

# EMILIU POMPILIU ISACU IN 1918

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**Abstract:** Born (1886) and died (1954) in Cluj, Emiliu-Pompiliu Isac was the son of a Transylvanian lawyer involved in the Roumanian nationalist movement. He was known as a modernist writer. He collaborated with the labour press and he was member of the Roumanian section of the Social-Democratic Party of Hungary. Further more he was also a supporter of the union of Transylvania with Roumania. 1918 was the peak year of his life. Bravely, he condemned the Bucharest Treaty, asked for the cessation of war and advocated for the Union. Present in the (Roumanian) Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia (1918 XI 18 / XII 1) he took part in its preparation and then he was leader of the press bureau of the Transylvania's Roumanian National Council. In 1919–1920 he promoted the Roumanian interests in Europa. In the interwar period he lived in his native Cluj and he published several books. After the Second World War, getting sicker, he accepted to praise the new communist regime (and Stalin as well), and that's why he was accepted as a corresponding member of the re-organized Academy of R.P.R.

**Keywords:** Emiliu Pompiliu Isacu, Transylvania, Cluj, the Roumanian national movement, the 1918 (Roumanian) Great National Assembly.

## A. Introduction

### A1. Roots

In 1872 the first State University in Transylvania was founded in Cluj (Koložsvár) of course, with teaching in Hungarian language. There was also a department of Roumanian language whose first holder was Grigore Silași. Around the scholar, it was formed „Iulia” Cultural Society of the Roumanian students in Cluj including Aurel Isac (1846–1932) as well<sup>1</sup>. The one who, in 1877, would lead the destinies of the society by organizing a great assembly to pay homage to the Roumanian soldiers distinguished on the Balkan front during the Russo-Turkish war<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, Aurel Isac will be a well-known Roumanian lawyer in Cluj. In this capacity, he would defend the memorandists, in the famous trial of 1894<sup>3</sup>.

The lawyer Aurel Isac was married to Elisabeta Eliza, born Roșescu. The marriage of the two resulted in 4 children: Aurel Jr. (1882–1923), Valeria (1884–1947), Emil (1886–1954) and Lucia (1888-?).

### A2. Before The First World War

„Emiliu Pompiliu Isacu” was born in Cluj on May 17, 1886<sup>4</sup>, a town where he died on March

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<sup>1</sup> Ilincioiu 1972, p. 148–149.

<sup>2</sup> Pascu 1968, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Pascu 1968, p. 187; Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>4</sup> Rusu 2003 (date and place of birth is confirmed by his Birth Certificate). Other sources indicate the fact that he was born at Apahida, near Cluj (Ciopraga 2005, p. 673; BEI, p. [1]). Year 1889 (instead of 1886) is indicated by Predescu 1940:1999 (probable a printing mistake).

25, 1954<sup>5</sup>. He did his primary studies in German, in his hometown<sup>6</sup>. This is also where he started secondary school (Piarist, 1895–1901)<sup>7</sup> that he finished at Năsăud (1902–1904)<sup>8</sup>. He passed his baccalaureate exam only in 1907, at the (Hungarian) State High School in Cluj<sup>9</sup>. He studied Sociology and Law at the Franz Joseph University of Cluj, taking his bachelor's degree in 1910<sup>10</sup>.

In 1902–1918 he collaborated with Roumanian publications on both sides of the Carpathians. He was also present in the columns of the Hungarian press. The young writer was inclined towards modernism. According to some critics, he is the most authentic representative of modernist Roumanian literature, the only Transylvanian writer of the city-life, writing in Roumanian<sup>11</sup>. A play, *Maica cea tânără* [„The Young Mother”], was staged at the Bucharest National Theatre in 1912. He had two published volumes: *Poezii, impresii și suveniruri moderne* ([= Poems, impressions and modern souvenirs], Cluj, 1908) and *Ardealule, Ardealule bătrân* ([Thee, old Transylvania], Arad, 1916)<sup>12</sup>.

Politically, he was leaning towards the left. He even collaborated at *România muncitoare* [Workers' Roumania] in Bucharest, in 1912<sup>13</sup>. In 1915 he published in issue 233 of the *Romînul* [= The Roumanian] of Arad an open letter to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru in which he defines the ideals according to the Populism ones of the time: „*Today ... we have a new, and only one faith formed, steadfast and holy: to love the people. To love them, to understand them, to descend among them, to bring to the surface, from deepdown their soul, countless treasures that lie in, to fight for their cultural emancipation and to preserve their ethnic character – this is an ideal that fully clarifies any attitude.*”<sup>14</sup>

### A3. In 1917

Roumania's entry into the World War I, in 1916, against Austria-Hungary prompted the Hungarian authorities to take action against the Roumanian nationalist movement. Persecuted, the Roumanian National Party (RNP) drastically restricted its activity. Gradually, the oppression would decrease as the war progressed, more and more unfavorable to both Roumania and Austria-Hungary. The first to use the opportunity to resume the national propaganda were the members of the Roumanian section of the Social-Democratic Party of Hungary (S.D.P.). On October 8/12, 1917, it is issued, in Budapest its press organ, called *Adevărul* [The Truth]<sup>15</sup>

Among the most active collaborators: Emiliu Pompiliu Isac. His articles: (1) „Europa cea nouă” [‘The New Europe’], (2) „Liga poporului” [‘People's League’], (3) „Viitorul Europei” [‘The Future of Europe’], (4) „Isbânda democrației” [‘Victory of democracy’] depicts him as a propagator of the new, as a supporter of a new Europe in which peoples are twinned on a peaceful basis<sup>16</sup>. In reply to an article published by Valeriu Braniște in *Drapelul* [‘The Flag’] of Lugoj<sup>17</sup>, in *Adevărul* from December 16, 1917, he published an article requesting that the Roumanian National Party

<sup>5</sup> According to his Death Certificate. Wrong date of 1954 III 15 is mentioned by Rusu 2003; Ciopraga 2005, p. 673; BEI, p. [2].

<sup>6</sup> According to some sources at Lutheran school (Ciopraga 2005, p. 673) or Evangelic school (BEI, p. [1]). His family was Greek-Catholic.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Predescu 1999; Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>9</sup> Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>10</sup> BEI, p. [1]; cf. Predescu 1940:1999.

<sup>11</sup> Uricariu 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Predescu 1940:1999; Rusu 2003; Ciopraga 2005, p. 674; BEI, p. [1]. Bibliographical details: Miclescu 1986 (nr. 29360 and, respectively, 29359).

<sup>13</sup> Răduică 1995, p. 368 (no. 5861).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Constantinescu 1968, p. 364.

<sup>15</sup> PPR 1969, p. 6 (no. 25); Răduică 1995, p. 20 (no. 58).

<sup>16</sup> Porțeanu 1968, p. 302.

<sup>17</sup> Constantinescu 1968, p. 364.

„*would take action.*” He understands that the persecution of the Hungarian government of Count István Tisza caused the R.N.P. to cease the bold political activity. But times had changed. The political activity of the Roumanian nationalists, limited to „*two or three speeches in the parliament and [to] some barren statements*” must make way for an open action, in relation to the Roumanian masses<sup>18</sup>.

## B. In 1918

### B1. Before the Assembly of Alba Iulia

1918 is the year of grace for Emiliu Pompiliu Isac.

On May 5, 1918 he welcomes the congress of the Roumanian section of the in Hungary's S.P.D.<sup>19</sup> which was held in Budapest to mark a century since the birth of Karl Marx<sup>20</sup>.

Subsequently, he denounces the difficult conditions imposed on Roumania by the Central Powers by the Treaty of Bucharest of March 24 / May 7, 1918, in his articles „*Reacțiunea se bucură*” [‘Political Reaction Is Happy’] and „*Pacea cu România*” [‘The Peace with Roumania’] published in *Adevărul* of the Romanian Socialists in Hungary. It says, „*No separate peace, but peace outside and inside, with all peoples, with all world.*” And: „*the socialist's iron logic says that it is immorality to \*splinter peoples and nationalities*” in order to weaken their resistance. Even so, Roumania was only „*a sleeping lioness*”<sup>21</sup>.

With the unfolding of events, and until it became more and more sharp, through his articles „*Isbînda democrației*” [‘The Victory of Democracy’] (September 29, 1918) and „*Principiul naționalităților*” [‘The Nationalities’ Principle’] (October 13, 1918), E.P. Isac expresses the joy of defeating the „*maniacs of imperialism*” by the principle of nationalities. He denounces the illusion of ethnic unity of a Hungary inhabited by numerous peoples in search of their own destiny<sup>22</sup>.

At the initiative of the Roumanian Socialists, the Central Roumanian National Council is formed in Budapest on October 18/31, 1918, in collaboration with R.N.P.<sup>23</sup> The purpose of the council, whose headquarters would move to Arad, was to lead the Roumanian national movement in Hungary. In order to counter the action of the similar Hungarian Committee in Cluj, at the initiative of Amos Frâncu, the Roumanian National Senate was formed in the same city (town?) in November 1918. His press office would consist of Elie Daianu, V. Moldovan and Emiliu Pompiliu Isac<sup>24</sup>.

Although ill, E.P. Isac keeps up with the events. An article of his in *Adevărul* of November 24, 1918<sup>25</sup> expresses the Roumanians’ joy when facing the collapse of the dualist monarchy with the abdication of Carol of Habsburg.

### B2. In Alba Iulia

In characteristic style, E.P. Isaac recalled the events of 1918 XI 17/30 and 1918 XI 18 / XII 1.

Firstly he expressed in an interview for the Hungarian press, in *Kolozsváry Hírlap*, in December 3, 1918. The Hungarian reader is presented with „*an ethnographic demonstration never seen, which any cultured man would applaud*”, miners’ orchestras, a company of horsemen, the people from

<sup>18</sup> *Adevărul*, Budapest, a. XIII, no. 9, 1917 XII 3/16, p. 1–2 apud Nuțu 1968, p. 137–138; Constantinescu 1968, p. 364–366; Porțeanu 1968, p. 293; Unc 1972, p. 526.

<sup>19</sup> Porțeanu 1968, p. 278.

<sup>20</sup> Porțeanu 1968, p. 277–282.

<sup>21</sup> Pascu 1968, p. 294; Porțeanu 1968, p. 290, 292.

<sup>22</sup> Unc 1978, p. 477.

<sup>23</sup> The council was founded on a meeting of the Roumanian socialists and nationalists at “Jägerhorn” Hotel in Vienna (Albani 1969, p. 49–51).

<sup>24</sup> Pascu 1968, p. 339–340.

<sup>25</sup> *Adevărul*, Budapest, a. XIV, no. 45, 1918 XI 24, p. 3 apud Porțeanu 1968, p. 301.

Abrud with the Roumanian flag, „secretaries with briefcases”, officers who „carry heavy files of documents with an emotional face”, „violin-journalists [...] historians of the moment”, proletarians with red flags, a unit of seamen... All of them were Roumanians. National songs are sung. „The Internationale” is sung. After the proclamation of the great act, „horse-riding couriers carry the news everywhere”: „It happened. A people liberated itself.”<sup>26</sup>

10 years after those memorable events, E.P. Isac brings them up to date for the Roumanian public in the essay *În drum spre Alba Iulia* [„On the way to Alba Iulia”] in a homage volume edited by Cezar Petrescu. We note the essential: In November 30, 1918 the author embarked in Cluj, in a train provided „by force by the Hungarian government”. „The distance between Cluj and Alba Iulia is relatively small”, recalls Isac „and it took us half a day to get to Alba Iulia. But to get to Alba Iulia, we waited, admittedly, for a thousand years.” On the train he meets Sever Dan. There is no shortage of incidents. At Teiuș the train lingers longer. Enough to be killed a Roumanian standard-bearer. And to provoke strong exchanges of fire between the Roumanian train guard and the Hungarian soldiers. E.P. Isaac gets off the train. He manages to stop the carnage. Roumanian travellers leave, taking with them „hostages so they can identify the killers of our standard-bearer.” The town of Alba Iulia was too small for the Roumanian crowd coming from all parts of Hungary. He met Eugen Goga again, after 10 years. At the restaurant „Corona” he stays all night with „[Iuliu] Maniu, [Alexandru] Vaida[-Voevod], [Ștefan] Ciceo-Pop, [Vasile] Goldiș, Valer[iu] \*Branisce”. The next day, the great event took place. He fleetingly remembers Iuliu Maniu and Miron Cristea. Even the Hungarian journalist of Cluj who wrote down his impressions about that historic day he remembered. It was like a release: „Cried like a child \*Cicio-Pop, as I cried myself, as you did, Roumanian, who were there and who came to Alba Iulia to remember that December 1, 1918, which for us, the Roumanians, is more than any other day in the human history.”<sup>27</sup>

But E.P. Isaac’s pen did not retain other aspects of his activity in the historic days at the turn of November and December of 1918. Others detained them. Among them it was the socialist Tiron Albani of the editorial office of the socialist newspaper *Adevarul*. In November 17/30, 1918, in the Alba Iulia casino house, there were ideological confrontations between the Roumanian socialists and the nationalists. Under socialist pressure, paragraph 1 is amended. Initially, „The National Assembly of all Roumanians of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, gathered through their representatives, decrees the Union of those Roumanians and all the territories they live, with the Kingdom of Roumania. Socialist protests: „the kingdom can be fleeting, Roumania is eternal”. The change is made. Another socialist: „The National Assembly expresses its wish for Roumania to become a republic.” For the nationalists, it is too much: „Voices: ‘Get out!’”. Peacefully, as always, intervenes E.P. Isaac: „Gentlemen [...] A quarter of an hour ago you approved the resolution: the Assembly guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the free propagation of all human thoughts. Now you revolt to hear that human thought is being expressed. Today, when three kings have been driven out and cast the crowns after them! Be more consistent.”<sup>28</sup>

E.P. Isac was not among the official speakers of the Great National Assembly<sup>29</sup>. He seems to have expressed his thoughts in a less formal setting<sup>30</sup>. Some sources even include him in the Great National Council elected in November 19 / December 2, 1918<sup>31</sup>. However, he was head of the Press Office of the Roumanian National Council in Transylvania<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *Kolozsvári Hírlap*, Kolozsvár, a. XIX, no. 284, 1918 XII 13 apud Covaci 1978, p. 660–662.

<sup>27</sup> Isac 1928. The flagger killed in Teiuș station was Ion Arion from Agriș (Turda-Arieș County). At the proposal of Șt. C[iceo] Pop, in the official meeting from 1918 XI 19 / XII 2 decided to be buried at the expense of the Council (*Românul*, Arad, a. VII, no. 20, 1918 XI 20 / XII 3, p. 4).

<sup>28</sup> Albani 1969, p. 81–82.

<sup>29</sup> Deac 1972, p. 677.

<sup>30</sup> Constantinescu 1968, p. 416.

<sup>31</sup> Ciopraga 2005, p. 673; BEI, p. [1].

<sup>32</sup> Uricariu 2017.

### B3. After the Assembly in Alba Iulia

His swan song in the socialist camp was the article „The Alba Iulia of the Roumanian socialists” published in January 1, 1919 in *Adevărul* (newspaper that had since moved its editorial office in Sibiu). The article was a response to accusations brought against the Roumanian socialists that they preferred a royal Roumania instead of a republican Hungary<sup>33</sup>. The Old Hungary was the regime of „*shameful imperialism of the feudal class*” that exploited, socially and nationally, the Roumanian people it tried to assimilate. The disappearance of „*the historic Hungary*” was a historical necessity. Roumanians part with it without regrets. The facts demonstrated: (1) the necessity of uniting the Roumanian people into a unitary State; (2) The Roumanian State will modernize by bringing through industrialization and a numerical increase of the working class, the bearer of social progress (in the opinion of the socialists); (3) The Roumanian socialists showed wisdom by sacrificing their momentary social interests for the eternal interests of the country. That is why the Roumanian proletariat of Hungary followed the example of the Italian one who preferred to republican Austria (after 1918) the union with royal Italy. Certainly, they hope that the new Roumanian State will someday become republican. In conclusion: „*The Alba Iulia of the Roumanian socialists is therefore the defeat [= victory] of the social democratic current and, in Alba Iulia, the Roumanian Social-Democratic Party is recognized as a serious factor. In Alba Iulia, the future of the Roumanian workers was secured, and if some try to despise our Roumanian comrades for this, they secretly serve the very sinful cause of historical and feudal Hungary.*”<sup>34</sup>

### C. In the Unified Roumania

In 1919, Emiliu Pompiliu Isac officially left the socialist camp. Until 1920 he worked to promote the Roumanian interests in Europe<sup>35</sup>. He spent almost his entire life in his native Cluj. In 1920–1940 he was an inspector of the Roumanian theatres in Transylvania<sup>36</sup> and, temporarily, he taught Aesthetics at the School of Fine Arts in Cluj (1925–1931). And he also published several books<sup>37</sup>.

The Roumanian-Hungarian Arbitration in Vienna of August 30, 1940, which, among other things, temporarily returned Cluj to Hungary, forced him to take refuge in Turda. Five years later, he would return, together with the Roumanian authorities, to his hometown. This time, completely changed: more and more sick, he integrates into the new realities, raising hosannas to Joseph Stalin. The new regime appreciates it. In 1948 XI 2, he became a corresponding member of the reorganized Academy of the Roumanian People’s Republic.<sup>38</sup>

After his death, the family residence became, starting with 1955, a memorial house. Four decades later, the son and grandson obtain the house by a Court decision. Officially, the museum closes in 2001<sup>39</sup>. His patrimony would be taken over by the „Octavian Goga” County Library in Cluj. Fortunately, this institution not only preserved, but also digitized and put on line the legacy

<sup>33</sup> As a response to the Roumanian Assembly in Alba Iulia, the National Magyar Council of Cluj, led by István Apáthy organised in 1918 XII 23 a great national assembly of the \*Szeklers at Cluj. At this assembly, two Roumanian socialists delivered speeches. The first, Demian Sava-Ştregaru declared, in Hungarian, that he did not acknowledge the decision of union proclaimed in Alba Iulia. The other one, Avramescu (presented as deserter from the Roumanian Army) “declared that the Roumanians from here [i.e. Transylvania] did not want to be united with Roumania, because there [i.e. over the Carpathians] the boyars rule” (AMC 1918).

<sup>34</sup> Isac 1979. Vd. Constantinescu 1968, p. 410–411; Deac 1978, p. 633–634 (and n. 154); Agrigoroaiei 1988, p. 58–59.

<sup>35</sup> Predescu 1940:1999; Rusu 2003; Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>36</sup> Predescu 1940:1999; BEI, p. [1]; Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>37</sup> Predescu 1940:1999; Ciopraga 2005, p. 674.

<sup>38</sup> Ciopraga 2005, p. 673.

<sup>39</sup> MEIC.

of our writer of Cluj, making it accessible for the interested people. This is also the reason why we conclude this presentation with a thought of gratitude to that cultural institution in Cluj<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> We expressed our gratitude to “A[lexandru] D. Xenopol” County Library of Arad, as well, for the digitalisation of *Românul* newspaper collection.

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