

ON THE SYMBOLISM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY. THE FLAGS OF CLUJ AT THE END OF WORLD WAR I (1918)

Abstract: This article aims to analyse the significance of flags in Cluj at an exceptional historical moment represented the end of Austro-Hungarian dualism and the integration of the Claudiopolitan city in Greater Romania at the end of World War I. For the Transylvanian Romanians, the history of 1918 contained an exceptional deployment of events, which culminated in Romania's unification with the provinces ruled by Austria-Hungary theretofore. The events of this period had a public manifestation that fully recorded the phenomenon of sacrality transfer from the traditional religious universe into the national political sphere. The sacralisation of concepts, the oath of allegiance to the Romanian nation and its representative bodies, the hoisting of Romanian flags in public places or the display of the Romanian national colours in any other form (on the uniforms worn by the national guards), the religious services for the consecration of the national flag - all these were elements and moments of national celebration that re-enacted, partially at least, the national celebration scenario of the 1848 Revolution. In Cluj and Alba Iulia, at Vidra and Sighetul Marmăției, Romanian tri-colour flags were the signs of a new reality, a concrete political expression of the principle of national self-determination, formulated at the end of World War I by the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who was dubbed by the Romanians as "the great apostle of the subjugated peoples."

Keywords: Cluj, Transylvania, Austria-Hungary, national symbol, flag

The hoisting of flags - national symbols with such a tremendous impact - has a particular political significance in times of peace or so-called normalcy, but in times of crisis or at historical watersheds, the political, ideological and, above all, the identitarian symbolism of flags increases in scale and scope. Representing, under ordinary circumstances, the national identity of a community or of an established authority, the civil and military structures or institutions of a state, flags were, at the end of World War I, fundamentally emblematic of the territorial and political mutations that had afflicted the entire European continent. This was also the case in Cluj, as well as in the whole of Transylvania during the year 1918: the hoisting of a flag essentially signified change. There were coats of arms and flags that left the stage together with the political regime they had represented, and there were emerging flags that signalled the coming of a new world, which was about to be born from the ruins of the war.

My interest in this theme was occasioned by an immediately perceptible detail in the recent history of the city by the Someș River, namely the obsessive presence of the three Romanian national colours - red, yellow and blue - in the cityscape of Cluj during the three terms of the nationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar (1992-2004). Throughout these 12 years, the mayor abused the national symbols, riddling the city with an excessive number of flags; in the last years, he also had the three colours displayed on garbage bins and on the benches in the city's parks. This was a case of excessively instrumentalising the national symbols and of deliberately manipulating the tricolour and other elements of historical and identitarian import for the Romanians,

which were emblematic gestures for the political style adopted by Funar and the party he led for a while (the Romanian National Unity Party - PUNR). His political strategy ultimately had a deleterious impact on the national symbols, voiding them of meaning and discrediting them in the public perception of - first and foremost - the Romanians from Cluj. Starting therefore from the omnipresence of the Romanian flags in the urban landscape of Cluj during that period, I want to investigate their significance in the history of the city and its surrounding region. To this end, I have selected an exceptional historical moment: the end of Austro-Hungarian Dualism and the integration of the Claudiopolitan city in Greater Romania in the aftermath of World War I.

In the modern period, flags have an immediate connotation of identity for a national community, being the bearers of representative symbols. A flag symbolically encapsulates the benchmarks that define a community and is a crucial element in outlining both the specificity of selfhood and the identity of "otherness." Flags are genuine "objects of worship" for nationalism, the new "religion" of modernity, since the transfer of sacrality from the religious ceremonial traditionally administered by the Church onto the people-nation is accomplished with their help and in their presence.¹ While the subject of flags in Romanian history has indeed been approached from a heraldic perspective,² their ideological and identitarian significance has not been the object of any systematic research so far.

Cluj is situated in a region that has distinguished itself in the modern period through its multiethnic and multicultural make-up and its multifarious use of the national symbols. Beginning primarily with the 1848 Revolution, Transylvania has displayed an array of competing national symbols, which has been utterly consistent with the nature of the peaceful or conflicting relations among the ethnic groups in this space. During the period spanning from the 1848 Revolution to World War I, it was obvious that the process of politicising the national symbols was well underway, in the sense that the symbolism of the "national colours" became representative of the local communities in the area, to the extent that these had grown to be instruments of political discourse and of political-national ideologies.

For the peoples of Transylvania, the first time the national symbols illustrated their capacity and force as conveyers of political values was during the 1848-1849 Revolution. In those turbulent years, displaying the flag clearly signified the avowal of identity benchmarks and assumed political options or, in other words, the sense of belonging to one camp or the other, especially after the events ushered in the insurrectionary stage from the autumn of 1849. Thus, the black-yellow colours ("schwarz-gelb") represented, together with the two-headed eagle, the official symbol of imperial Habsburg power, which was generally valid for all of Transylvania and for the

¹ See, in this sense, Mona Ozouf's demonstration in *La fête révolutionnaire 1789-1799*, Paris, 1976, pp. 317-340.

² P. V. Năsturel, *Steagul, stema română, însemnele domnești, trofee*, Bucharest, 1903; Anton Velcu, "Steagurile României," in *Enciclopedia României*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1938, pp. 73-82; Ema Popescu and Constantin Căzănișteanu, "Cu privire la cele mai vechi drapele tricolore ale oștirilor din Țara Românească," in *Revista Muzeelor, Seria Muzee*, II, 1969, no. 2, pp. 173-175. For more general approaches, see: Dan Cernavodeanu, *Știința și arta heraldică în România*, Bucharest, 1977; Maria Dogaru, *Heraldica României*, Bucharest, 1994.

entire empire. Ever since the spring of 1848, the removal of the “imperial eagle” from the buildings and from the public space and its replacement with the Hungarian colours - red, white and green - had signalled a clear expression of adhesion and consent to the union between Transylvania and Hungary. In his pamphlet published in 1848, the Saxon Daniel Roth captured very well the competitive relationship between these symbols, which reflected major political changes: “the imperial eagle is being knocked down from all the public buildings and in its place the red-white-green idol of the Hungarians is being hoisted.”³ In fact, throughout the 1848 Revolution, the display of colours revealed the competitive and conflictual relations between the national ideologies of the warring camps, as well as the course of the hostilities. The Romanians also made themselves visible, initially through the blue and white colours, while eventually, towards the middle of May 1848, the colours of the Romanian flag became defined as red, white and blue.⁴ During the years of the 1848 Revolution, the principle underlying the composition of the Romanian flag was based on distinguishing its colours from those of the Hungarian flag - red, white and green. In 1848, there were also proposals for associating the colours red, yellow and blue in the Transylvanian Romanians’ flag so that it would be identical with that of their conationals in Wallachia and Moldova. Despite its significance for the Romanian national ideology, opting for identical flag colours on both sides of the Carpathians would have represented a vulnerable solution for the Romanians in Transylvania, who risked being accused thus of separatism (“Daco-Romanianism”) and of attempts to become united with their conationals from the extra-Carpathian area. During these years of revolution, there were rumours that the Romanians had allegedly carried Russian flags to the Grand National Assembly on the Liberty Plain in Blaj, between 3-5 May 1848, a confusion that the Hungarian circles encouraged, insisting on the flag colours the Romanians had displayed - red, white, blue - which, in actual fact, coincided with the colours of Revolutionary France.⁵

The 1848 Revolution also meant, for the Transylvanian Romanians at least, the local celebration of the national revolutionary holiday. Having its origins and archetypal model in the 1789 French Revolution, the national holiday was celebrated in exemplary manner in the Romanians’ Grand National Assembly from Blaj during the 1848 Revolution, between 3-5 May. Defined as the place where the blueprint of a new society and of an ideal world was conceived,⁶ the revolutionary holiday meant - in Blaj and elsewhere in Transylvania, similar to the Federation Holiday held in Paris on 14 July 1790 - the place where membership in the Romanian national community was solemnly celebrated and where the transfer of sacrality to the people-nation occurred. Far from being just a silent witness, the flag was the most important symbol in observing the national holiday during the revolution, a genuine icon endorsing the sacred idea of the nation. This is clearly indicated by the local revolutionary holidays organised in different

³ Apud Gelu Neamțu, “Simboluri naționale în timpul revoluției de la 1848 din Transilvania,” in Nicolae Bocșan et al. (eds.), *D. Prodan. Puterea modelului*, Cluj-Napoca, 1995, p. 173.

⁴ Aurelia Bunea, “Steagul poporului român din Transilvania în revoluția din anii 1848-1849,” in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj*, XII, 1969, pp. 37-51.

⁵ See Gelu Neamțu’s excellent reconstitution in *ibidem*, pp. 181-189.

⁶ Michele Vovelle, *La Mentalité révolutionnaire: société et mentalités sous la Révolution française*, Paris, 1986, p. 157.

Romanian communities from the villages of Transylvania, as local re-enactments of the Grand National Assembly on the Liberty Plain in Blaj, which included, in their solemn part, a moment when the consecration of the national flag was carried out.⁷ This part of utmost sacredness, in which the national flag was consecrated, imposed the standard scenario for celebrating the national holiday, which was also replicated at the level of the Romanian community in Transylvania in 1918.

The years of the revolution, 1848-1849, inaugurated therefore the modern, "national" convention of the flag with the Transylvanian Romanians. During the revolution, the imperial colours, black and yellow, also had a precise political significance for the Romanians, to the extent that in their self-image about their participation in the events, the Romanians considered themselves to be allies of the "emperor" and co-belligerents of the imperial troops, especially after the revolution entered, in Transylvania, the stage of a civil war, which lasted from the autumn of 1848 until August 1849.⁸ The second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were by no means irrelevant as regards the history of the national Romanian symbols in Transylvania, even though their overt display was not permitted by the political regimes, by Dualism in particular (1867-1918). According to the consecrated 1848 model, the national colours served, for the Romanians too, as symbolic elements in representing their national identity and ethnically delineating themselves from the other communities in the region, in relation to whom their identitarian difference was marked symbolically, through the use of specific colours. Between the 1848 Revolution and World War I, there were several occasions when the Romanians in the Habsburg and, after 1867, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy used the national colours as a central symbol of identity. Moments such as the celebration of the Blaj assembly of 3-5 May 1848, or the years of maximum political activation in the Romanian community, coeval with the Memorandum Movement (1892-1894), witnessed the expressive force of the national symbols, albeit not always directly and explicitly, since the hoisting of the Romanian flag was obviously prohibited and regarded as a political offence by the Dualist regime. Research in the field of ethnography and popular culture has revealed the existence of indirect means of displaying the three national colours - red, yellow and blue - on interior fabrics and on the less visible parts of the Transylvanian Romanian peasants' festive garments, from the late nineteenth century until World War I.⁹ The presence of the national flag colours disseminated in the decorations and colour palette of folk art highlights the level of political activation registered in the Romanian community from Transylvania during the last decades of the Dualist period.

⁷ *Memorialistica revoluției de la 1848 în Transilvania*, edited by Nicolae Boșan and Valeriu Leu, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, pp. 66-68; Ion Cârja, "Sacru și profanul în sensibilitatea colectivă românească la 1848-1849," in Camil Mureșanu, Nicolae Boșan, and Ioan Bolovan, *Revoluția de la 1848 în Europa Centrală. Perspectivă istorică și istoriografică*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, pp. 427-434.

⁸ On the significance of the terms "revolution" and "revolutionary" for the Transylvanian Romanians during the years 1848-1849, see Nicolae Boșan and Valeriu Leu, *Revoluția de la 1848 din Transilvania în memorialistică*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, pp. 7-88.

⁹ See, in this sense, Rodica Herlo and Aurel Sasu, "Tricolorul în colecția de artă populară a Muzeului Județean Arad," in *Ziridava*, VIII, 1977, pp. 475-481.

1918, which was an exceptional year for the Romanians everywhere from a national point of view, brought about the political unification of all the historical Romanian provinces into a single state, Greater Romania, completing, thus, the formation process of the modern Romanian national state. In this crucial year, 1918, the city of Cluj played a highly important role, this century-old capital of Transylvania serving as the background of key events for accomplishing the union of this province with the Kingdom of Romania. The political and administrative capital of Transylvania prior to its incorporation into Hungary at the onset of Dualism (1867), as well as an important cultural centre, with a university founded here in 1872, Cluj played a significant role in the context of the province's urban life both before and after World War I. From a demographic perspective, the city's population amounted - shortly after World War I, in 1920 - to about 83.000 inhabitants, 40.000 of whom were Hungarians (50%), 28.500 were Romanians (33%) and 10.000 were Jews (12%), while the first general census of the interwar period, organised in 1930, recorded a total of 106.245 inhabitants.¹⁰ Between the end of the war and the integration of Transylvania into the structures of the reunited Romanian state, Cluj had a noteworthy impact on everything that the Romanian movement for accomplishing the Union of 1 December 1918 entailed. Even though in 1918 the main decision-making pole of power for the Romanian action was in Arad, where the headquarters of the Central Romanian National Council (CNRC) had been established as a coordinating body of the movement for all the Romanian territories that had belonged to Hungary (Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Maramureş), a part of the decision-making factors involved in the movement for the unification of Romania were also concentrated in Cluj. Thus, on 3 November 1918, the Romanian National Senate of Transylvania, presided over by Amos Frâncu, was established in Cluj as a structure that partly took over coordinating the preparations for the union in this part of Transylvania and that was subordinated to the CNRC in Arad.¹¹

For Cluj, as well as for entire Transylvania, the change of statal framework and political regime from the end of World War I naturally entailed the replacement of the symbols of identity, especially of the coats of arms and flags. The national logic underlying these symbols and the competitive-conflictual relationship between the Transylvanian Romanians and the Hungarians meant that the national colours representative of one ethnic group would exclude those of the opposite ethnicity in the city by the Someş River.

The actual course of events that took place in Cluj was somewhat typical, in terms of their scenario, of the entire series of political changes and of the transformations the symbols underwent in the regions that were separated from Austria-Hungary at the end of World War I and became united with the successor states. In Cluj, the "revolution" broke out on 1 November 1918, as noted by Iulian Pop, who was to become the first Romanian mayor of the city; on the same day, orders were given to the troops from the city garrison to take an oath of loyalty to the Hungarian Republic. The day of 3 November was set as the date for taking the oath; however, on the eve of that date, the Romanian officers of the 63rd and 21st Regiments, stationed in Cluj,

¹⁰ Ştefan Pascu (ed.), *Istoria Clujului*, Cluj, 1974, pp. 384-385.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 379-381.

presented themselves, together with Amos Frâncu and Emil Hațieganu, as representatives of the Romanian civilian population, before General Siegler, the supreme military commander of Transylvania, and informed him that the Romanians in Cluj - both military and civilian - would not take this oath before a general consultation of the Romanian people. They also said that by that time, the Romanian national guards, among others, would be organised with a view to defending order, safety and property. The planned submission of the oath was postponed, indeed, throughout Transylvania and remained deferred *sine die*, given the well-known turn of events. The Romanians managed to set up a national guard consisting of almost 3.000 people, enrolling the former soldiers, who substantially contributed to the maintenance of order and to the ensuing course of events.¹²

3 November 1918 was a day of reference for the activation and organisation of the Romanian community in Cluj. The Romanian National Senate of Transylvania, comprising 100 members, was now established, as a body of the CNRC in Arad. To avoid the collision of duties with the CNRC, the Senate from Cluj turned, after the matter was clarified, into a national council for the city and county of Cluj. On the day of its formation, 3 November, the Senate from Cluj promulgated a manifesto to the Romanians, whereby it urged them to peace, calmness and obedience to the Romanian representative bodies.¹³ During the following period, the fast-moving events culminated in the Romanian takeover of the city's administration. Thus, the Romanian National Guard from Cluj ensured the safe departure of the 39 delegates nominated for participation in the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia, on 1 December 1918, which was to decide the union of Transylvania with Romania. On 24 December 1918, the Romanian Army entered Cluj: the first units that arrived in the city belonged to the 7th Division of the Romanian army, led by General Constantin Neculcea. Eight days later, the French General Henri Mathias Berthelot was received in Cluj, and on 19 January 1919, the Romanian intellectuals and national guards took over, with the help of the Romanian Army, the city's administration.¹⁴ This course of events was highly symbolically charged, representing, for the Romanians, the end point of the long-awaited and dreamed-of fulfilment of the national ideal; thus, the entire unfolding of events was accompanied by its own symbols, which marked the imposition of the new political and administrative realities, eventually inaugurating a new historical era for the city of Cluj.

For the Romanians in Transylvania, the year 1918 had a strong impact - given the changes it brought forth - on the collective sensibility of the entire Romanian community: the time of "not yet!" had practically been replaced with the time of "at long last!" In other words, after the Dualist regime, which had largely been hostile to the political assertion of the Transylvanian Romanians, it was now time for decisive changes to mark the achievement of the national ideals. Since the time of deferrals had been replaced, in the Romanian collective sensibility, with the time of accomplishments, the series of events from this period was frequently associated with sacrality. At the

¹² Cf. Octavian Buzea, *Clujul: 1919-1939*, Cluj, 1939, pp. 55-56.

¹³ Ion Popescu-Puțuri and Ștefan Pascu (eds.), *1918 la români. Documentele Unirii. Unirea Transilvaniei cu România 1 decembrie 1918*, vol. VII, Bucharest, 1989, p. 81 (Hereinafter cited as: *1918 la români*).

¹⁴ O. Buzea, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-62.

level of discourse and of the highly symbolic gestures, there occurred a powerful transfer of sacrality, which served to legitimise the new transformations that were favourable to the Romanians. The oaths of allegiance and the hoisting of the Romanian flags instead of the Hungarian colours symbolically marked this transfer of sacrality from the traditional religious domain into the political and national sphere that Mona Ozouf talks about, with reference to the French Revolution of 1789.

Thus, the oath - a solemn moment by which the transfer of sacrality was achieved - systematically marked the course of events from Cluj during the autumn of 1918. As seen above, the Romanians in the city refused to take the required oath of allegiance to the Hungarian Republic on 3 November; later, on 19 January 1919, the last Hungarian mayor of the city, Gustav Haller, adopted the same attitude when he refused to swear allegiance to the Romanian king and the Dirigent Council, invoking the loyalty to the government in Budapest that the oath he had previously taken bound him to. The manifesto addressed to the Romanians by the National Senate from Cluj, on 3 November 1918, the day of its establishment, resorted to concepts it consistently justified with the argument of sacrality: for instance, the Romanians' National Assembly that was to be convened would complete "the holy work" for the Romanian language, law and land, "one and undivided like the Holy Trinity"; the Romanians were demanded to show obedience to the national council "in the name of God, the guardian of our national freedom"; finally, the document ended with "Long live national freedom! Amen and May God help us!"¹⁵

The entry of the city under Romanian administration was marked, at the level of symbolic insignia, by the submission of the oath at various moments and by the replacement of the old state and national symbols with those of the new regime. Thus, one of the first resolutions made by the Romanian National Senate of Transylvania in Cluj, concerning the Romanians' political and military organisation, stipulated that troops should be organised "with Romanian soldiers and officers, under the Romanian tricolour flag and with Romanian as the language of command"; given the lack of a uniform, the national and the civilian guards would have to wear "civil garments with a Romanian tricolour scarf on the left arm."¹⁶ The daily Order no. 1 of the "Romanian Commissioner General of Transylvania" from 5 November 1918 also referred to the organisation of the Romanian troops, mentioning that the existing and future troops should have "Romanian as the language of command, under the Romanian national tricolour flag, sworn in to the cause of national freedom"; the same text provided that the Romanian troops should take the "oath under the national tricolour" before the CNR and the Romanian National Senate, as representatives of the Romanian nation in Transylvania."¹⁷ The Senate from Cluj frequently insisted, through its circulars and directives, on the need for the Romanian troops that would be formed in Transylvania to have Romanian as the language of command and to pledge allegiance to the authorities of the Romanian nation - the CNRC and the Romanian National Senate - under the

¹⁵ *1918 la români*, vol. VII, p. 81.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 71, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

Romanian tricolour; such was, for instance, the letter of 7 November 1918¹⁸ and Emil Dandea's report on the organisation of the Apuseni Mountains, from 20 November.¹⁹

The year 1918 evinced an obvious similarity with the revolutionary year 1848 as regards the scenario for organising and conducting the national holiday. Thus, like in 1848, when the Blaj national holiday of 3-5 May was resumed and reiterated by the Romanians in many parts of Transylvania, in the form of local national holidays dedicated mostly to paying homage to freedom and the abolition of serfdom, in 1918 the model national assembly of the Romanians was that of Alba Iulia, from 1 December: the Romanian communities later organised small national holidays, at the local level, which celebrated the end of the Dualist period and the power takeover by the Romanian councils and national guards. In the case of Cluj, the first local national holiday of this type was the above-mentioned holiday of 3 November 1918, when the Romanian National Senate of Transylvania was constituted. The entrance of several Romanian army units in Cluj, on 24 December 1918, was another moment of Romanian national triumph that displayed the typical features of a national holiday. In the operations log of the 7th Division, the entry referring to this day is as follows: "On their entrance into Cluj, our troops were greeted with utmost enthusiasm. The Romanian population of this and the neighbouring localities took part in this manifestation of joy in extraordinarily high numbers. The Cluj that the Hungarians had turned into a strong centre of Magyarisation amidst the Romanian population living in the surrounding region had terminated its mission. The Romanian tricolour proudly fluttered on the Hungarian chauvinistic institutions, as the symbol of the right to life not only of the Romanian people, but of all the nations whose life and fortune the folds of this majestic tricolour and the Romanian soldier's bayonet were going to protect henceforth."²⁰ In the historical registry of another Romanian military unit that participated in the takeover of Cluj in those days, the 15th Dorobanți Regiment, it was also recorded that on this occasion, the first Te-Deum was celebrated at the monument of King Matthias Corvinus, with the broad participation of the Romanian population.²¹ The image of 24 December being celebrated as a Romanian national holiday in Cluj is also confirmed by a Hungarian source, namely the report submitted by Captain Botka from Cluj to the Ministry of War in Budapest, dated the same day: "the Romanians have now occupied Cluj and organised a great feast in the main square. [...] The Romanian inhabitants of the surrounding villages have marched with flags and greeted the troops with frantic enthusiasm."²² The information from that time proves the existence of certain crucial moments that marked the events of the autumn of 1918, whereby power was transferred from the Hungarians to the Romanians in Cluj. In terms of the scenario, evolution and discourse characterising these moments, they were fully compliant with the model of the local national holidays.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 434-436.

²⁰ Apud O. Buzea, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

²² Ion Ardeleanu et alii, *1918 la români. Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român. Documente externe 1916-1918*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1983, p. 1279.

The political-national festive nature of the local national holidays which symbolically marked, in 1918, the political-administrative inclusion of Transylvania in the new statal framework evinced essentially the same scenario in most of the towns and villages in the region. I shall mention a few more examples, some located in the proximity of Cluj and within the range of action of the National Senate established here on 3 November. Thus, a notice issued by the National Committee of Alba Iulia on 7 November 1918 prescribed the insignia of the Romanian National Guard that was about to be set up: "The sign of the guard shall be a white armband around the left arm and the tricolour shall be worn by every guardsman on his cap."²³ The oath of the National Guard from Săliște, on 21 November 1918, grounded the national concepts on religious values, just like in 1848, using a relevant expression for the transfer of sacrality: "the holiness of the national flag."²⁴ At Câmpeni, the protocol taken on the establishment of the local Romanian National Council on 8 November 1918 recorded that: "After the election of the committee, those present take the official oath on the most h[oly] cross, raising three fingers of the left hand and placing the right hand over the heart; then, with the h[oly] cross and the three-coloured banner leading the way, they sing the national anthem "Awaken Thee, Romanian!" and "Union Is Written on Our Flag" and march around the square, and then the banner is carried and hoisted on the building of the communal house."²⁵ The account concerning the founding of the Romanian National Council in Comloșul Bănățean, entitled *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism*, presents a triad in which traditional religious elements are invoked with a view to sacralising the national elements: one Lord - the Romanian National Party, one faith - the unification of all the Romanians, one baptism - from the Dniester to the Tisza,²⁶ while in the resolution adopted by the constituting assembly of the Romanian National Council on 14 November in the locality Mihai Viteazu, the U.S. President Wilson was called "the great apostle and fighter for the liberation of the subjugated peoples."²⁷

One of the amplest accounts presenting the national holiday atmosphere was the above-cited report submitted by Emil Dandea on 20 November 1918, concerning the state of mind of the inhabitants from the Apuseni Mountains. Dandea led a delegation of the National Senate from Cluj with the mission to pacify the area, which was rumoured to be a hotbed of turbulence and popular uprisings. After passing through Turda, the team travelled along the Arieș Valley, reaching Abrud, Câmpeni, and then going all the way to Vidra, the village of Avram Iancu, the leader of the *Moți* in 1848. In this extremely picturesque mountain village, Dandea's arrival occasioned a popular assembly that fully and completely contained the scenario ingredients of a revolutionary holiday. Thus, on 12 November, the 2.000 people who had gathered at Avram Iancu's home listened first to a few speeches delivered by the Father Arieșan from Câmpeni, followed by Emil Dandea as the envoy of the National Senate from Cluj; then they ovated the Romanian National Council, Romania's Allied European Powers, and

²³ *1918 la români*, vol. VII, p. 146.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 340.

Wilson; all those present took an oath of fidelity to the Romanian National Council; and then the consecration of the national flag was celebrated by the four priests from Vidra.²⁸

For the Transylvanian Romanians, the history of the year 1918 represented an exceptional course of events that led to the unification between the provinces previously ruled by Austria-Hungary and Romania. The events of this period had a public appearance that fully reflected the phenomenon of sacrality expanding from the traditional religious universe into the national political sphere. The sacralisation of the concepts, the oath of allegiance to the Romanian nation and its representative bodies, the hoisting of the Romanian flags in public places or the display of the Romanian national colours in other forms (the uniforms worn by the national guards), the religious services for the consecration of the national flag: all these represented national holiday elements and moments of celebration that re-enacted, at least partly, the national holiday scenario from the time of the 1848 Revolution. In Cluj, as well as in Alba Iulia, Vidra or Sighetul Marmăției, the Romanian tricolour flags were the signs of a new reality, a concrete political expression of the principle of the peoples' right to self-determination, which was formulated at the end of World War I by the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who was dubbed by the Romanians the "great apostle of the subjugated peoples."

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 434-436.