

GREAT UNION CENTENARY – A MOMENT OF THE ROMANIAN IDENTITY CELEBRATION

Associate professor Cotîrleț Paul-Claudiu

Faculty of Letters, Vasile Alecsandri University Bacău, Romania

ABSTRACT: A country movement forward means respect traditions and legacy. Both of them give as what we traditionally mean by identity. Any state without identity cannot live its own present, nor can it plan its future. In this paper, I have managed to highlight the most important moments that gave visibility and credibility for the Ministry of Culture in Romania, in an attempt to offer Romanian citizens a cultural-historical affiliation so that they can be proud of on their centennial anniversary. The role I had during this period full of intense feelings such as patriotic valences honored and obliged me to assume a mission. A mission of forming characters and valuable attitudes. From the position of university professors, we don't just transmit pieces of information, but we help students to become responsible and good citizens, specialists, and instill love for their own country.

KEYWORDS: *culture, identity, Romania, centenary*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Romanian culture has gone through a natural process of self-evaluation, which sometimes took on dramatic and conflicting aspects [1]. This process has its source and motivation in the internal need of the Romanian culture to reinterpret its spiritual tradition and some episodes of its modern evolution in relation to the new historical context, which imposed perspectives of interpretation and criteria of appreciation different from those which operated in the interwar period, in the communist period (predominantly and restrictively ideological) or in the post-communist reconstruction period (chaotic and without substance).

As Romania has been integrated into the European Union, Romanian culture rediscovered its creative potential, but also its gaps and historical handicap, through a necessary and beneficial comparative examination against the new trends of contemporary culture. As in other eras, it redefined its identity and reevaluated its tradition in relation to the spirit of the times. Under these conditions, the most frequent reaction was not nationalist self-glorification, but a massive relapse into a fatalistic attitude, which favored the belief of our identity in predominantly negative terms. European integration became the occasion for a severe examination, which put Romanian culture in a position to reopen its identity file, in more radical terms, and to find answers to the new challenges of history [2].

The year of the Centenary of the Great Union made the debates on how we relate to national values more and more heated. Obviously, culture stands for the structural element of national identity, and the existence of a ministry that had in mind the support of national identity was a *sine qua non* condition for the emancipation of a movement characterized by deep patriotic accents in Romania. The issue of identities arouses many controversies. The identity of Romanians is a group reality, or, in other words, it refers to the community spirit, to the conviction of being part of the community.

Scena9, one of the journalism publications that review the cultural life in Romania, gave wide spaces to the topic on the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and National Identity at the beginning of 2017. They put the equal sign between National Identity and Propaganda, implying that it is only a step to nationalism effervescent of the interwar years:

In the 155 years since there has been a minister to deal with cultural affairs in Romania, the words "culture" and "national" appeared for the first time side by side in the name of the institution during the government led by Marshal Ion Antonescu. Antonescu was, moreover, the first (interim) minister of the Ministry of National Culture and Arts. No one dealt with identity, although many ministers were philosophers or sociologists. [3]

An assertion without a true historical basis, Ion Antonescu did not hold this position during his government, the position being occupied by the legionary lawyer Radu Budișteanu, and the name of the ministry did not include the term "national".

Other analyzes and media campaigns followed that wanted to prove the existence of a direct social conflict due to the fact that there are multiple cultures and cultural identities within a nation that are contrary.

Radu Vancu - writer: "*National identity is just another name for the destructive angel of nationalism, which destroyed the last century and it seems that it is about to curse this one as well.*" [4]

Oana-Valentina Suci - PhD lecturer, Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Bucharest: "*The first time, when I saw it, I thought it was a joke to affix the phrase National Identity to the Ministry of Culture.*" [5]

Cosmin Năsui - art historian: "*One way or another, where the national spirit is explicitly sought and ideologically programmed, from a cultural point of view, the representation is impoverished.*" [6]

What these authors did not consider was the fact that there was (and still is) a lack of trust among young people in all state institutions and their representatives. [7] The moment of 2018 stood for a good opportunity to (re)discover the legacy and the truth upon the past, because the present was full of worries and the future seemed hopeless. The last century since the Great Union was a good opportunity to make others - friends, unfriends or indifferent - see us, know us, and understand us, with our identity as Romanians. [8]

In a democratic, pluralistic environment, the diversity of points of view is natural, beneficial, and stimulating, the condition being to respect the historical truth and axiological criteria, not to interpret cultural creations from a narrow and partisan politics. In these conditions, I believe that there was, (a Ministry of National Identity is needed to try to recover the authentic identity of this culture) an identity repressed in the first phase of the communist regime, interpreted in a contradictory and often distorted way, for political and propaganda reasons, in the last phase of this regime. In the post-communist period, it was subjected to new deformations and partisan interpretations, when, to the earlier prejudices, new, subtle, and almost imperceptible forms of psychological and informational aggression were added, forms and techniques of manipulation to which the Romanian intelligentsia, in the most much of her, was not and is not ready to react.

That is why, to prepare the centenary year of the Great Union and to restore the historical truth, detached from political pressures, the restoration of complete images of the modern Romanian culture was a desirable thing that was wanted to be achieved.

II. NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The issue of national culture and national specificity was directly related to the internal and geopolitical challenges to which Romania had to respond. In a context in which the political elite were subjected to a process of negative acculturation, associated with attitudes of devaluation of the national culture, the reaction of the local fund and the representatives of the ministry was justified. Consolidation of the original elements of Romanian culture, in all its spheres, but especially in those that had a major formative function - literary and artistic creation, education, the press, social thinking etc. -, was a cardinal problem of the historical moment. The strengthening of the national sentiment could only be done by appealing to the autochthonous background, to the values and ideas that have preserved the spiritual identity of the Romanian people throughout the centuries. The reevaluation of tradition, as a cultural attitude, was an imperative of the moment, a strategy aimed at channeling energies towards the realization of the ideal of national unity. [9]

III. THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY'S RESPONSE TO THESE NEEDS

In my capacity as secretary of state and coordinator of the National Identity Department, I initiated a series of projects aimed at restoring to culture the role of coagulation of social life, as a factor of national regeneration. I wanted the restoration of the lost unity of Romanian society.

The school, the second church of the nation, has the role of directing the population towards culture, making them aware of its strength and purpose. That's why the project entitled "Centenary Caravan" came to life from the desire to have a specific national program in culture, a militant but also limiting program, which wanted to impose the national spirit in schools and high schools. The representatives of the Department in collaboration with history teachers, museographers, writers gave a series of lectures that conveyed to young people the message of the Centenary of the Great Union and the importance of the consciousness of national unity.

Also, for the young generation, we have also created an online platform, a small encyclopedia of the Centenary, with an exclusively educational role, with the aim of increasing the level of learning and understanding of users regarding the events that contributed to the realization of the Great Union of 1918 and to the consolidation of the national state Romanian unitary.

The great Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga, divides the people into classes, and the classes into individuals. He also affirmed: "*The interests of individuals do not reconcile with each other, and the interests of classes often become enemies; but above the interests of individuals, above the interests of classes, must rise national solidarity, the feeling of unity that embraces a society from one end to the other.*" [10]

And as national solidarity springs from the village, through the goodwill and involvement of Peter Hurley, an Irishman who fell in love with Romania, we laid the foundations of the "United Villages of Romania" project. The project aimed to support the process of recovery, revitalization, but also to promote and ensure the continuity of the autochthonous folkloric heritage - Romanian folk customs and traditions, through a national appeal to the rural communities of Romania. At least 100 communities, standing for all the ethnographic "countries" of Romania, of national minorities but also communities of Romanians outside the country, were invited to take part in the Centenary year in the establishment of a cultural, informal, and apolitical Network, for the discovery, promotion, and preservation of Romanian intangible heritage, living testimony of values, beliefs, traditions and national identity.



Fig.1 [11]

National identity is the direct result of the daily presence of some components that represent common denominators for all people who are part of the same state or the same nation, such as language, historical context, national symbols, and the presence of these components is expressed in areas such as education, culture, media and sport. [12] International sports events influence the process of defining the national identity of the participating countries, and Romania, as a member of the International Olympic Committee, was aware of the importance of the Olympic Games in the emancipation of the national spirit.

On the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang - South Korea, the National Identity Department, together with the representatives of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee, organized a dedicated evening at a hotel in Gangneung, the city that hosted the ice competitions Centenary of Great Romania. [13] On this occasion, the guests were able to meet Romania's history full of heroism and drama and view images that are part of the photographic exhibition - "*Personalities of the Great War*".

These are only a part of the actions undertaken by the National Identity Department within the Ministry of Culture and National Identity, to which was added the continuous support offered in the organization and implementation in a unitary manner, at national and international level, of the events, actions and anniversary projects of to the Great Romania Centenary that were proposed by other state institutions, but also by non-governmental organizations.

The NGOs took over, against the background of a crisis of state resources, functions and roles that before 1989 represented exclusive attributes of the administration, becoming an important factor in the promotion of democratic values and social changes, of new relations between the state and society. An example of involvement in honoring the memory of the participants in the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia in December 1918 was the Association of the Great United Successors, set up in 2015 in Oradea. They brought into attention of Romanians, the sacrifice and devotion of those who fought for the country, who became models of a generation that must take Romania as far as possible. Another example would be the initiative and contribution made by the Unlimited Connections Association from Bacău, which financed the construction of the public forum monument "*Victorious Romania*", inaugurated in Unirii Park - December 1, 1918 in Bacău. [14]



Fig.2

It is the first monument in Romania that depicts the two kings (Ferdinand I and Maria), together, in monumental size (2.40 meters and 2.20 m, respectively).

All the achievements and failures of the centenary year of the Great Union were captured by the author in the work "Celebrating Romania 1918-2018" [15], and based on this material and at the invitation of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in America, we undertook a traveling tour in which we discussed how the Romanian state put its shoulder in creating an emulation at the national, and even international level, in order to celebrate the 100 years of at the Great Union. I traveled to Jacksonville, Salt Lake City and Atlanta where I met those who form the Romanian diaspora. They were extremely interested in the topic of discussion and actively contributed to the debate that followed the presentation.

The effort undertaken by the Embassy of Romania in the United States of America in organizing events that marked the 100 years since the Great Union should not be neglected either. The documentary "*The Great Union - Romania, 100 years old*" was screened on Monday, May 14, 2018, for the first time in the United States of America, at the Romanian Embassy in Washington, in the presence of a large audience. [16] In 2018, on the occasion of the celebration of the Centennial of the Great Union, the embassy approached the governors of the US states and congressmen for them to mark, through proclamations and resolutions, 100 years of the Great Union. [17]

The Permanent Representation of Romania to the UN and the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York organized in 2018, on the occasion of the National Day of Romania, a gala concert by the pianist Alexandra Dăriescu (graduate with the gold medal of the prestigious Royal Northern College of Music in Great Britain). The event was held at Merkin Hall of the Kaufman Music Center. At the same time, the Permanent Mission of Romania to the UN - New York also organized a reception to mark the National Day of Romania, at the headquarters of the Mission, on November 30. [18]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian identity was preserved and strengthened through the unity of the language, the consciousness of Romanian, faith etc. It is our duty to ensure that this identity still is alive, and that the flame of *Romanianism* will continue for years to come. In 2018, a step has been taken that needs to be continued in such a way that the glorious past helps change the lethargic present and leads to a bright future.

It has been proven that people and communities acutely feel the need for the past and for truthful reconstruction of the past. For us, the Romanians, there were a thousand years of division that led to a century of national unity.[19] The union gave us the power to stand in solidarity, to respect each other regardless of religion or race, it made us realize that together we mean something and that we will be hard to put down.

Identity is a currency that the world uses and will undoubtedly help to create a common feeling [20], that of belonging. The Romanian identity has endured for centuries and will always be a guiding beacon for those who look to reach that great feeling of love of country.

Noica once said: "(...) culture, when it acquires high value attributes, transforms the people into a nation", and the deep correlations between culture and society, between symbolic forms and the social and historical experience of peoples are intimately linked to the collective soul of those who want to get involved in the good running of a country. Modern nations are formed based on a common historical life, under the interaction of multiple factors, the most important of which are cultural, political and economic. The unity of language and culture is the binder that ensures the functional integration of the various components of national life. Although it is also expressed in political and economic terms, national identity has its pivot in culture, in the creation of values, in historical traditions, in its creative performances." [21]

"A country can lose its identity in two ways: disintegrating territorially and disintegrating spiritually". [22] If Romania's membership in international structures such as the EU, NATO and finally, the UN, offers us additional protection when we refer to state borders, the spiritual disintegration is not visible and attacks the nation from within. That is why we must be aware that the defense of culture is as important as the defense of the national territory.

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