

Majorities And Minorities In Bucovina From The Interwar Period

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The integration of national minorities from Bukovina into The Romanian Kingdom represented a complex and sinuous process that took place during 22 years (1918- 1940) depending on the national, social, political and administrative pattern of the governors leading Romania during the interwar period. Bukovina constituted a genuine Austrian legacy represented by the 12 national groups with 10 different religious denominations, whose interwar evolution within the Romanian Kingdom has been similar from many points of view. Being in a tight eventful correlation with the Central- European realities and going beyond the 1918's specific enthusiasm, the Romanian Kingdom tried to surmount an entire complex of problems which were subsumed under the general effort to build a national Romanian identity. The Orthodox Church officially held the state of the national church. Furthermore, the ethnocentrism founded a whole series of laws, a legislative body that inspired the 1923 Constitution, of national- liberal inspiration.

The Romanian state has constantly been confronted with different claims from the national minorities regarding their identity rights especially after the development of a political pattern of French origins in its Romanian version. From a political, administrative and cultural point of view, it took into account national minorities' rights and interests regarding governors' obligations in this area (see the Minority Treaty signed by Romania on the 10th of December 1919). The Romanian Kingdom should have been constituted to fulfill the claims of the Resolution adopted within the Great National Gathering in Alba Iulia on December 1st, 1918. The text stipulated –among others– “absolute national liberty for all cohabiting nationalities”. These statements also indicated the principles that should have guided this generous political regime “each nation shall teach, administrate and judge itself in its own language through individuals of its own extraction and each nation will receive the right to representation in legislative institutions and to the country’s government in proportion to the number of individuals that forms it”. Moreover, the 1923 Constitution specified in article 7 that “in Romania, religious faith and confession, ethnic origin and mother tongue do not impede exercising civil and political rights”, whereas articles 5, 8, 22, 28, 29, 64, 104, 108, 119 underlined and re-expressed the victory of the equality principle upon national, confessional or ethnic differences. Even the Constitution of the monarchic authoritarian regime from 27th of February 1938 was written in the same spirit, stating that “all Romanian citizens regardless of their ethnic origins and religious faith are equal before the law...” (article 5). Due to these reasons, legislative regulations have mainly considered the observance of citizens' rights and liberties regardless of their ethnic origin or confessional affiliation, but practically, abuses from clerks - mainly from the Old Kingdom - have often been reported in the spirit of some old mentalities and habits, of a low instruction degree, peasant preponderance in social configuration of the state, of an insufficiently developed civic conscience, unaccustomed to specific tolerance of historical Bukovina. The education system represented an extremely delicate and complex field in the relationship between Romanian authorities and national minorities , the politics of Bucharest regarding this issue has constantly troubled and dissatisfied political leaders, elites and minorities exponents, regardless of their ethnic origins or religious confessions. The Baccalaureate , which is very difficult and to be taken with a commission from outside the original school of the students, implies a very good knowledge of the Romanian language – discriminatory for the foreigners – has constantly provoked dissatisfactions stated from the tribune of the Romanian Parliament by the

representatives of national minorities in the legislative forum. Reported incidents at Cernauti in 1925 regarding taking this national exam that ended with the murder of the Jewish student David Fallik and the later discharge of murderer Nicolae Totoescu after a trial of sad memory at Campulung Moldovenesc on the basis of a nationalist and anti-Semite hysteria represent the collapse of the peaceful atmosphere and mutual harmony defining for historical Bukovina – part of central Europe through affiliation with German culture and civilization – perceptible later on, after 1930, together with the powerful rising of the Extreme Right represented by the Legionary movement, with the numerous supporters in historical Bukovina. Initiation and excellent functioning at “Carol II” University in Cernauti – founded at 4th of October 1875 under the name of “Franz Joseph” until 1918 – of academic societies for students belonging to national minorities until 1938, the collaborative and respectful relationships cultivated between students during various manifestations have transformed the University in an authentically Heidelberg of Bukovina in Romania. After 1918 together with the embracement of the Romanian language as the state officials – Romanian, German, Polish and Ukrainian were officially acknowledged between 1867 – 1918 in Bukovina – there occurred an administrative, educational, confessional, cultural Romanization in spirit of the expectations of the Romanian state, adapted to the National Liberal Party philosophy, the most powerful and organized political party governing between 1918 – 1928 and 1934 – 1937. The Romanization process – of which historians in the communist period avoid writing – wanted, first and foremost, to assure the preponderance of the Romanians in the annexed province, among which Bukovina, this being an unusual situation. In Bukovina, the most important national minority is represented by the Ukrainians , 38,4% in comparison with the Romanians which held 34,8%, but less than other ethnic groups together; it was only after 1930 that Romanians became majoritary in Bukovina. Under these circumstances, it was required a lot of ability, diplomacy, knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon represented by the historical Bukovina, considering that only the Polish and the Germans accepted the formula of the unconditioned union of Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom that took place on 15/28th November 1918. From a certain view, the integration and the junction of the Bukovina to the reality of the Old Kingdom depended on the dispute between Iancu Flondor and Ion Nistor, the most important personalities during the union of Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom. Belonging to Bukovina by origin, formation, destiny, career – and more by vocation in the case of Iancu Flondor – the two politicians assumed the organization of the events that lead to the Union of Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom, at first they placed themselves in the middle of problems – in the case of Iancu Flondor assuming great risks – or penetrating afterwards- with the support of Bucharest in the case of Ion Nistor . When the Romanian army entered the provinces ,the organization of the National Romanian Council and of the Constituent Assembly ,had already pacified in a determining way the meeting of the General Congress of the Nationalities from Cernauti (15/28 November 1918). The following political games that were won – as we know – by Ion Nistor with the important support of the National Liberal Party (The Democratic Party of the Union merged with the National Liberal Party in a specific register of the Romanian political scene) demonstrated the equalizing and centralizing position of Bucharest in comparison with the new provinces which held a rather marginal status– especially in case of Bukovina. Iancu Flondor whose opening and understanding of the needs and interests of a multi-ethnic and pluri-confessional province was well-known exited the political scene of Bukovina, disappointed by the petty politics and the backstage games. Previously ,on 12 April 1919 as part of an organized assembly at Cernauti he tried a debate with the national minorities concerning the future of Bukovina. Ion Nistor continued in a direct or indirect way to participate at the building of the future of Bukovina by actually assisting at its crush as a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement on August 23, 1939 and which was materialized on June 28, 1940 when the Soviet Union annexed the Northern part of Bukovina and the Herta region to Basarabia. The construction from Versailles proved to be too fragile to assure the European security when Adolf Hitler’s Germany and I.V.Stalin’s Sovietic Union reached an agreement. Bukovina did not benefit from a proper industrial and economical modernization, the province maintaining its

prevailing agriculture-based economy ; the reorientation of relationships and commercials changes after 1918, even in the inter-war period did not bring benefits or concrete advantages. The success of the integrative phenomena depended to a great extent on the development of an economically viable atmosphere, the growth of the degree of the civic conscience development in comparison with the expectations and the needs of an European state ,with the important obligations assumed in the internal and external plan regarding the national minorities. The way in which the Romanian authorities assured the legal frame for the development of each ethnic group reflected the level of maturation of the Romanian society as well as the level, the limits and the imperfections of the democratic political regime. Yet, culturally speaking, the inter-war period meant a remarkable progress for Cernauti and the entire Bukovina, as well as for the entire Romanian space, marked by the plenary affirmation of some poets, writers, painters, scientists, artists of universal vocation, of various ethnic origins and different religion, whose destiny blends directly with the one of the province. The German language continued to be used after 1918 - being used with honour and ostentation by all of Bukovina`s citizens – in the high class society (especially among the Jewish – who, after 1930, in sign of protest against anti-Semite manifestations started to use more the Yiddish). The German language represented a sign of spirituality for the center of Europe. The existence of cultural, scientific, sportive, artistic societies, belonging to national minorities from Bukovina, the perpetuation of the traditions and of the German values, indicate the maintenance of the multi-ethnicity and of the pluriconfessional atmosphere specific to Bukovina`s territory. This maintenance was completed with the apparition of newspapers in the languages of all national minorities ,the apparition of many companies, workshops and enterprises, having as owners people of different ethnic extraction. In addition, during the poll, the political groups and parties belonging to the national minorities formed different alliances and political conventions with the Romanian parties, their purpose being the success of the elections and the implementation of an electoral programme designed to satisfy their own identity desires. These types of agreements were constantly being found at the local level, too. The percentage of national minorities in a specific location had a major contribution to its victory, beyond the defects of the inter-war Romanian democracy. In Cernauti, where the Jewish had the majority during the inter-war period, each party had to close an agreement with the mosaic community of the town, if they wanted the absolute power. The degradation of Bukovina`s tolerant atmosphere indicated the separation of the Romanian Kingdom – a part of Versaillese Europe. The development of anti-Semitism among the Bukovina`s citizens, the increase of the Legionary Movement influence, the inefficient and late reaction of the authorities in many cases, the demagogic of the political class, the promotion of a political speech which requires the introduction of numerous clauses, numerus valachicus, numerus nullus, by the political leaders of some extreme right parties (Al.C. Cuza, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu etc.), the strong influence of the national socialist ideology among the Germans from Bukovina, Transylvania and Banat, all represented the obvious reasons of Bukovina`s collapse. The sudden promotion of the centralism in almost all aspects of life - administrative, economical, educational, political – appointing in administrative positions persons coming from the Old Kingdom – most of the time lacking the necessary personal qualities – to the disadvantage of the local elite (irrespective of their ethnic origin) clearly affected the evolution of Bukovina during the interwar period. Even if the National Liberal Government between 1918-1928 implemented the agrarian reform in 1921, it proved not to be preoccupied by effectively supporting the agriculture. This way the peasants –left without governmental support-were unable to cope with the situations, without any experience and knowledge and inefficient in managing the land received from the big land owners. The National Liberal Governments sustained the unjustified growth of the salaries for the employees working for the state, cultivating the political clientage but developing on the other hand a discourse of profound European inspiration about the rights of the national minorities, placing itself inside an obvious paradox through the inside promotion of an economical nationalism expressed by the thesis “Through ourselves!”. As a reply to this matter, the ascension of The National Rural Party led by Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache aimed to be a genuine alternative to the

government of Great Romania through program, doctrine and effective political action, promising the removal of the political clientage, the demagogic, the corruption existing in the state's system and also of the politicianism by establishing a new order. Concerning the national minorities' rights, the program of the National Rural Party was far too generous and realistic, trying in essence to apply the contents of The Declaration from Alba-Iulia from the 1st of December 1918, representing the articulation of the coordinates of a modern European state. Practically, despite of the growth in the number of schools teaching in the languages of national minorities, of the modification of the Bacalaureat law, of the growth in the local autonomy-so necessary, in fact- the rural government did not manage to overcome the effects of the economic crises between 1929-1933, rapidly losing the trust of the constituency. The return of the National Liberal Party between 1934 and 1937, during the government of Gheorghe Tatarasu who was the leader of the young liberals, but also a close friend of King Carol the Second meant, on the grounds of an economic growth without precedent in the history of Romania which reached its peak in 1938, the cancellation of the measures and regulations introduced by the National Rural Party and the implementation of the neo-liberal program. Lately, the division of the Romanian political spectrum, characterized by the growing role of the Legionary Movement in the internal political life determined for the first time in the interwar history of Romania the loss of the elections by the National Liberal Party. NLP obtained an electoral score of 35,92%, below the limit of 40 % which would have allowed it to form the government, NRP -20,4%, The Party Everything for the Country 15,58%, The Christian National Party led by Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza -9,15%, in December 1937, under the circumstances in which the legislation allowed the party having the power to organize these elections fully using the whole administrative system found at their orders. The apparition of different political tendencies of the extreme right- Legionary Movement – and of the extreme left –the communism –The Communist Party from Romania- complicated and put in jeopardy the frailty of the democratic political regime of the interwar Romania. This favored the evolution of the monarchic authoritative regime introduced by King Carol the second (10.02.1938-06.09.1940) and later the introduction of the National Legionary State (06.09.1940-27.02.1941) followed by the military regime of Marshall Ion Antonescu (27.02.1941-23.08.1944).

Despite the acknowledgement of some personalities on the cultural and spiritual, artistical or literal level, the atmosphere from Central Europe which evolved in the Bukovinean space started to decay constantly, in the broader context of a general European phenomenon which favored the ascension of the right extremism. In the Bukovina , the appearance of the right extremist movement, because the left extremist movement was quite faint, most probably had internal restrictions, social, psychological, economic, religious motivations, a lot of peasants took part in the legionary movement (an atypical phenomenon), being attracted by the promises, the demagogic, the speech, the actions and the charisma of their leaders. The Jews had, indisputably, the most tragic destiny of all the national minorities in historic Bukovina, ending with “the Shoah” or “the Holocaust”, the darkest moment of the human species which made 6 million victims. The other national minorities in Bukovina had a tragical destiny, which ended up in the Siberian Gulags or in the communist prisons (along with the Romanian historian Ion Nistor). The movements of the populations (Germans in 1940, Hungarians in 1941, Polish in 1947) have ended the multicultural actions in historical Bukovina, on the 10th of February 1947, being practically divided between Romania and the Soviet Union, as a result of the Peace Treaty of Paris (as a result of which historical right?). The integrative efforts of the Romanian authorities, the appeal of a mobilizing speech of a nationalist manner used as an integrative argument, existing in the programs and texts of the many parties and political formations, the accentuation of the anti-Semitic manifestations, the decay of the interethnic relations and afterwards the annexation of the northern part of Bukovina (28th of june, 1940), along with Basarabia and the Herta province have set the basis of a state with a unique history, culture and civilization called Bukovina.

Translated by Dana Postolachi

