

# ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND COLLECTIVE MENTALITY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR. CASE STUDY: YEAR 1918

PETRE DIN\*

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## ASPECTE ALE VIEȚII COTIDIENE ȘI ALE MENTALITĂȚII COLECTIVE DIN TIMPUL PRIMULUI RĂZBOI MONDIAL. STUDIU DE CAZ: ANUL 1918

**ABSTRACT:** 1918 meant the total concentration of resources for the armaments production, the systematic exploitation of occupied territories, the streamlining of food resources, the catastrophic increasing of the mortality rate of young men in the Warring States, the galloping rise of inflation and the dramatic deterioration of living conditions in the states that formed the Central Powers, due to the naval blockade imposed by England.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed on March 3, 1918 and the Treaty of Bucharest signed on May 7, 1918 offered Germany the direct control of Romanian wheat and oil, thus helping to increase its morale. The ending of the war in the Eastern part allowed Ludendorff to transfer troops and arms to the Western Front, hoping to gain victory over the Franco-British ones until the massive involvement of the Americans in the war. Although the Germans were successful in the spring of 1918, the Franco-British armies' strength has not brought them the decisive victory. The involvement of the US troops on the Franco-British side, the counteroffensive of the Allies led by the General Foch, in conjunction with the call for the truce by the Bulgarian, Turkish and Austro-Hungarian troops, finally determined also the acceptance of the truce by Germany on 11 November 1918, this event signifying the end of the First World War.

**KEYWORDS:** Austro-Ungarian, collective mentality, Central Powers, November 1918, Germany

**REZUMAT:** Anul 1918 a însemnat concentrarea totală a resurselor pentru producția de armament, exploatarea sistematică a teritoriilor ocupate, raționalizarea resurselor de alimente, creșterea catastrofală a ratei mortalității la tinerii bărbați în statele beligerante, creșterea galopantă a inflației și deteriorarea dramatică a condițiilor de viață în statele ce alcătuiau Puterile Centrale, datorită blocadei navale impusă de Anglia.

Tratatul de la Brest-Litovsk semnat pe 3 martie 1918 și Tratatul de la București din 7 mai 1918 oferea Germaniei controlul direct asupra grâului și petrolului românesc, contribuind astfel la ridicarea moralului acesteia. Închierea războiului din est i-a permis lui Ludendorff să transfere trupe și armament spre Frontul de Vest sperând să obțină victoria asupra franco-englezilor până la implicarea masivă a americanilor în război. Chiar dacă germanii au obținut succese în primăvara anului 1918, rezistența armatelor franco-engeleze nu a adus acestora victoria decisivă. Implicarea trupelor americane de partea franco-englezilor, contraofensiva Aliaților conduși de generalul Foch, coroborat cu solicitarea armistițiului de către trupele bulgare, turcești și austro-ungare a determinat în final și acceptarea armistițiului de către Germania la 11 noiembrie 1918, acest eveniment semnificând sfârșitul Primului Război Mondial.

**CUVINTE CHEIE:** Austro-Ungaria, mentalitatea colectivă, Puterile Centrale, noiembrie 1918, Germania

Around 1900, as a reaction to positivist history, spiritual tendencies toward a "total" history that would include all aspects of human material and spiritual life made their presence felt. The new

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\* Mărșă Technological High School and „Gheorghe Lazăr” Academic High School Avrig; E-mail: petre\_din@yahoo.com

historiography gives a significant role to the facts of collective and individual psychology, historical interpretations focused on the actual man, his aspirations and mentalities. Sociological approach of the past, pertinent analysis of material structures, daily structures and spiritual representations have gradually shaped the history of collective mentalities. The main contributions to the development of the collective mentality history lie with the French School of “Annales”, founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. “Annales” Magazine School promoted a non-eventful history with concerns about representations, images, feelings, passions, habits and attitudes towards life and society<sup>1</sup>.

The First World War Analysis from collective mentalities point of view aims to highlight belligerents’ belief in victory, the urgent need to solve the conflict by conducting peace talks, the gradual dissolution of the Central Powers’ morals and the raise in hope for victory by the Entente States.

Russia’s abandon accompanied by Romania through the peace preliminaries in Buftea (March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1918), favored the movement by the German High Command of numerous troops from the Eastern Area to the Western Front. General Ludendorff hoped to win by July, when American troops were expected to play an important role in the war.<sup>2</sup>

During this time American Troops were headed to Europe, crossing the Atlantic Ocean. American young people enthusiastically joined the crusade of peace and freedom launched by President Wilson. The speech before the Congress suggested that the USA did not issue imperialistic ambitions like those of England and France, the purpose of their involvement in the conflict being that of human rights defenders. The speech of the American President determined a large number of Americans to join the army and the American, English and French flags have covered the boulevards of the great American cities<sup>3</sup>.

Starting with March 1918, 31.000 American soldiers bearly trained arrived to France for additional training in camps specially arranged for this purpose. In that area, there were also cafes, souvenir shops and cathouses to meet the needs of the Americans. A few days after the Germans launched the offensive on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1918, American troops were asked to serve in the French and British divisions. In this context, soldier Sam Ross informed his mother with details of this first military experience. “*We had only three people injured and they’d only had light wounds from the shrapnel, so you see that I was lucky, because others were injured harder. Claud and Quack have inhaled toxic gases, but now they are fine. They put their masks on time and the gas did not have a very big effect*”<sup>4</sup>.

Involvement of American troops raised the exhausted moral of French and English soldiers and gradually decreased the moral of German soldiers. The impact of the association between American troops and Anglo-French troops was the one described by writer Vera Brittain: “*I pushed ahead with the others to see with my own eyes how the United States actually entered the war, these soldiers as gods, so magnificent, so splendid, unlike no one else, compared with the tired soldiers with shaken nerves of the British Army*”<sup>5</sup>.

USA played an important role in the First World War as peacekeeper of the world, highlighted by President Wilson in January 1918 when he launched the program *Fourteen Points*. “*With the idealist emphasis on democracy, national self-determination, open diplomacy and war prevention, these ideas were not very welcomed by its war-exhausted allies who were expecting some rewards for their efforts*”<sup>6</sup>.

The speech of President Wilson on the peace terms is remarkable in the concept of Sextil Pușcariu, an Austro-Hungarian officer on the Italian front, both in content and form. The idealist professor from Washington desired that this peace should not consecrate the distinction between winning and defeated states. Peace should be respected and preserved by all states, through general disarmament. “*The sea is*

<sup>1</sup> Boia 1980, pp. 937–940; Nicoară, Nicoară 1996, pp. 40–41.

<sup>2</sup> Renouvin 2006, pp. 113–114.

<sup>3</sup> Brendon 2006, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 128.

*free for everyone, and everyone has a sea exit guaranteed by everyone else. The difference between large states with millions of soldiers and small states, eternally threatened to no longer exist. Every citizen should be allowed to choose the state he wants to belong to, and the new map of the world should be formed so that dominant and subjugated peoples no longer exist. Then there will be no likely conflicts, or, if they are, everyone will be against the one who wants the war. These ideas are too beautiful for them not to be utopian. The American President's speech contains also a very significant proposition: America is ready to initiate such a peace but is ready to impede with all its forces a peace that would be dictated by the winner"*<sup>7</sup>.

In January 1918, on the Italian front Austrian military were so hungry they had to identify the leftovers of meat degraded and full of worms for them to eat, meat that in the previous months was refused and buried. Hoping to get to food, wine and cigarettes supplies of Italians, they called for immediate offensive strikes to stop starvation<sup>8</sup>. Sextil Pușcariu details the state of mind of the Austro-Hungarian army at the beginning of 1918. *"Peace with Ukraine was received with skepticism, as all winning news in the latter time. The world no longer believes in a good turn. The ghost of hunger and general exhaustion is becoming more and more horrible. Only the hope to receive bread from Ukraine has given a revival to the crowd. But Entente, with the statement that war has to be continued, has made the clouds of care not to scatter, not even by the news that "peace broke the front". And so the war continues, and soon, with the first weeks of spring, new blood shots will unleash, the dead will have to get deeper into the ground to make room for those to be buried"*<sup>9</sup>.

Military failures, supply difficulties both on the front and for civilians illustrate the deception and dramatic state of mind of the Austro-Hungarian army. The number of prisoners, rebels in the army increased, as well as the number of cases of insubordination and of those who refuse to execute the orders. *"The fact is that in the last days, the Austro-Hungarian army had many cases of worrying rebellions, soldiers that no longer want to go to the front, and all, especially the officers, live with an eternal fear of revolts. The deserters are thousands in all country. The only thing is if the fatal end, submission of weapons, will follow us faster than in the Entente countries. So again: the one resisting the war one quarter of clock more than the other shall be the winner"*<sup>10</sup>.

The mess of Austria-Hungary is also manifested in Hungary, where the Prime Minister Sandor Wekerle (1892–1895), (1901–1910) and (1917–1918) has conducted a policy to combat the national struggle of Romanians, Slovenes and Croats in Hungary. The public sensitivity is increasingly disgusted by his policy, being considered outdated. *"In Hungary, Wekerle is still supported, the most cynical and screwed president of a council of ministers, allowing Tisza's whims more and more, even agreeing to her. Although every day, even in Hungary, reactions are more and more, the spirits are disgusted by the "strong hand" of this reactionary whose ideas are obviously outdated"*<sup>11</sup>.

In 1918, he brought to discussion the citizen's obligations on his political role and his ability to influence and attend the decision-making process. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba consider that an influential, active citizen, described by political theories is expected to obey the law. Politologists have argued that he has the additional obligation to obey precisely because of his participation to public life. If the individual thinks that the only goal to pursue is his personal and family advantage, then he is a parish priest and not a citizen<sup>12</sup>.

This theoretical approach frames also the statements of Sextil Pușcariu, discharged and named professor at the University in Cernăuți, statements that highlight the lack of horizons, the disorientation of the countrymen, but also the lack of scruples of the deputies who were more concerned with their

<sup>7</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> Brendon 2006, p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 278.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299.

<sup>12</sup> Almond, Verba 1996, pp. 144–145.

affairs and much less of the problems of the Romanians in the monarchy. *“The war did not open the eyes of many, almost all are intimidated and confused. Our deputies still deal with their own affairs or utopias, and I think their role is to please voters with a little favor! And what a nice role they could have when they could lead the fate of the Romanians in the entire monarchy from Vienna, when the new situation in the neighboring countries made new problems for us also and we should now more than ever be a healthy and conscious political orientation”*<sup>13</sup>.

On the West front, German General Erich Ludendorff launched the offensive on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918 at the junction point of the French armies with the English ones. For the British command the surprise was total and an English army was entirely destroyed. Never since 1914 had the situation been worse for Anglo-French allies. With great efforts the French army managed to stop the opponent’s offensive, but allies understood that in an effective war it was not possible to maintain duality of command on the Western front. Under these circumstances, General Foch was named the sole commander on the allied front, he being the right man in this stage of war<sup>14</sup>.

Confronted with the destructive noise of machine guns, explosions, loss of friends, lack of sleep, many military considered the death as an easier alternative to their own existence under these conditions. Sextil Pușcariu, in his view, characterized a soldier’s mentality by loss of compassion towards those fallen, and real mercy was addressed to survivors. This type of approach transformed those missing into heroes, for they have given up the instinct of conscience and reasoning of the mind and have accepted the supreme sacrifice. *“Mercy to those who die cannot feel it. And with those left behind? They do are merciful. And yet! They have the right to be proud to bring the ultimate sacrifice to this war, which is not your life, but the life of those you love. The moral power that makes thousands of superiors today throw themselves in the killing whirlwind, giving up their right to happiness, overcoming the instinct and the mind’s reasoning, willingly rising to the role of the millions of anonymous that dye for faith-their moral power must give the force necessary to those left behind to bear the loss”*<sup>15</sup>. The symbolism of this quote falls within the approaches of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, which mention that individuals who accept this set of perceptions and interpersonal values explain the inclination of their commitment in a cooperative behavior with political aspirations<sup>16</sup>.

Despite the fact that they had lost a lot in the first half of 1918, England and France organized a unified command structure, raised their moral by cooping the American troops and proved more professionalism in using military tactics. The massive introduction of tanks and their integration into the combat system consisting of artillery, infantry and aviation was the surprise element in the Allies’ counter-offensive, held near Amiens, starting with August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918. For Ludendorff this date was perceived as *“the blackest day for the German army”* and not because of the 9.6 km of lost territory, but for the *“16,000 prisoners very happy to be out of the battle”*. General Ludendorff considered the military guilty of this failure and ordered that the deserters be executed in an emergency procedure<sup>17</sup>. *“This time, Germany lost any hope of victory. In a memo addressed to his father, the heir prince of Prussia declared that there is a need of negotiation because the German forces are in an obvious numerical inferiority, while the forces of the enemy are constantly growing due to the entry into the war of the Americans”*<sup>18</sup>.

At Cernăuți, where Sextil Pușcariu was a university teacher, the public opinion perceives the fact that German defeats are decisive and this will mean the end of the war. A significant detail is the fact that people don’t regret German military failures, considering that only this way can peace be achieved. The running of events in this way is the only news that can disconnect people from the apathy and lack

<sup>13</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 302.

<sup>14</sup> Madaule 1973, pp. 115–116.

<sup>15</sup> Pușcariu 1978, pp. 250–251.

<sup>16</sup> Almond, Verba 1996, p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Brendon 2006, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> Renouvin 2006, p. 121.

of interest in everyday life, notes the Romanian intellectual on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918. *“Last week was an emotional one for those that follow the battle development. Franco-English and Americans always move forward, and the Germans retreat daily, sometimes reaching the so-called “Hindenburg line”, the last year’s line of defense, surpassing it sometimes. The anxious, bored world thinks that today’s battles are decisive and will bring the end. And it is significant how few people find it sad that the Germans are defeated! Most of them are quite happy, either because they cannot sympathize with them, either because they hope that only this way there will be peace or either because finally, this unexpected turn of the warrior’s fortune has a charm for them, it’s a novelty that alone can shake them out of the apathy and lack of interest that war events can produce.*

*The fact is that the Germans lost a lot of the blind trust in their luck, of the armies’ bravery and the genius of their leaders, and they are very sad. They have seen that even Entente can have genius leaders, and especially they have been convinced that the immense material of people and the technical superiority of their enemies would take them down naturally and safely, in time”<sup>19</sup>.*

Material difficulties, exorbitant food prices and increase of rent prices created acute problems for the population of Austria-Hungary. Low salaries, very high prices of food and products of prime necessity led the population to contract loans in order to survive, hoping for better times. *“Thank God that now we have firewood in our basement-bought at an exorbitant price and after many rides; we have some flour in the chest – because in Cernăuți for two months it is impossible to get a piece of bread, and a kilo of flour or corn meal costs 20–30 krone; we have a woman who occasionally helps us with the house and the rooms are all cleaned and beautiful as they once were. We have enough worries and the biggest ones are, for me, the financial ones. For rent in the past four years, I had to pay once 5200 krone. The prices here are so high that with my monthly salary of 1050 krone. I cannot survive. But what should I do? I have to live and if I live in debt like everyone else, maybe better times will come”<sup>20</sup>.*

Economic realities became more painful as the time went by. The exalting of existential living, the huge increase of prices, the decrease in salaries of civil servants, the inflation hard to control, the people gotten rich from war with their primitive and unscrupulous manners are the characteristic notes of everyday life highlighted by Sextil Pușcariu on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. *“It’s awful how existential living exalts every day. Compared to last year, prices are enormous. A classic example of optical deception produced by the so-called “good affairs”. I have a cherry in my garden, half-wild, whose fruit I sold before to a neighbor with 5 krone. When I came in June, it was full of cherries and I sold them with 130 krone, so 26 times more expensive. Then, with this money I bought eggs and I got exactly the amount I bought 5 years ago with five krone! If it keeps going this way I do not know where we are headed. With our old salary we cannot survive and the debts increase. But what about those who do not earn like me 1100 krone monthly or not even half that?! And this is the case of most civil servants, the social class that was formerly one of the state’s pillars, cult and honest people living by a decent living standard, and giving to their state well-raised children from where its great men were chosen. Today all of them are starving. A plasterer or a woodcutter earns more than a “Regierungsrat”, envied before so much for his high function. It is a complete revolution of the social status, like that followed by the French Revolution, which has brought to poverty the entire class of old-fashioned aristocrats. And instead of those who die of hunger come the jackals who do not know what to do with the money won, with their manners of primacy and their immoral soul. They, and especially their children, will be elected deputies, will offer the country favorable laws for all of them and will form the public spirit”<sup>21</sup>.*

Among the Allies of Germany, the first to surrender was Bulgaria on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1918. Defeated in the Second Balkan War (1913), Bulgaria did not cease to wish for retaliation, wanting to occupy Dobrogea, Greek or Serbian Macedonia. The Central Powers promised Bulgaria territorial advantages, while Russia invoked the Slavonic solidarity. Bulgaria remained neutral until October 11<sup>th</sup>,

<sup>19</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 307.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 305–306.

1915 when it triggered hostilities against Serbia without a prior declaration of war<sup>22</sup>. Sextil Pușcariu mentions that Bulgarians were dissatisfied with the Central Powers because they were not helped with clothing, food, weapons and were not encouraged in their territorial claims on Dobrogea. *“Today week everybody is still under the impression that Bulgarians are changing, a change that seemed very mysterious and incomprehensible. Today we all know what happened there. Tired of the long war-for them with two years longer than for others-, dissatisfied with their allies that no longer helped them with clothing, food and weapons and not supporting them with their exaggerated claims in Dobrogea and even to their Turkish arms comrades, Bulgarians were hesitating for a long time in their politics, especially since the alliance with the Central Powers was never really popular in Bulgaria, and many felt the burden of hostility with all the other Slavic people. They were led by King Ferdinand, the Iscariot, as the Russians called him. During his reign, he did nothing else but change alliances and friendships, thinking he was smarter than everybody else and betraying his yesterday friends in repetitive rows, in order to achieve his exaggerated ambitions of tsar over all Bulgarians. ... Once more, what happened in the history of this people was repeating: when the Bulgarian state reached the largest extension and had supremacy over the Balkans, immediately followed the collapse and the reduction to the borders it seems to worth. It has to be terrible the deception of waking up from such a beautiful dream as the Bulgarians did in the last two years”*<sup>23</sup>.

On the West front, in September 1918, the mess of German Army amplified. A large number of German soldiers were surrendering, deserting or pretending to be sick and not able to fight on the grounds of the outbreak of Spanish influenza pandemic. Historian Vyvyen Brendon believes that this dramatic decline in German morals is explained by the fact that the offensive had led them to painful psychological solicitations, a strong impact having also the increasingly difficult food supply and the unfortunate influence of Bolshevik pacifism. *“Above all, the strongest influence over their morals was the fact they knew millions of American soldiers were coming to Europe as backup and they could not handle them. This was what crushed their confidence, a feeling typical of the German soldier, accustomed to do his job”*<sup>24</sup>.

On this background, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, Ludendorff informed Emperor Wilhelm II that Germany had lost the war. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, the German general wrote to President Wilson hoping to get some less harsh armistice terms, but facing the intransigence of American opinion, Ludendorff ordered on October 16<sup>th</sup> to continue the war. Germany’s disappointment was even greater because the public opinion believed in the victory by the end of summer. Food supply was more and more difficult and as a result of the shortage of coal, the factories were shut down. At the categorical request of the Chancellor, Emperor Wilhelm II made Ludendorff to resign<sup>25</sup>. Jacques Madaule considered that Germany would rather surrender to US President Wilson, with Fourteen points, than to the French-English and American armies, but these proposals surely translated the hope of humanity in a peace that would exclude in the future the outbreak of another military conflict<sup>26</sup>.

Well-known of Austro-Hungarian realities, Sextil Pușcariu noted on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1918 the dissolution of political authorities and of the administration of monarchy, after the Yugoslavs, Poles and Czechs had proclaimed their independence from October 6<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. Assertion of national identity was illustrated also by the massive desertion of the imperial army. Under these circumstances, the Hungarian Prime Minister Weckerle denounced the dualism. The situation still confusing in Hungary led to political inactivity of Transylvanian Romanians. Confronted with separatist movements of nationalities, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, Emperor Carol I launched the manifest *“To my faithful people”* trying to avoid dissolution of the empire. This document aimed at the federalization of the empire by establishing

<sup>22</sup> Renouvin 2006, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 312.

<sup>24</sup> Brendon 2006, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Renouvin 2006, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Madaule 1973, p. 119.

six independent states (Austrian, Hungarian, Czech, Yugoslav, Polish and Ukrainian), Transylvania remaining an integral part of Hungary<sup>27</sup>. “Austria is a house of madmen, where everybody had gone crazy, nobody believes in a settlement of the tangled situation and those leading try to stop the death of the sick one by prescribing distilled water. Hungary has no news. It seems the situation is bad over there also. The cynical Weckerle will leave, but before that he will want to do another cabotine gesture, denouncing the dualism. Tisza lost his reputation. Too bad! If he were the prime minister, the collapse would come sooner. Lucky that Andrásy will become Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From magnates comes our salvation; a lot more dangerous would be if the democratic elements in Hungary took the leading. Under these circumstances, it is not possible that only us, the Romanians, remain inactive and wait for the desired future to come to us. It seems like in Hungary the terrorism is so great that our people do not dare to move. But here in Bukovina the time for manifestation has come”<sup>28</sup>.

Deeply affected by the war, Austrian Bukovina was facing a revolutionary atmosphere during October-November 1918. The law and order seemed to fall and the existential chaos characterized the society. Discharged soldiers were robbing the military stores. The crowd had weapons and people started shooting in public markets without having a real opponent. Insecurity was amplified also by the fact that Ukrainian troops occupied Eastern Galicia. “This is how the Romanian press appeared on days when Bukovina was facing a revolutionary atmosphere, with soldiers discharging themselves and leaving home after emptying the military stores. The crowd took the weapons abandoned in barracks and young children started shooting in markets and on streets. One day, a group of armed punks entered the National Palace trying to “conquer” it. People that were not Romanians started to believe that the rumors on the help to come from the Romanian Kingdom were only a bluff”<sup>29</sup>.

This manner of evoking a revolutionary situation leads us to affirm that similar events took place during the French revolution in 1789, when the rumors called the *Great Fear* spread throughout France. In Jean Delumeau’s view, this was accompanied by the disintegration of the army, replacement of paralyzed local authorities with new municipalities, rumors about plotting, high hopes, strong fears, and the threat of monarchy’s bankruptcy. The state armor of the Old Regime was demolished and a deep sense of insecurity dominated the French’s sensibilities. The means of self-government were to be immediately identified and enemies whose possible actions were to be feared removed<sup>30</sup>.

The previous quote of Sextil Pușcariu recalls the fact that the void of power created by the final crisis of the Habsburg Monarchy favored free spaces for some political groups that were operating discreetly as long as the authority was firm. The power void released more permissiveness that would confer hope to a political freedom and a national self-determination. In this context appeared the periodical *Glăsuț Bucovinei* and newspaper *Foiaia Poporului*, the body of the National Peasants’ Party, publications that militated for the emancipation from the authority of Austria-Hungary.

Jean Starobinski proposes an introspection in the crisis universe of the French authorities at the time of 1789, valid also for Austria-Hungary. Approaching the realities in a rational manner it was obvious that the costly spending was not the only thing that led to the exhaustion of the state’s finances. The military support granted to American colonists had been expensive. But, in a sensory manner, the population stigmatized only the castles of the nobility, the jewels of the queen and the fireworks. The balance meant an act of indictment against a lifestyle that had gradually generated the state’s bankruptcy<sup>31</sup>.

From the time of hawking the information on the abandonment of the Bulgarian troops, the government of “young Turks” was in total disorganization and on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1918 resigned. The new

<sup>27</sup> Renouvin 2006, p. 127.

<sup>28</sup> Pușcariu 1978, p. 317.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 326.

<sup>30</sup> Delumeau 1986, p. 265.

<sup>31</sup> Starobinski 1990, p. 27.

government led by Izet Paşa proposed to conclude a separate armistice with less harsh terms. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1918, the Armistice of Mudros made available for the Allies the main strategic point of the Ottoman Empire. That was the favorable context for the Italian offensive to take place on October 24<sup>th</sup> against Austro-Hungarian army in full decay. Slavs and Romanians no longer wanted to accept the sacrifice in defending a state from which they want their national self-determination. On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the Piave Front was destroyed and the defeat of the Austro-Hungarians turned into confusion<sup>32</sup>.

It was obvious that the Imperial system had collapsed. The Austrian currency depreciated at a rapid rate, production was zero, there was no coal, food or control. The Imperial Authority was incapable to handle the situation. The number of those supporting “the Austrian mission” was getting smaller. By the end of October 1918, all the peoples of the empire had abandoned the Habsburgs, forming their own national states. The Habsburg Army of the First World War was no longer identical to Radetzki’s army, made up of poorly trained peasants and lacking national sentiments, that being the explanation for the contamination of the army with national ideas that had demolished the empire. The Austro-Hungarian army on the Italian front did not resist the Italian army and each soldier headed home on the grounds of confusion and chaos<sup>33</sup>.

Realities were similar in Austria-Hungary where authorities dreamed at reforms, regeneration, but over these hopes dominated the twilight feeling of acute disappointment. The last moments of the monarchy gave birth to many works of writers and historians, among which I mention the story of the British historian A.J.P. Taylor, considered by me to be the most relevant and emotional one. *“The last remains of the Habsburg Monarchy were the emperor and Lammasch government, “a post-state cabinet”. The Great Monarchy was reduced to a single room, where old bureaucrats and teachers mournful oversaw each other—that was all that was left of the “Austrian idea”, as grateful on paper, as catastrophic in practice. They had no other goal but the one to negotiate the personal safety of the emperor; simple ghosts, they disappeared from history books, leaving even this chapter unwritten. Carol remained by himself with his rights without substance. On November 11<sup>th</sup> he left the government in German-Austria and on 13<sup>th</sup> in Hungary. He did not want to abdicate. Leaving Vienna and then Austria, he carried with him the last threads of the Habsburg veil”*<sup>34</sup>.

After the Austrian Government decided to stop the war on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, Germany remained by itself. The loss of allies did not create for Germany a significant military disadvantage, as it was the one who supported everyone else during the war. Emperor Wilhelm II appointed the liberal prince Max de Baden as Chancellor and gave Reichstag more prerogatives. However, dissatisfaction increased also in Germany. The sailors in Kiel port refused to listen to their officers informing them of the war start with Great Britain. Large groups of citizens joined the sailors protesting in the city, asking for a democratic government and for the end of war. The Revolution expanded to other cities, Prince Max Baden resigned, the Emperor abdicated and Germany signed the armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918<sup>35</sup>.

In Jacques Madaule’s view the defeat was more than honorable. To achieve it, all the energies of the universe had to ally against an army abandoned by its allies and its own people. *“All these realities, vaguely felt in the allied countries, as in Germany itself, have not yet altered the joy of victory. It is truly remarkable that, after a four-year carnage, people were less happy to be victorious than that the war was over. Great hope was crossing the world: it was believed that this attempt was enough for the spirit of the war to be driven out for good”*<sup>36</sup>.

At the end of this study the following conclusions are required:

Abandonment of Russia and Romania opened new perspectives for the war. In this context,

<sup>32</sup> Renouvin 2006, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor 2000, pp. 208–214.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> Brendon 2006, pp. 142–143.

<sup>36</sup> Madaule 1973, p. 119.



Germany was hoping for a victory against France and Great Britain by the massive arrival of American troops to Europe. German General Ludendorff decided to move some troops from the eastern front to the western one. Within two and a half months, German troops gain considerable success, but not the final victory. The firmness of the French and English Governments determined the continuation of the war until victory.

The failure of the German army on Marne River in July 1918 admitted the beginning of Germany's defeat in the First World War. The military crisis of the Central Powers manifested by Bulgaria's signing of the Armistice on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918, by Turkey's acceptance of the Armistice on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1918, by Austria-Hungary on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918 and by Germany itself on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918. The food shortages, the national movements of the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the revolutionary disorders and military defeats of the Central Powers determined the signing of the armistice and the end of the First World War with the victory of the Entente.

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