the student movement for the autumn. As he himself had stated earlier, his aim was to discuss at the congress the “proposal for a unitary organization of the students in the country.”²⁹

While he had some reservations about those in charge of the student center in

N° 153/1923
 A Monsieur le Secrétaire
 de l'Université de
 Paris.
 Oxford.
 Rome.
 Bruxelles.
 Zurich.
 Prague.
 Varsovie.
 Belgrade.
 Athènes.

Cluj, le 5 juillet 1923.

Monsieur le Secrétaire,

Notre Association générale « Petru Maior »
 des Étudiants de l'Université de Cluj (Roumanie),
 préparant une étude comparée de tous les
 règlements d'ordre et discipline universitaire
 des diverses Universités de l'Europe, en vue
 d'un nouveau règlement qui se sera appliqué
 dans toutes les Universités roumaines, vous prie
 de bien vouloir lui adresser vos observations

Letter to the universities of Europe,
 5 July 1923, Lucian Blaga Central
 University Library of Cluj-Napoca,
 coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851.

Bucharest (at least towards some), he had nothing but sympathy and courtesy for the young people in Iași. Among them he had found quasi-identical ideas and feelings. He showed them a more personal face, confiding in them in almost lyrical terms. He talked to them not only about the organizational, decision-making role of the congress, but also about its expiatory purpose. There they could “bare our souls, rethink our attitude and if possible, restore our full solidarity.” And he went on to say that

I am writing and speaking to you [Grigorescu] but, in fact, I'm addressing your entire leadership committee. Oh, and please tell the brothers in Iași that, we, the committee in Cluj, are all so anxious to save the honor of our association, the life of the movement and that of the Nation, just like our colleagues in Moldova, so tried in battles: we will not, therefore, be party to a shameful compromise. We have so far held our heads up high and untainted. We will neither bow our heads, nor stoop to any defiling attempt.³⁰

The summer reunion “we believe would bring joy to us all, as well as other major benefits. It will be a meeting of those who, spiritually, were and are one block.”³¹ The personal acquaintance and direct relationship between those leaders was highlighted as decisive for strengthening the unity of action.

The stylistic register and ideological content of Moța's thinking (at that time) is also illustrated by an excerpt from a text he sent to his colleagues at the Academic Society in Berlin, which had emboldened the Student Center in Cluj. They were thanked and reassured of the brotherly love

of all the students in Cluj, with the promise that we will do our duty to the very end, to the last remaining ounce of energy in our bodies and souls, so often tormented and lashed by those who should be our loving and understanding parents. We ask you, gentlemen, to receive the warm wishes of the pure-hearted and self-confident students, hopeful for the destiny of their nation. Brushing away the sweat beads gathering on their foreheads as they are relentlessly pursuing their goals, they will gaze, for a brief moment, with love at you, before setting off again for the summit, where they will find either Golgotha or victory.³²

Notwithstanding the style that might seem antiquated today and the rather pathetic tone, what we can see here are topics and phrases that were to become more frequent in future articles related to the ideological stance of the political movement that Moța and his colleagues would found: duty, identification with the suffering of Christ, ordeals and repression, the failure of the older generation

of parents and professors to understand them, as well as the purity of the youth and their sacrifice for the nation.

Despite all the remarkable organizational effort, despite all the intellectual energy spent in dozens of pages of draft texts, the expected congress never took place in Cluj. Although the rector's office had allegedly approved hosting it in the city in a letter dated 5 July 1923³³—a surprising fact considering the way the academic year had ended—the other authorities dismissed the idea. Instead of the envisaged student congress, a congress of the delegates was to be held in Iași, in approximately the same time frame (22–25 August). “Ten members of the Committee” in Cluj were preparing to go to Iași, “considering that the travel expenses for a return trip, third class, would amount to 2,500 lei.”³⁴ Moța was convinced that the Congress in Iași “will very successfully manage to reorganize the students.”³⁵

In spite of the complications with the authorities, who tried to prevent the occupation of the university and forced the congress participants to change their venue every single day,³⁶ the meeting in Iași truly opened a few new possible pathways for the student movement. The first and most obvious contribution to the students' “reorganization” was owed to the emergence of a strong centralizing and even authoritarian trend. “There will be only one Center in a university town, so as not to break down the power of the Romanian students.” Moreover, “the student Center cannot, under any circumstance, accept Jewish members.” As for “the centers remaining in a minority on an issue decided by the delegates' committee, they shall have to comply with decisions taken by a majority of votes.”³⁷ In other words, they were no longer entitled to their own decision in case their opinions diverged from those of the majority!

The day of 10 December 1922 (when students from all over the country showed their solidarity) became a “student holiday,” to be marked each year by “a suspension of classes and any other activities in universities.” In addition to participating in an official celebration, the students also received a festive uniform for the occasions “when the students will present themselves as a corporation”: “the Romanian national costume from each individual county.” For days “in which ordinary clothes are worn, the student badge with the letters S. C. (Christian Student), with the tricolor and a cross, is hereby declared as official.”³⁸ The badge could be withdrawn from those who proved to be unworthy of wearing it. The student movement was celebrating itself and its members could now identify themselves by external, recognizable signs; they clearly formed a distinct body.

Compared to such novelties, the rejection of the new university regulations, the resumption of passive resistance in the autumn (refusal to attend classes, take exams and turn in papers) and the request for legislation to be passed on the *nu-*

merus clausus were already predictable, familiar things. To ensure the efficiency of the movement's leadership, as many delegates' congresses as possible were to be held. Delegates had gradually been turning into a decision-making superstructure that guided and led the national student movement. A list of the signatories of the delegates' release³⁹ gives us a glimpse into the foundations on which the future organization known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael was to be built. Still, there were a few more steps to go before they would get there.

Having returned from Iași, Moța gave a "brief overview" of what had been discussed there before his colleagues in the committee of the Petru Maior Center. Telling them that they would find more details in the communiqué that would be published in the newspapers, he also revealed to them information that they would otherwise have been unable to come across. For example, the information, shrouded in secrecy, that "it has been decided that we should actively fight against the government and all our enemies."⁴⁰ On that occasion, Moța made a rather suspicious statement: "Our committee will lead the students for as long as they obey and carry out our orders." The continuing phrase—"which they themselves dictated to us"—was crossed out, corrected by a hand other than the one that had taken down the minutes, and replaced with: "in order for the mandate entrusted to us to succeed." The intervention suggests that the person who had read the document felt that something was off. Indeed, the representatives of the students (at least some of them!) tended to turn into their commanders, expecting total obedience from them. A quasi-identical phrasing can be found at the beginning of a long list of names (dated Cluj, 30 April 1923, the day of Moța's self-appointment as leader: "We, the undersigned students, members of the Petru Maior Student Center in Cluj, hereby pledge our word that *we will obey at any time and in any circumstance* the decisions reached by the Petru Maior Student Center in Cluj and that *we will follow them to the letter*, and that we are in solidarity with all the students in the country" (emphasis ours).⁴¹ Slowly but surely, the democratic logic was being unfairly dislodged by an authoritarian one. However, this was not a safe bet and some members dared to confront the leader, as shown by an incident recorded at the same meeting on 1 September.

Speaking about the need to collaborate with a local (Cluj) newspaper in order to secure a few columns that would advocate the student cause, Ionescu, secretary-general of the Center, asked to be present at the discussion with the director of that publication. Moreover, having accurately remembered that the students of Cluj used to have their own gazette, he asked: "What about the *Dacia Nouă* newspaper? Mr. Moța answers that the whole matter of the newspaper is recorded in the archives."⁴² Still, Ionescu's curiosity did not stop there, because he wanted to find out what had happened with the postcards issued by the Center or with the brochure entitled "The Demographic Situation of Ro-

mania,” all marketed “by students through the Center.”⁴³ Moța answered, just as evasively as before, that he was the manager of those funds and that some money (10,000–15,000 lei) was still to be collected from the students.

The timing was remarkable. Ionescu pointed out that Moța was bound by a custom that had survived in the Center: namely, the chairman himself could be held accountable. He also shed light on a different side of Moța’s personality: his entrepreneurial talent. As he had already demonstrated, Moța could not only sacrifice himself for the cause, but also make money for it. Besides the organizational and intellectual skills he had placed in the service of the Center, he also had expertise, acquired in the family, in another field: the use of printing with its twofold aims, as a source of information and as a source of income. Along with the nationalist⁴⁴ and religious education that the young man had received from his father, the Orthodox priest Ioan Moța, and which informed his own writings, he had also inherited the skill of using images and printed words in the pursuit of an ideal.⁴⁵

Newspaper articles, posters, manifestos, petitions to the authorities, postcards, leaflets and book translations (like the famous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) benefited from Moța’s literary talent and entrepreneurship, coupled with an outstanding compulsion to work. This was proved by the dozens of pages he wrote, now included in the archive of the Petru Maior Center. That he was perfectly aware of the twofold value of printing is made clear by his report on the management of the series of postcards entitled “Romanians, Help!” He stated that “this operation was well-received, I gather, because, on the one hand, these 5,000 postcards made very good propaganda for our national cause, and on the other hand, we can see that the Center had (or will have, after all the arrears are collected) a profit of about 12,000 lei.”⁴⁶ D. B. Vasiliu’s leaflet had also brought net returns of 2,010 lei.⁴⁷ These were just two examples of the fundraising organized for the Student Center during that academic year (donations for the poor students, for those expelled from dormitories, for the sick, etc.). An academic year in which students, through their representatives, often portrayed themselves as an imperiled category, outraged, oppressed and forsaken by the careless authorities, but helped by the more compassionate pillars of society, from university professors to opera singers, from doctors and lawyers to bankers.

Ionescu’s interpellation was effective. Moța would thereafter regularly report on activities that he had previously kept under strict control. But it also turned like a boomerang on Ionescu himself. At the end of the month in which he had asked the questions, the secretary-general would also receive a more personal answer. In an unknown committee of three, Moța dismissed him on the grounds of his “gossip.” Moreover, much like a sovereign, Moța rejected his defense in the committee meeting of the Center, when Ionescu claimed that his position as secretary-general had been taken away without cause for blame. Moța, both

prosecutor and judge at the trial, “considers Mr. Ionescu’s defense as unfounded.”⁷⁴⁸ A summary execution, an unforgiving leader.

At the same meeting, in late September, Moța informed his colleagues that the previous meetings of the delegates organized in Iași and Bucharest had been very effective: some of the editors of *Cuvântul studențesc* (The voice of the students), who were found to be “unbefitting our movement,” had been removed and there had been “purges” in the Student Committee of Bucharest.⁴⁹ The strategy, based on meetings of delegates (decided in the August congress), had worked. On that occasion, Moța made the announcement that there was an upcoming action that would help sort things out: “the next assault we will be making this fall will bring us either victory or honorable defeat.”⁷⁵⁰

The whole agitation over the summer and Moța’s mandate as chairman of the Petru Maior Center were to bear fruit. The honor and integrity of the movement, so often invoked, would be restored by a miraculous, mysterious maneuver.

A simple handwritten receipt, like the countless⁵¹ ones previously signed by Moța (who was both a very efficient fundraiser and a lavish spender), contained terms that suggested the use of the amount of “4,000 (four thousand) lei for a 5 (five)-member delegation to Iași and Bucharest in the interest of certain supreme goals of the national student movement. The delegation will last about 10 (ten) days—Cluj, 2 October 1923, Ion I. Moța, Chairman of the Center.”⁷⁵²

Cristanta.

In documentul prezintă al Centrului
au primit de la ...
lei 4000 (patru mii) pentru o delegație
de 5 (cinci) membri, plecați la Iași și
București în folosul unor urgemite interese
ale mișcării naționale studențești. Dele-
gația va dura aproximativ 10 (zece) zile.
Cluj, 2 octombrie 1923.

Președintele aprofundat
al Centrului
Ion I. Moța

22 [19] 1923
la centrul ...
nr. 109 [109] ...

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

The frequent meetings with the representatives of Iași, his vigil and meditations together with Codreanu on Rarău Mountain, had helped Moța to find a solution to the crisis. Moța phrased it as follows: “let’s end the movement on a beautiful note, by sacrificing ourselves, but also by felling all those whom we will find guilty of having betrayed the Romanian interests.”⁷⁵³ The plot they had planned targeted ministers, rabbis, bankers, journalists; Romanian traitors and Jews, in this order. It was not carried out, because several members of the group, selected from among the students from Cluj, Iași and Bucharest, were arrested on the evening of 8 October 1923.⁵⁴

Declarații.

Subsemnatii studenți, membri ai centrului studentesc "Petru Maior" din Cluj, declarăm pe convingutul de onoare că ne vom supune în orice moment și în orice împrejurare literaturilor aduse de centrul studentesc "Petru Maior" din Cluj și le vom executa întocmai, apoi că ne solidarizăm cu întreaga studențime din țară.

Cluj la 30/IV. 1923

Stoian Alexandru
Ghiarcas V.
Lucin Iuliu drept.
Aniga Octavian drept
Popovici Ioan medicina
Balint Augustin științe
Andrei Ioan drept
Mien Petru drept
Opriș Ioan drept
Bogdan Liviu științe
Iordache J. acad. com.
Fobosi Corneliu științe
Paul Pavel drept
Pitea E. acad. com.
Tancea S. Marin științe
Serban Victor drept
Cipa Lazar drept
Caliani Augustin științe
Mareș Teodor științe
Trașcu Iacob
Oana Emil drept
Roman Timotie drept

Stoian Emil drept
Briste Nicolae drept
Murgulescu J. G. științe
Fandor Alexandru drept
Marina Ionichia medicina
Abrudan V. medicina
Pecurariu I. medicina
Muresan Victor drept
Maldovan Ionel drept
Munteanu Stancu științe
Penes George acad. com.
Patriciu J. drept.
Avram Cornel medicina
Bricea S. Visnel drept
Muresan Gh. drept
Popa Traian acad. com.
Bărbos Florian științe
Milcu Emil litere și fil.
Local Iuliu acad. com.
Liliasi Ioan științe
Crăciun George acad. com.
Stefu Ioan acad. com.
Chirca A. științe
Lucin Ioan drept

Together with his comrades, Moța made the newspaper headlines, which appended to his name the prestigious title of “chairman of the Petru Maior Student Center.” His mystical-ethical crisis did not end with his incarceration at Văcărești prison. During the ensuing trial, in March 1924, he fired several shots at the man he had identified as the group’s traitor, Aurel Vernichescu, his colleague from Cluj. The battle to regain student honor had reached its final stage. □

Notes

1. “ASR Principele Carol la Cluj,” *Înfrățirea* (Cluj), 3 May 1922, p. 3.
2. “Agitația studentimei din Cluj,” *Patria* (Cluj), 4 May 1923, p. 2.
3. At the committee’s meeting of 26 April 1923, George Alexa handed in his resignation because he did not agree with the path chosen by some students, who wished to “join Mr. Cuza’s organizations.” He believed that “taking the fight forward would entail compromising ourselves.” Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, “Proces-verbal” (26 April 1923).
4. The first chairman was Adam Popa, who resigned on 30 November 1922, a few days after the riot broke out in the dissection halls of the Faculty of Medicine. See the article “Ultimele hotărâri,” *Dacia Nouă* (Cluj), 23 Dec. 1922, p. 4.
5. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, “Adresă către Rector” (2 May 1923).
6. “În chestia așa zisului memoriu al Universității din Cluj: Un comunicat al rectoratului,” *Înfrățirea*, 13 May 1923, p. 3.
7. Cluj County Branch of the National Archives, coll. Universitatea din Cluj, “Ședințele Senatului Universitar,” file 4, F. 98v (meeting of 3 May 1923).
8. “Regimul baionetelor,” *Patria*, 4 May 1923, p. 3.
9. “Informațiuni,” *Dacia Nouă*, 10 May 1923, p. 2.
10. “Having therefore been expelled and placed under police surveillance, with a view to being deported home, I found refuge at my friends’ place in Cluj,” he stated in the petition he addressed to Vice-Rector D. Călugăreanu. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, “Memoriu Dsale Domnului Prorector al Universității,” Cluj (8 September 1923).
11. “Avis: Membrii Comitetului Centrului Studentesc ‘Petru Maior’ din Cluj sunt convocați în ședință astăzi, 1.V.1923, ora 8 ½, la Dl. Moța (str. Bob 2).” The document is signed by the Council (“Consiliul”) and, underneath, by “I. Moța.” Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5993.
12. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, “Proces-verbal” (1 May 1923).
13. Cluj County Branch of the National Archives, coll. Universitatea din Cluj, “Ședințele Senatului Universitar,” file 4 (meeting of 11 May 1923).
14. Ibid. (meeting of 14 May 1923).

- 15 See, for example, the petition requesting the rector's approval for holding a student congress in Cluj "in the first half of August" (Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, no. 144) or the two petitions, submitted on 11 July 1923, asking the rector for explanations regarding the students who had been expelled and those who, "on account of the strike," had been unable to show proof of their class attendance to the local authorities in order to be exempted from military service (*Ibidem*, petitions of 11 July 1923).
16. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, "Adresă către Rector," no. 135.
17. Ion I. Moța, "Ce am câștigat până acum?," *Dacia Nouă*, 10 May 1923, p. 2.
18. Ion I. Moța, "Necesitatea naționalismului radical," *Dacia Nouă*, 20 January 1923, p. 1.
19. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Proces-verbal" (23 May 1923). At the end of the minutes, it was stated that the committee's meetings would henceforth be held with that frequency, namely "on every Thursday, at 3 p.m., on Mr. Moța's premises."
20. *Ibid.*
21. See Maria Ghitta, "Primul congres studentesc din România Mare: Cluj, 1920," in *La granița dintre științe: Istorie, mentalități, imaginar: Omagiu Profesorilor Simona și Toader Nicoană la vârsta de 60 de ani*, eds. Ovidiu Ghitta and Gheorghe Negustor (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut & Mega, 2017), 524–538.
22. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Proces-verbal" (23 May 1923). This was the first time Aurel Vernichescu appeared as a committee member.
23. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Proces-verbal" (10 July 1923).
24. *Ibid.*, "Proces-verbal" (19 August 1923).
25. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, "Către Societatea Academică Română, Berlin" (10 July 1923).
26. *Ibid.* (10 July 1923), no. 157/1923.
27. *Ibid.* Moța had been preparing for some time now the publication of the *Protocols*, which appeared in serial format starting with the second issue of the periodical *Dacia Nouă*. He signed the translation (from French) with the pen name "Neodacus." The book did see the light of print, containing comments by Cătuneanu and Vasiliu, two of the intellectuals who supported the student movement.
28. *Ibid.*
29. See note 23.
30. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, "Scrisoare către G. Grigorescu, Centrul Iași" (2 July 1923).
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, "Scrisoare către Societatea Academică Română din Berlin" (10 July 1923), no. 56/1923.
33. The information appears in a letter dated 10 July 1923, addressed to Râpeanu, the representative of the students in Bucharest. See note 27.
34. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Procesul-verbal al ședinței Comitetului 'Petru Maior'" (19 August 1923).

35. Ibid.
36. Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului,"* transl. Wilhelm Tauwinki (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 67–70.
37. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5993, "Hotărârile Congresului de la Iași."
38. Ibid.
39. Among the signatories were Simionescu and Râpeanu from Bucharest, Moța, Vernichescu, Georgescu and Mocanu from Cluj, Zelea-Codreanu, Gârneață, Mărgineanu, Filipescu from Iași, and Tudose Popescu from Chernivtsi.
40. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Procesul-verbal al ședinței Comitetului Centrului 'Petru Maior'" (1 September 1923).
41. Ibid., Declaration and list of names (without signatures); most likely the handwriting belongs to Moța.
42. Ibid., "Proces-verbal" (1 September 1923). Moța had been an editor of *Dacia Nouă* throughout its publication period, from December 1922 to May 1923. At one point during this time, the newspaper was shut down by the authorities.
43. Ibid.
44. There is a pithy saying about young Moța, namely that he "sucked nationalism with his mother's milk." Eugen Weber, *Dreapta românească*, transl., introduction and notes by Achim Mișu (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 61.
45. Fr. Ioan Moța evoked this activity in his book *42 de ani de gazetărie* (Orăștie: Tipografia Astra S.A. Cluj, 1935).
46. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5993, "Dare de seamă" (15 September 1923). Moța was very familiar with the ins and outs of the printing business. This was proved by the answer he gave to the Student Society in Timișoara, which had asked him for such postcards: "I can provide you with propaganda postcards but only under the following conditions: you should order at least 1,000 pieces . . . at 3 lei apiece (wholesale price). Still, if you only want 500 pieces, we can meet your demand, but at 4 lei apiece. If you order 2,000 pieces, you can have them at 2.5 lei apiece. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5851, "Dlui Președinte al Societății Studenților Școlii Politehnice Timișoara" (177/1 September 1923).
47. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5993, "Gestiunea broșurii 'Situția demografică a României,'" Cluj (15 September 1923).
48. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 6011, "Procesul-verbal al ședinței de comitet" (30 September 1923).
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. An expenditure list, found in such documents: coffee, cheese, hansoms, telegrams, letters, trams, tips, gasoline, kolivas, memorial services, cockades, food. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5993, "Bilanțul contabil al Congresului de la Iași" (4 September 1923).

52. Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, coll. Petru Maior, Ms. 5988, “Acte justificative, Chitanță de mână” (2 October 1923).
53. Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, *Pentru legionari* (Sibiu: Totul pentru Țară, 1936), 168.
54. Ibid. See also Schmitt, 72–73; Armin Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelului Mihail”: Mișcare socială și organizație politică: O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, transl. Cornelia și Delia Eșianu, scientific control Florea Ioncioaia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 113–114.

Abstract

Ion I. Moța: An Atypical Leader of the Petru Maior Student Center in Cluj

The paper is intended to shed some light on the personality and actions of Ion I. Moța, a law student who, amid the massive unrest that gripped Romania’s universities in the year 1923, managed to become the (unelected) leader of the Cluj student center. In this capacity, he devoted considerable energy to the efforts meant to mobilize and radicalize the students, coordinate their activities across the entire country, secure funding for the movement, and force the authorities to concede to their demands.

Keywords

Cluj University, student unrest, far-right movements in Romania, anti-Semitism, nationalism