

Parliamentary Reactions to the Antisemitic Manifestation of the Romanian Students between 1922 and 1923

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THE WAVE of antisemitic agitation that gripped Central and Eastern Europe after World War I affected Romanian too; it became the subject of parliamentary debates beginning with 1922, following incidents in Cluj, where tensions broke out between Romanian and Jewish students at the end of November, when the latter were accused of having refused to dissect the body of a coreligionist that they later returned to the community. The arguments soon moved from within the university walls to the streets, leading to a series of violent confrontations resulting in the devastation of the Jewish student dorm, the Jewish Students House, the office of the Zionist Federation and the almost complete robbing of the office and printing house belonging to the Hungarian Zionist daily *Uj Kelet*. At the end of these incidents that lasted three days, the Cluj medical students still refused to allow their Jewish colleagues access to classes, demanding Jewish cadavers for dissection and the introduction of *numerus clausus*. At the beginning of December, the antisemitic student manifestations spread to other university centres as well, namely at the University of Bucharest, where the offices of the independent newspapers *The Struggle (Lupta)*, *Truth (Adevărul)* and *Morning (Dimineața)*, and those of the Zionist daily *Redemption (Mântuirea)* were devastated;¹ in Iasi, the offices of the periodicals *The World (Lumea)* and *The Opinion (Opinia)* were confronted with the same problem, “the students destroying everything, throwing furniture out of the window and the printing letters in the Bahlui.”²

In the **Chamber of Deputies**, the first Jewish representative who sanctioned these events was Adolphe Stern, who, in the meeting on November 30, 1922,

interpellated the government concerning the antisemitic excesses in Cluj, asking the Ministers of Public Education and Interior to present the measured adopted both against the local administration and against those who had committed these deeds.³ A week later, without having received any answer from the authorities, the Jewish deputy found himself in the position of having to repeat his interpellation; in its preamble, he remarked bitterly: “The student revolts in Cluj were a bitter and painful disappointment for me, as they seemed to revive that terrible disease that plagued the Old Kingdom [...] and to represent a new chapter in the painful story of antisemitism that we believed extinguished in Greater Romania”.⁴ After a brief overview of the events, in an attempt to address the question “Cui prodest”, Ad. Stern considered that the two reasons underlying these incidents, namely the religious affiliation of the cadavers and the principle of “*numerus clausus*” were only pretexts, taking into consideration the fact that the former was not an issue, as several Jewish hospitals had manifested their intention of sending the unclaimed bodies to the medical school, while the latter was impossible, as it was opposed to the “principle of freedom of education.” Consequently, the Jewish Mp did not blame the students, who were regarded as mere tools, but denounced the moral responsibility of the National Christian Union and its leaders, A. C. Cuza, C. Șumuleanu, E. Paulescu, și I. Zelea Codreanu, seen as “the true traitors of the people” on account of the disservices brought to the Romanian state.

In the end, the orator asked the ministers of Public Education, Interior and Justice to punish the true guilty ones, the “intellectual authors”, as he called them, and to present before the Chamber the measures taken by the government in order to put an end to this conflict.⁵

The Jewish MP received the prompt reply of the Minister of Public Education, C. Angheliescu, who, after giving a detailed presentation of the incidents based on a document received from the Cluj University Senate, explained before the Chamber that, in keeping with the principle of autonomy, ensuring order and discipline in the university fell in the responsibility of the university senate and that the Ministry was only indirectly involved. In this respect, he considered that he had taken all the necessary measures, presenting a long series of telegrams sent since November 29 to the Rector’s Offices in Cluj and Iasi with the aim of adopting urgent measures to restore order. At the same time, the liberal minister also presented the effective measures adopted by the Cluj university senate and the Council of the School of Medicine: closing the dissection room as long as the Jewish students were denied access there, stopping the manifestations and meetings and opening an investigation in order to identify the people responsible for having devastated the offices of the *Uj Kelet* newspaper. As far as the conflict in the Bucharest and Iasi Universities was concerned, C. Angheliescu provided

comforting reassurance, stating that the former had been extinguished, while the latter was being addressed at the time.

At the end of his intervention, considering he had done everything possible, he asked the Jewish community, in his capacity as minister of Education, to become involved in restoring order by sending all the unclaimed bodies to the schools of medicine.⁶

At the end of the parliamentary meeting, the Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, who was in the room, wanted to intervene in order to present the point of view of the government concerning the respective events. He stated in this respect: “the government is determined to preserve order and to ensure that those who are responsible for the chaos will receive their due punishment.”⁷

These antisemitic student incidents were mentioned in the interventions of other Jewish deputies, such as Nathan Lerner⁸ and rabbi I. L. Țirelson, who, in a genuine sermon, stigmatised the perpetuation of medieval stereotypes and clichés in Greater Romania, the most serious among them being the accusation of ritual murder present in a series of brochures distributed by the National Christian Union in several Moldavian high schools. Along the same line, the Jewish MP also condemned the antisemitic student manifestations by which the much more serious and “odious doctrine of hatred against people” entered the university, “the temple of light” that was supposed to be the “true root of human love and morality”, these manifestations having a negative impact both for the Jews and for the new Romanian state that “was being compromised before the whole education world.” At the end of his speech, the deputy condemned the government incapable of putting a definitive end to antisemitic agitation: “why have no necessary effective measures been implemented so far? Why are we all spectators of a tactic that unintentionally brings about a continuation of student violence against the Jews?”⁹

I. Pistiner, a Jewish deputy from the Social Democrat Party, also joined the voices protesting against the student unrest, emphasising that this fell outside the usual frame of student manifestations and developed as a movement spreading to the rest of the country, which meant that the government was obliged to adopt the most severe measures against it.¹⁰

The protests of the Jewish representatives against the respective events were accompanied by those of a few opposition MPs, primarily from the Peasant Party. One of them was Virgil Madgearu who, during an interpellation addressed to the ministers of Public Education and Interior, denounced the Cluj antisemitic excesses and sanctioned the responsibility of the local administration who, through their tolerance, allowed them to spread to Bucharest student circles as well.¹¹

The deputy P. Bujor adopted a much more intransigent attitude: referring to

the incidents at the University of Iasi, he accused the government of inefficiency, because, despite the investigation conducted by the general secretary of the Ministry of Public Education, the Jewish students were still being denied access to classes and laboratories. According to the speaker, the principal and true culprit was A. C. Cuza who, in his capacity of dean of the School of Law¹² and with “the approval of the Ministry” (Cuza being an old friend of the minister), used his “unfortunate influence” on the students, instigating them against Jews and creating an antisemitic movement that would spread and bring about “unspeakably disastrous consequences for our country”, favoured by the government’s passivity. In the end, he asked the minister C. Anghelescu to adopt urgent measures to restore order; otherwise, it meant that the government approved of the entire situation. He concluded: “In this case, the responsibility for all the consequences of these actions will fall on him and the government he belongs to.”¹³

The antisemitic student revolts were also condemned outside Parliament: the Union of Romanian Jews, in a manifesto published in December 1922, adhered to the points of view expressed by the Jewish senators and deputies. Highlighting the Jews’ patriotism and sacrifice during World War I, the Union condemned the antisemitic excesses and asked the government, “whose duty was to protect all its citizens, to rigorously apply all the school regulations, to give just punishment to those directly involved in creating chaos and to send all the culprits before justice in order to be tried in accordance to the letter of the law.”¹⁴

The student unrest at the end of 1922 had a profoundly negative impact on the morale of the Jewish people. This is how M. Landau described the atmosphere of the “Jewish street” in those days: “The dominant atmosphere was one of pogrom. I had read about the Russian pogroms and we had some idea what the attitude of the authorities would be if we asked them to protect us. That is why we considered it necessary to organise the defence of the Jewish quarters in Iasi. The Jewish students were organised in gangs of bullies (Jewish butchers and cabbies) to provide protection against hooligans at the synagogue in the heart of the Jewish quarter, in “Targul Cucului” or on Costache Negri Street. We appointed contacts, we got hold of heavy clubs, but we dreamt of guns. [...] We were determined not to let Jews be slaughtered like cattle anymore, we would protect them. The students in Bessarabia had heard from their parents how the Russian Jews had been organised throughout history and were willing to lend a helping hand.”¹⁵

After a brief respite brought about, among other factors, by the students’ winter break, the agitation started anew at the beginning of 1923, more precisely on January 30, when Jewish students at the University of Bucharest were molested and turned away from classes.¹⁶ In retaliation, a large number of

Jewish shops, companies, offices and school institutions closed their doors.

Given this state of affairs, the antisemitic unrest featured prominently on the agenda of the Parliament. The very next day, Ad. Stern, speaking in the Chamber of Deputies, declared he was dismayed by the recent “painful events” that had transgressed the borders of the university and turned into genuine street movements described as “a black page in the chronicle of antisemitism.” He did not blame all Romanian students, only that “small, confused faction that had fallen prey to the influence of revolts”, being at the same time convinced that the soul of the Romanian nation had not been infected by the antisemitism that had emerged “from the ranks of the criminal movement in Iasi and spread like a plague across the country”, preaching a “fanatical” and “reactionary” nationalism that prevented the consolidation of the new national state by instigating one ethnic or religious minority against the other.

In an attempt to dispel “the confusion” of a part of the Romanian students who had been gripped by the “great pontiff of Romanian antisemitism”, the speaker quoted both the words of king from the Message of the Throne about “the inner peace, essential to the health and flourishing of our beloved country, without which any attempt at building something would be without foundation” and the words of the appeal made by the Romanian Students’ Association in France, in which they protested against the antisemitic agitation and “urged their Romanian colleagues to understand that such situation bring serious prejudices to the internal order of the country and undeniably compromise its reputation abroad.”

As far as the attitude of the liberal government was concerned, this was accused that, despite the promises of the Minister of Public Education and the Prime Minister, the manifestations were allowed to continue, “the police of the interior minister and the magistrates of the likeable minister of justice sleeping throughout these events.” At the end of his intervention, the Jewish MP questioned the government about the measure it saw fit to take in order to “guarantee human and citizenship right to the Romanian Jews.”¹⁷

The passivity of the government was also denounced by P. Bujor, the Peasant Party deputy, with the following words: “the representative of the Ministry of Education witnessed this scandal with a passive, lenient attitude that was evident to the army who were unable to prevent the bloody violence inflicted upon the Jewish students.” Taking this into consideration, as well as the fact that the government did not see fit to take the effective measures required by the “current serious situation”, the speaker felt justified to believe that “the student manifestations were condoned by higher authorities.” P. Bujor did more than criticise the government in his speech, he also presented a solution to ease the tensions, namely providing all university institutions, including student dorms

and canteens, with the necessary funds to satisfy all student demands, regardless of whether these referred to scientific activities or to living conditions. Only thus, the deputy concluded, “when all students have plenty of place in all the institutions of our university”, “at civilised standards”, they will be persuaded of the unreasonable nature of their political demands by the government.¹⁸

The reply of the Minister of Public Education, C. Angheliescu, came without delay. He combated the serious accusations of passivity and condoning the student unrest raised against the Ministry, by indicating the decisions it had adopted in response to student demands during a conference of all the deans and rectors, namely: revising student admission records and expelling all those whose papers were not in order, primarily foreign students from Poland and Hungary, granting scholarships abroad based on rigorous competition and denying funds to all students who had scholarships abroad to study subjects that could have been studied in Romania as well. The only demand the ministry categorically denied was the introduction of *numerus clausus*, considered an “imported concept” that could not be applied in Romanian universities because it would lead to differences between the “citizens of the same country.” From Angheliescu’s point of view, the Ministry had done “everything humanly possible” to re-establish order, but the same could not be said, in his opinion, about the Union of Jewish Communities that, despite the request to provide Jewish cadavers for the schools of medicine, did nothing to fulfil this, something that was “a serious mistake, because it would have greatly contributed to solve this matter.”¹⁹

The presentation of all the measures adopted by the minister, also stipulated in a memo sent to all the rectors on January 18, 1923, asking them to implement the decisions agreed upon at the December conference, did not impress the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies; dr. N. Lupu, a deputy of the Peasant Party, even demanded the resignation of the minister: “I am telling you, politics is judged by results and if you, after all these efforts, have been unable to accomplish such small things, you must resign your commission.”²⁰

Elegantly overlooking the harsh words of the Peasant Party deputy, the liberal minister considered he had done his duty, “intervening where necessary, namely with the university senates and the rectors”, bringing as proof a series of telegrams addressed to the universities beginning with January 18, by which he imperiously demanded that “the most energetic measures be taken so that all students could be enrolled accepted in the university” and that “all those creating chaos be punished.” As far as the solution proposed by deputy P. Bujor to provide adequate resources for higher education, Angheliescu reassured everyone that this “was almost a reality”, as he had secured to promise of the finance minister that substantial additional funds would be provided and commissions to analyse the introduction of reforms had been formed.²¹

Referring to the violent incidents on January 30 at the University of Bucharest, which actually proved the inefficiency of the governmental measures, the liberal minister, in an attempt to weigh the responsibility of the parties involved, was inclined to blame the Jewish students for “coming armed with clubs”. Despite this fact, he showed, the university senate met in an extraordinary session, “because we not approve of different among students on account that some are Jews and some others are Christians”, and reached the decision to suspend all classes for eight days and close the student dorms and canteens.²²

In a subsequent meeting on February 7, the Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu presented the government’s point of view, showing that they were determined to defend the principle of equality before the law and to do their duty to “prevent evil from becoming more potent”. At the same time, he wanted to point out that the measure of completely shutting down all university activity was *an in extremis* measure adopted only “all attempt to persuade, advise and clarify failed to produce results.”²³

The student unrest at the University of Bucharest were discussed by Nicolae Iorga in an intervention by which he announced his resignation from the position of professor of medieval and modern history at the aforementioned University that had been submitted to the minister of Public Education on February 6, 1923; he justified his decision by explaining that, upon leaving a conference held at the Ateneul Roman, where he made an appeal for order and national unity, he was hissed by the students gathered outside the building. His resignation was rejected both by the Prime Minister and the minister Anghelescu, on account of the fact that “there could be no connection between the scandal caused by a few misbehaving boys and eliminating a professor like Mr. Iorga from his rightful place at the university.”

In his speech, N. Iorga, although expression disappointment towards “the youth capable of such acts”, “the souls I spoke to my entire life, who are mute today”, considered that the decision of the government to close the student dorms was unfair, because it would punish those less responsible for the incidents, young people who “made mistakes because they did not have experience”, manipulated by people “who are experienced and push them to make mistakes.” Actually, in a highly emotional speech, Iorga blamed the government for not punishing the true moral culprits, those who “brandished the cornered cross of aggressive German nationalism”, the true “perpetrators of this crime against the country’s peace and future” who stay in “warm offices and hotel rooms” while students “walk the snow-filled streets.”

At the end, pointing out to the students that what they were doing was no longer “antisemitism”, but “anarchy”, Iorga sounded the alarm about the fact that Romania did not wish to follow the example of its Russian neighbours, who

“started out with pogroms against the Jews and ended up under the dictatorship of Trotski and the Jewish revolutionary committees.”²⁴

In the Romanian **Senate**, in an interpellation sent to the ministers of the Interior and Public Education, Iosif Stanielevici also took a stand against the student unrest in the University of Bucharest, questioning the two ministers both about the measures they deemed necessary and especially about the passive attitude of the general secretary of the Ministry of Education, who “was in the university chancellor’s office and, although notified about the incidents, did not intervene to stop the violence” and of the police, “who had arrived at the scene and did nothing to protect the victims of the aggressions.”²⁵

Two years later, having reached the conclusion that the issue of Jewish cadavers was the main reason for continuous tensions between the Christian and Jewish students, the members of the Senate put forward a legislative project stipulating the following:

“The Ministry of Public Health, the hospital administrations in the country and the Institutes of coronary medicine are obliged to donate to the medical schools, in the higher interest of learning, all the bodies of people who died in hospitals or found on the public domain, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation, if these are not claimed within three days since the time of death by their next of kin, fourth-degree relatives included. The kinship proof will be done in accordance to the provisions of the regulation drafted by the Ministry of Public Health as soon as the law has been signed into force.”²⁶

The debates surrounding this law included the intervention of the Jewish senator I. Sanielevici who, agreeing that the Jews also had to bring their contribution to restoring order, considered the project a fortunate initiative and a viable solution to the cadaver issue, a law that finally “forced everyone to provide cadavers and stipulates that certain distant relatives do not have the right to claim a body.”²⁷

The issue of Jewish cadavers was over at least theoretically at the end of 1926, when the Union of Jewish Communities in the Old Kingdom, proving its willingness to comply with the government requirements to finally solve this matter, sent a memo to all the communities in the country, asking them to notify the Union if they had any unclaimed bodies for which the Union would provide transportation. But, on account of the budget deficit of the Union and the lack of training on the part of the communities to preserve and ship the dead bodies, coupled with discussion between the representatives of the Union and the Bucharest Medical School, an agreement was reached to obtain free transportation by rail for the cadavers donated to medical schools beginning with December 15, 1926.²⁸

If one analyses the parliamentary attitudes towards the antisemitic incidents

and the passivity of the government, one can see that the interventions of the Jewish MPs were not the only ones, they were supported by those made by a number of Peasant Party deputies, such as V. Madgearu, N. Lupu, I. Mihalache și P. Bujor.

By far the most intransigent of them was P. Bujor who, speaking about the incidents at the University of Iasi, accused the government of inefficiency because, despite the investigation carried out by the secretary general of the Ministry of Public Education, the Jewish students were still denied access to classes. According to the speaker, the principal and true culprit was A. C. Cuza who, in his capacity of dean of the School of Law²⁹ and with “the approval of the Ministry” (Cuza being an old friend of the minister), used his “unfortunate influence” on the students, instigating them against and Jews and creating an antisemitic movement that would spread and bring about “unspeakably disastrous consequences for our country”, favoured by the government’s passivity. In the end, he asked the minister C. Anghelescu to adopt urgent measures to restore order; otherwise, it meant that the government approved of the entire situation. He concluded: “In this case, the responsibility for all the consequences of these actions will fall on him and the government he belongs to.”³⁰ Later on, referring to the incidents occurred at the University of Bucharest on January 30, he denounced the passivity of the government in the following terms: “the representative of the Ministry of Education witnessed this scandal with a passive, lenient attitude that was evident to the army who were unable to prevent the bloody violence inflicted upon the Jewish students.” Taking this into consideration, as well as the fact that the government did not see fit to take the effective measures required by the “current serious situation”, the speaker felt justified to believe that “the student manifestations were condoned by higher authorities.”³¹

The leader of the Peasant Party, I. Mihalache, had a particularly radical position regarding the issue in question: the beginning of his speech, he admitted that there was an imbalance between the number of Jewish and Romanian students explained by the urban composition of the Jewish population, a large proportion of which lived in university cities and had a better economic situation compared to the Romanian population, especially the rural one. But he went on to show that it was not the Jews who were responsible for this state of facts, it was the government that had been incapable of formulating a policy by which “higher education could include the total number of Romanian students, especially those from rural areas”, a policy that could have prevented the antisemitic unrest.

Mihalache considered that the measures to restore order taken by the Minister of Public Education, C. Anghelescu, were inefficient, because they did not put an end to the incidents, a failure accounted for by two reasons: “[...] either

you did not pinpoint the problem and did not prescribe the right medicine, or your policy only contributes to making these agitations worse.” In the end, the supreme accusation brought against the liberal government’s actions, described as “confusions”, was that “antisemitism had been deliberately brought to the table” both to divert the attention of the people from the government’s inefficiency in solving the economic and social problems confronting the country and to directly hurt the opposition, because, under the pretext of stopping student manifestations, the government wanted to prevent the organisation of any public manifestations, including those of the opposition, claiming that these affected the “peace” and “safety” of the state.

In the end, the Peasant Party deputy demanded that the government should pursue a real policy that would “open the doors of higher education to students from towns and villages” in order to eliminate the “obstacles that, at certain times, lead to conflicts between elements that are supposed to live in harmony”; he also drew attention to the dangerous game played by the authorities: “Gentlemen, you have been playing with fire and provoked student antisemitic movements for mean political reasons. Be aware, you played the same game in 1907, when one started out with antisemitic movements that degenerated in peasant revolts.”³²

In a later session of the Chamber of Deputies, I. Mihalache provided additional comments on the position of the Peasant Party towards the student incidents, more precisely towards the student demands, stipulating that the party agreed to their material and educational demands considered justified on account of the fact that higher education institutions were few and inadequately equipped. The deputy bluntly rejected the introduction of *numerus clausus*, showing that this would violate a fundamental principle of the party, namely respecting the minority rights stipulated in the Peace Treaties.³³

The issue of limiting the number of Jewish students in higher education was reprised and explained by another Peasant Party deputy, Vespasian Pella, who considered that the only viable solution for dealing with the student problems had nothing to do with “punishing” the Jewish students by introducing *numerus clausus*, but with achieving *numerus maximus* by increasing the number of autochthonous students. He stated, “the creation of more high schools to allow the sons of peasants to have access to secondary schools, more scholarships and university dorms, this is the most rational and equitable solution to the problems that caused the current student revolts.”³⁴

On the other hand, the representatives of the government party, the National Liberals, used a kind of parliamentary discourse whose nuances were rather hostile, briefly defined by the statement “*we disapprove, but...*”, a definition adopted by the parliamentary majority of various other governments.

One of the main topics of this kind of discourse referring to the antisemitic student manifestation in 1922-1923 was the responsibility of Jewish students, who provoked the Romanians either by responding “too violently” to the hostile attitude of their Christian colleagues, or especially by refusing to dissect Jewish cadavers. In the first case, the liberal senator Ermil Pangrati, manifesting his concern towards the appearance of “unrest and noise in the Romanian universities” and building his discourse around the distinction between “us” and “them”, stated that the Jewish MPs should also denounce the Jewish students who “demonstrated against our students”, thus causing “troubles in the university” – something that, in his opinion, was an easy thing to happen because “the majority of our students are warm-hearted and become easily involved in national issues”. In the end, Pangrati asked the government to adopt impartial measures regardless of the nationality of the “agitating students”, be them “of foreign or Romanian nationality”, without forgetting to add that the latter “was the dominant nationality of this country and that is the way it will stay.”³⁵

As far as the issue of Jewish cadavers was concerned, a few liberal MPs wanted to push the idea according to which the refusal of Jewish students to dissect the cadavers of their coreligionists was nothing but “an irritating superstition” that “naturally led” to provoking the Christian population: “[...] the Jewish people has some superstitions that are anything but harmless: for instance, one should not dissect the body of a Jew, because this is desecration, but you, as a Jew, can dissect as many Christian cadavers as you want without this being desecration” (C. Rigu).³⁶ The speeches of senators N. G. Popovici and N. Hasnaș followed the same logic, asking that Jewish and Christian medical students should only dissect the cadavers of their coreligionists, because “we cannot allow such dissections to be carried out on Christian cadavers starting from the premise that these can be desecrated, but the Jewish ones cannot.”³⁷

The liberal parliamentary rhetoric sometime included evident antisemitic notes. For instance, deputy D. Lascu, referring to the student antisemitic agitations, considered that these were triggered not by antisemitism, but by the “conservation instinct”, as this generation “was outshone in every way by their Jewish colleagues and strove to regain a position that was rightfully theirs so that “Romania and its people should not be ruled by hostile, foreign elements.”³⁸

The statement of deputy I. Buzdugan was also interesting: he denied the existence of antisemitic incidents and considered them pure “inventions” of the “slandering Jew” who was unaware of the dangers coming from adopting such an attitude. By spreading “unsubstantiated rumours”, the Jew might bring about the “fire that can spread one day from one end of the country to the other. Then, it is not us who will be responsible, but them, because they caused this spark.”³⁹

Is I. Buzdugan denied the existence of antisemitic agitation, V. Pop and

C. Şumuleanu attempted a reversal of terms in which antisemitism became “anti-Romanianism” or “the movement of the Kikes against Romanians”,⁴⁰ these antisemitic incidents being nothing more than “peaceful manifestations” of defence on the part of Romanian elements in the predominantly Jewish towns, manifestations that “bothered” the Jews so much that they retaliated by “physically aggressing the Christian population.”⁴¹

It is interesting to note that the image of the Jew as “agitator” responsible for the antisemitic incidents can also be found in the parliamentary rhetoric during Al. Averescu’s government, being used in the Cernăuți incidents of 1926, when student David Falk was shot.

Paradoxically, blaming the Jewish representatives for intervening in the antisemitic agitation and especially for the way in which this was presented reached a climax during the National Peasant government of 1928-1931, when the Jewish MPs, who were elected based on a political agreement with the National Peasant Party, were accused not only of “excessive insistence”, but also of exaggerating and blaming the government without due cause.

If we consider that the Jewish MPs were supported in their interventions by their National Peasant colleagues only when these were in opposition (during the times when the government was in the hands of the liberals),⁴² the conclusion to be drawn is that, sometimes, the rhetoric sympathetic to the demands of the Jewish senators and deputies was a coded one: the underlying message was different, namely the incapacity of the liberal government of fulfilling its mandate efficiently. In this respect, the solidarity with the interests of the Jews was done not out of genuine belief, but rather out of the desire to upset the liberal majority which became the target of harsh accusations, the most serious of which being, as we have seen, the deliberate provocation of antisemitic student manifestations in order to divert the attention of the Romanian public opinion from the country’s real problems.

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Notes

1. The attack of the students against the offices of the newspaper “*Mântuirea*” was triggered by an open letter addressed to the Cluj students by A. L. Zissu, who used a particularly radical tone to condemn the antisemitic incidents in Cluj carried out in the name of Christianity and religious freedom at the end of November: “This is how you are called in various articles: Christian students, not Romanian students. This only makes sense. Only your congenital Christianity allowed you to achieve this great ... Jewish ethical effort. The Jewish conception on the sanctity of the human

body [...] (that is why dissection is considered rape) could find understanding in your ... evangelical hearts only, in the same manner in which only your Christianity could have instilled in you the magnanimity with which you devastated everything that could not be protected in Cluj: lead and waste paper. [...] And while my heart breaks of hopelessness and despair and my pale lips whisper the syllables of a terrible curse, we feel pride in having been, yet again, the incentive and opportunity for a moral revolution. Naturally, we were also the victims, like in the history of all moral revolutions. For instance, when we brought Christianity to the world. Our Christianity from Nazareth, because yours, the perverted monster, makes us sick and ashamed and we abandon it with horror.” “To the Romanian Students in Cluj”, A. L. Zissu, *Noi... Breviar judaic*, București, Editura Adam, 1932, p. 146-147. We consider it necessary to quote these lines because one could argue that the radical tone of the letter agitated the Bucharest students even more, a fact proven on December 10, when the incidents reached their climax: besides Jewish cadavers and the introduction of *numerus clausus*, Zissu’s punishment was also demanded. His letter was published daily in **Cuvântul Studentesc** as a permanent reminder for six months in a row.

2. **Curierul Israelit** (The Israelite Courier), 10 December 1922 (henceforth **CI**). For a history of the antisemitic student agitations in the first half of the interwar period, see C. Iancu, *Evreii din România de la emancipare la exclude*, București, Hasefer, 2000, pp. 177-206.
3. **Dezbaterile Adunării Deputaților** (The Debates in the Chamber of Deputies), meeting of 30 November, 1922, p. 15, henceforth **DAD**.
4. *Ibidem*, meeting of 7 December 1922, p. 33.
5. *Ibidem*, pp. 34-36.
6. *Ibidem*, pp. 37-38.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 39.
8. *Ibidem*, p. 32. Without going into further details, N. Lerner briefly stated his protest against the “hooligan student manifestations” and demanded that the authorities stop the incidents.
9. **DAD**, meeting of 27 December 1922, p. 256.
10. *Ibidem*, p. 255.
11. **DAD**, meeting of 5 December 1922, p. 24.
12. A. C. Cuza’s position as dean was the topic of several parliamentary interventions, especially on the part of the opposition, by people like N. Iorga, I. Simionescu, Policarp Bețianu and Vespasian Pella, who denounced the fact that he did not obey the decisions of the University Senate and the Rector T. Bratu, causing and fuelling a state of conflict that made it difficult to maintain order among students. Moreover, the Ministry of Education was condemned for not taking any measures, although it was aware of the situation, thus being partially responsible for the student incidents,

- in *ibidem*, meeting of 7 December 1922, pp. 31-32; meeting of 11 December 1922, p. 79; meeting of 20 December 1922, pp. 190-200.
13. *Ibidem*, meeting of 29 December 1929, pp. 456-457.
 14. **CI**, 17 December 1922.
 15. **M. Landau**, *O viață de luptă*, Tel Aviv, Bronfman, Cohen Publishers Ltd., 1971, p. 72. The fragment quoted about how the Russian Jews acted probably refers to the Chișinău pogrom of 1903 when, for the first time, probably under the influence of “Orașul măcelului” by Haim Nahman Bialik (“The City of Slaughter”), the Jews stood up for themselves and, renouncing their “proverbial” resignation, organised themselves in self-defence units, something that the historian A. Oișteanu considers to be a “historical process of changing the centuries-old Jewish mentality”, **A. Oișteanu**, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context Est-central european*, București, Humanitas, 2001, pp. 212.
 16. These antisemitic incidents occurred exactly a day after the students of Bucharest, supported by delegates from other universities, published a motion that was a true anti-Jewish programme, by which they demanded: enforcing numerus clausus in universities, forbidding Jews to perform dissections on Christian cadavers, expelling the Jews who arrived in the Old Kingdom after 1914 and those in the new provinces who had arrived there after 1918, forbidding Jews from entering the country and banning Jewish students from attending classes until those demands were met.
 17. **DAD**, meeting of 31 February 1923, pp. 663-667. This interpellation of the government was presented by Ad. Stern in his notes as taking place at a time when “pogroms were being prepared”; he himself felt in danger: “I felt that this was an attempt against me. When I arrived at Dealul Mitropoliei, I saw that both sides of the road were filled with dark, lurking shadows. I was able to pass unnoticed with the roof of the carriage raised and the hat over my eyes. The court of the Mitropolie was filled with hooligans who demanded to be let in the Chamber. When I entered the hall, an usher whispered that everyone had come there for me”, **A. Stern**, *Din viața unui evreu român. Însemnări din viața mea*, vol. III, București, Hasefer, 2001, p. 161. Another fragment of Stern’s diary is telling for the dominant atmosphere in Bucharest at the time; according to it, the Jewish deputy was called by the Minister of the Interior, general A. Văitoianu, after finishing his speech, who asked him to urgently cancel a protest meeting of the Union of Romanian Jews: “The Minister told me that URJ summoned a public meeting in Tomis room, without having suitable authorisation. [...] I was speechless! I had no knowledge about this, because the Central Office acted without consulting or warning me. [...] Anyway, the Minister said, we cannot allow such a meeting during these times of crises. I called upon the army to prevent it, but people insisted and a bloody confrontation is to be expected.” In the end, following Stern’s personal intervention, the mob gathered withdrew, *ibidem*, p. 162.

18. **DAD**, meeting of 31 february 1923, p. 667.
19. *Ibidem*, pp. 669-670.
20. *Ibidem*, p. 670.
21. The equipment of universities was a matter discussed by Minister Anghelescu during a previous meeting, when he presented the projects of the Ministry to build student dorms and boarding houses in Alba Iulia, Aiud, Cernăuți and Bucharest and to establish a commission to reorganise the students dorms and canteens, in **DAD**, meeting of 14 December 1922, p. 126.
22. *Ibidem*, pp. 671-672
23. **DAD**, meeting of 7 February 1922, p. 742.
24. *Ibidem*, pp. 743-744.
25. **Debates of the Senate**, meeting of 30 January 1923, p. 204, henceforth **DS**.
26. *Ibidem*, meeting of 31 March 1925, p. 1280.
27. *Ibidem*, p. 1281. The Jewish senator made an indirect reference to Chevrah Kedoșah (The Sacred Confraternity), one of the most important societies of Jewish community life, which existed in every community and was responsible for taking care of the ill and burying the dead. Thus, it was the organisation that claimed all Jewish bodies in hospitals and morgues.
28. **CI**, 5 December 1926.
29. A C. Cuza's position was dean was the topic of several parliamentary interventions, especially on the part of the opposition, by people like N. Iorga, I. Simionescu, Policarp Bețianu and Vespasian Pella, who denounced the fact that he did not obey the decisions of the University Senate and the Rector T. Bratu, causing and fuelling a state of conflict that made it difficult to maintain order among students. Moreover, the Ministry of Education was condemned for not taking any measures, although it was aware of the situation, thus being partially responsible for the student incidents, in *ibidem*, meeting of 7 December 1922, pp. 31-32; meeting of 11 December 1922, p. 79; meeting of 20 December 1922, pp. 190-200.
30. *Ibidem*, meeting of 29 December 1922, pp. 456-457.
31. *Ibidem*, meeting of 31 February 1923, p. 667.
32. *Ibidem*, pp. 672-674.
33. **DAD**, meeting of 10 May 1923, p. 755.
34. *Ibidem*, meeting of 24 November 1923, p. 241.
35. **DS**, meeting of 30 January 1923, p. 205.
36. *Ibidem*, meeting of 31 March 1925, p. 1280.
37. *Ibidem*, p. 1281.
38. *Ibidem*, meeting of 5 March 1926, p. 1281.
39. *Ibidem*, meeting of 30 November 1926, p. 136.
40. *Ibidem*, loc. cit.
41. **DAD**, meeting of 29 November 1926, pp. 120-121.

42. The only exception occurred between 1919 and 1920, the government led by Al. Vaida Voevod.

Abstract

Antisemitic manifestations appeared on the agenda of the Romanian Parliament debates beginning with 1922, following the incidents at the Cluj Medical School where tensions broke out between Romanian and Jewish students at the end of November; these tensions were caused by the fact that the latter were accused of having refused to dissect the body of a coreligionist. These incidents were condemned both by Jewish MPs, as well as by MPs of the National Peasant opposition. As far as the liberal MPs were concerned, they adopted a rather hostile rhetoric, defined in brief by the statement “*we disapprove, but...*”; one of the main topics of this kind of discourse was emphasising the responsibility of the Jewish students who provoked – deliberately or not – their Romanian colleagues.

Keywords

Antisemitism, numerus clausus, student unrest, parliamentary discourse, Jewish members of parliament (MPs)