



THE VISIT OF THE ROYAL FAMILY TO TRANSYLVANIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE YEAR 1919 (I)

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Abstract: The visits made in the interwar period by representatives of the royal family to the United Provinces with the Country in 1918 had a certain significance. The physical presence of the members of the Romanian dynasty was an act of affirmation of legitimacy and suzerainty over the territory acquired in 1918. The Romanian press in Transylvania and memorial oeuvres have extensively reflected and emphasized the importance of the visit of the Royal Family, following its route, which included numerous localities, from the outposts of the Romanian army at Békéscsaba (in Hungary) to Braşov. As far as Transylvania is concerned, this was all the more necessary given that, after World War I, a sudden campaign of unprecedented vehemence and magnitude was launched by Hungarian political circles, asking for the support of the international public opinion and of the governments of Western countries for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, which had "mutilated" the borders of the Hungarian state, aiming at the restitution of Transylvania, unjustly "wrested" from Hungary's body. The use of symbolic registers with grandiloquent connotations was a fairly common practice at such events at the time. The presence of the royal authority in Transylvania was stated by a symbolic gesture. The emblematic figure of Michael the Brave, who for the first time in history achieved the union of the Romanian territories and the reawakening of his qualities in the person of King Ferdinand I, or of his heir, Prince Carol, were the symbolic leitmotif of all trips.

Keywords: Romanian dynasty, World War I, Ferdinand I, Transylvania, royal family.

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As compared to King Carol I, who had been inclined to engage Romania at the offset of World War I in the conflagration alongside the Central Powers, in keeping with the old alliances (one also has to consider his German origins), his successor Ferdinand I, a supporter of the Entente, with his wife, Mary, closely related to the British Royal Family, influenced also by Prime Minister Ionel I.C. Brătianu, had other options in mind. During the two years of the country's armed expectancy, between 1914-1916, not only were the mounting pressures on the side of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire resisted, but Ionel Brătianu intensified negotiations with the representatives of the Entente, convinced that

the World War opened up the perspective of achieving national unity, a thing which had been promised by the latter.

The Crown Council in August 1916, presided over by Ferdinand I, engaged Romania in war on the side of the Entente. Romania's tragic stance during the two years of conflict is well known, and we shall not get into further details here; we shall just mention that King Ferdinand had trust in the accomplishment of national aspirations, in the victory of the Entente coalition. He led the country into the Iaşi exile, after the occupation of the capital, and when the Marghiloman government was forced to sign the peace of Bucharest, on May 7th 1918, the King refused

to ratify it; based on the radical change of France in the summer of the year 1918 in favor of the Entente, on November 10th 1918 he decreed the remobilization of the Romanian army, with the end of the war finding Romania militarily involved in the Entente coalition.

In the course of the year 1918 the complete national unity of Romania was gradually achieved, through the unification of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania with the Country. But the will of the Romanian people had to be internationally confirmed by the Peace Conference that ended the first global conflagration. This important international reunion, that took place in Paris and London between 1919-1920, was to be different from prior ones not only by virtue of its dimensions, but also due to the fact that its workings were to be led by democratic principles – that is what the Great Allies had decided to do – but above all in a modern world it had the mission of establishing the basis of a new international framework with which humanity was to evolve in the coming period.

Romania took part in the workings of the Peace Conference after it had fought in the World War in order to free its national territory, for the unification with the Country of the Romanian territories in the Austro-Hungarian empire, as part of the Entente coalition and at its request, and the conditions of its participation were laid down in the Treaty signed with France, Russia, England and Italy, on 4-17 August 1916. Romania had made great sacrifices during the war, both human and material ones, it had respected, as far as it had been able to, the obligations it had taken on in treaties and conventions, a fact underlined also by political personalities on the international scene¹; 800.000 people in the army and among the civilian population were killed by the enemy or decimated by hunger and epidemics, representing 11% of the country's population (a number only surpassed by France with regards to human losses).

Romania took part in the Peace Conference trusting the work of justice that was to be fulfilled. It brought to the official recognition of the international scene the historical decisions of the Romanian people, solemnly and unequivocally proclaimed during the Gatherings of Chişinău (March 27th), Cernăuţi (November 28th) and Alba-Iulia (December 1, 1918). The Peace Conference of Paris was not in the position of creating a unitary Romanian state; this state had already been accomplished by the Romanian people. The conference's mission was to grant judicial legitimacy to the new state from a territorial and political point of view, through the recognition of the principal of national self-determination, and not to do Romania a favor.

As far as Romania and its official position at the Peace Conference are concerned, the unification decisions requested many more territories than the treaty of 1916. This is how the vote decided on the unification of historic Bessarabia until the Dniester river (which could not have been conceived in 1916) and of the entire Bucovina (including the northern part), and to the west, the

entire Banat and the territory inhabited by Romanians in Crişana, Bihor, Satmar and Maramureş. As far as this precise decision regarding the Banat is concerned, flexible with regards to the Hungarian border, it was not a sheer coincidence that this border generally coincided with the line set down in the Treaty of 1916. This Treaty specified our rights over the following territories in the Austro-Hungarian empire (see art. 4): the entire Banat along with the mouths of the Mureş river (towards Serbia and Hungary), the towns and villages of Oroshaza, Bichiş-Ciaba, Vasarosnemeny, the mouths of the Someş river, a small part of Maramureş and Bucovina, until the confluence of the Ceremuş with the Prut river, so without the northern part of this province.²

The Romanian delegation to the Peace Conference, led by prime minister I.I.C. Brătianu alongside Nicolae Mişu, Romanian ambassador to London, Victor Antonescu, Romanian minister in Paris, Alexandru Vaida Voevod, minister without portfolio on behalf of the Ruling Council of Transylvania, general C. Coandă, C. Diamandy, former minister in Petrograd, accompanied by experts in issues that were of interest to Romania, would be confronted in Paris with challenging problems, created precisely by the Great Allies, especially considering that Ionel Brătianu had been quite intransigent regarding the compliance with the Treaty of 1916. There was some official encouragement for the Romanian representatives to present their requests; on the other hand, what was held against Romania, was the signing of the Peace Treaty of May 1918, without the Allies approval, and in certain influential circles, there appeared by the time of the opening of the workings of the Conference, a series of dangerous opinions, referring to the fact that the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would result in a "Balkanization" of Europe.³ Romania was to be accepted at the Peace Conference as an ally and as an associated country, enjoying a status similar to that of other small powers, having to put up with a limited presence of its representatives in the conference committees, including those that were of direct interest to it.

The Romanian delegation, led by Ionel Brătianu, stopped in Belgrade on its way to Paris, in order to have an open discussion with regent Alexander regarding Romania's border with Serbia, in keeping with the Treaty of 1916, which set the border between the two states on the Danube. Regent Alexander rejected the Romanian prime minister's position, holding that such a border was far too close to Serbia's capital, Belgrade, that during the war Serbia, even if it had been in a desperate situation, had not signed a peace Treaty as Romania had done and that in the Banat region there was a significant Serbian population.⁴ This vantage point was to weigh heavily in the future decision of the Peace Conference regarding the Banat, which was to be split in half: the Romanian and the Serbian one. Until the clarification of the issue, the problem of the Banat created tensions between the two countries, considering the occupation



until July 1919 of the Banat by French and Serbian military troops, the latter resorting to unacceptable acts towards the Romanian population in the Banat, with the scope of creating pressure from the perspective of a political decision. There were also attempts of diversion on the part of Hungary, which led to the proposal at the Peace Conference of a "Banat Republic", as a buffer state between Serbia, Romania and Hungary. During the visit of King Ferdinand to Transylvania, in May 1919, as part of the discussions with Romanian officials and Transylvanian Romanians, the King realized the existence of serious tensions and anxieties on part of the population regarding the Banat, which were also largely reflected by the Transylvanian press.

For Romania, what was utterly important was the signing of a peace treaty with Hungary. The end of the war created a period of great uncertainty. The new government of the Hungarian Republic, led by Karoly Mihaly, managed through an Armistice Convention, signed at Belgrade on November 13, 1918, between the defeated Hungary and the representatives of General Franchet d'Esperey, without any representatives of the Romanian government and the Romanian National Council of Transylvania to establish a dividing line between Romania and Hungary on the course of the Mureş river. Thus, a great part of Romanian territories was kept under Hungarian domination (until the conclusion of the Peace Conference) – a part of Transylvania, the Banat, Crişana and Maramureş. This dividing line did not comply with the Treaty of 1916 between Romania and the Entente Powers and was a defiance of the future Unification Decision expressed by the Great National Assembly of Alba-Iulia. The Hungarian government declared that it would not abide by the unification decision or by the authority of the Ruling Council regarding the territories on the western part of the Mures. This was another clear indicator of Hungary's intentions. Thus, the tense political and military atmosphere significantly worsened in the first half of the year 1919, during the workings of the Peace Conference, amplified also by the terrorist acts committed by the Hungarian occupation troops, by the gendarmes and the Hungarian gangs on the Romanian population and by the provocations regarding the positions of the Romanian army. A war like state was created between Hungary and Romania, that had not been given thought to by the Conferences decedents who had had other priorities.

The political and military decisional factors in Bucharest evinced a prompt reaction to the situation created in Transylvania, to the atrocities committed and the huge pressure in the territories that had remained under Hungarian occupation. At the request of the Ruling Council and with the approval of the Commandment of Allied Armies in Thessaloniki and the Inter-Ally Military Council in Versailles, The Great General Quarter of the Romanian army, ordered the

Transylvanian troops (7th Infantry Division and 1st and 2nd Rangers Divisions) to cross the "Mureş line" and to advance towards the west. On January 29th 1919, the dividing line was set on the western edge of the Apuseni Mountains, from where the counter attacks of the Hungarian army could be more easily repelled. A month later, the Supreme Council and the Inter Ally Military Council requested the Hungarian government to retrieve its army within 10 days alongside the line on the west of Vasarmameny, Devavanya, Gyoms, Oroshaza, Szeged until the conclusion of the Peace Conference regarding the final frontier between Romania and Hungary. At the same time, Romanian troops were to liberate the Romanian territories westward of the Apuseni Mountains, which were still under Hungarian occupation.⁵

On February 26th 1919, the Peace Conference Bureau proposed to the Inter-Ally Supreme Council the creation of an intermediary area in Transylvania, between the Romanian and Hungarian forces, which was to extend the territory granted to the Romanian commandment, the new dividing line following the railway route Satu-Mare-Oradea-Arad. The Hungarian government led by Deneş Berinkei (Karolyi Mihaly had become Hungary's president) refused to abide by the decisions in Paris. On March 20th colonel Vix, the military representative of the Alleys in Budapest handed Count Karolyi the order to retrieve his troops from the new dividing line, with the scope of shielding the Romanian population in the Apuseni Mountains from the attacks of the Hungarian troops. But during the same evening events took an unexpected turn. Karolyi, who had anticipated such a situation, relinquished power in Hungary and the new government made up of socialists and communists was formed, presided by Garbai Şandor and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the person of Bela Kun (with the later holding power), which the following day proclaimed the Hungarian Republic of Councils. It was hoped that by means of an agreement between Kun and Lenin, Transylvania would be reincorporated into Hungary.

Denying the request of retrieving the Hungarian army beyond the neutral area eastward of the Arad-Oradea-Carei-Satu-Mare line left under the control of allied troops, and the demobilization of the army, the Bolshevik government led by Bela Kun rekindled the military hostilities towards Romania and Czechoslovakia counting also on the support of the Ukrainian Red Army, while at the same time declaring itself at war "with all its neighboring states from which it had territorial request".⁶ In the night between the 15th and the 16th of April 1919, Hungary's new government ordained its troops to attack the Romanian units on the Someş Valley, in Ciucea and Ţigani with the scope of reincorporating Transylvania. The commandment of the Romanian troops in Transylvania (general commander Gh. Mărdărescu, operational section chief lieutenant colonel Ion Antonescu) reacted promptly. The Romanian troops launched a counter offensive on April 16th, reaching the

course of the Tisa River along the entire length of the front on May 1st, thereby eliminating the possibility of contact between the Hungarian troops and the military units of the Ukraine and the Soviet Russia, attacking from the east. Taking advantage of the indecisiveness of the 4 leaders of the Peace Conference, the government in Budapest equipped and armed a new army, attacking Romania again in the night between the 19th and the 20th of July 1919, protruding towards the Tisa River for 50 kilometers towards the Romanian army, while at the same time attacking Czechoslovakia, benefiting also from Lenin's promise for military aid. This time the Supreme Council was alarmed and accepted military action against Hungary with the participation of Romanian, Serbian and French troops (which were stationed in the area). The Romania army was the only one who took action, countering the Hungarian offensive on July 24th and launching a counter-offensive. In the night between the 29th and the 30th of July, the Romanian troops crossed the Tisa and in spite of the request of the Conferences Supreme Council to halt the offensive, they entered Budapest on 3-4 August.

Under these circumstances, King Ferdinand and Queen Mary, accompanied by Princess Ileana and members of the government, undertook a visit to Transylvania in May, with the scope of "taking over the new territories, inspecting borders and ensuring the unification of the Romania people";⁷ This was meant to raise the spirits of the Romanian population who had suffered numerous hardships and to affirm the position of Romania at the Peace Conference.

The Romanian press in Transylvania, as well as memorial works, reflected with an abundance of details and highlighted the importance of the Royal Families visit, tracing its progression, along numerous towns and cities, from Brasov until the outposts of the Romanian army at Bichiș-Ciaba (in Hungary).

On May 22nd, the Sovereigns entered Transylvania through Predeal. The Royal Couple was accompanied by ministers Mihail Pherekyde (interim president of the Ministers Council), Al. Constantinescu (minister of Industry and Trade), Ion Gh. Duca (minister of Agriculture and Domains), general Văitoianu (minister of War), general Prezan (Chief of Staff), general Ballif, general Ioan Boeriu, Prince Barbu Știrbei (administrator of the Crown Domains), Ștefan Cicio Pop (member of the Ruling Council the Army and Public Safety), Vasile Goldiș (minister without portfolio in the Bucharest government), ministerial counselor M. Popovici and Sever Dan, representative of the press in the Old Kingdom (*Neamul Românesc*, *Viitorul, Dacia* – Nechifor Crainic, *Adevărul*, *Universul*, *Independence Roumaine*) and couple of newspapers (*Times*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Gazeta del Popolo*, *Le Temps*) and foreign agencies (*Havas*, *Reuter*) – in total around 23 journalists. Apart from the aforementioned, Queen Mary was accompanied by several ladies-in-waiting at the Royal Court.⁸

At the old border in Predeal, the Royal Family was welcomed by the townspeople and by the Brașov county prefect, Dr. Gheorghe Băiulescu⁹, who saluted "with boundless joy and teary eyes" the Romanian Sovereigns first entrance to the territory liberated from foreign rule¹⁰.

The triumphal entrance of the Sovereigns in Transylvania through Predeal was a reminder of the elating moments during the war for the unification of the nation. During the night of Saint Mary's day 1916 (14-15 August), the Romanian army crossed the Carpathians through the same point in order to free Transylvania. Two days later they had reached Brașov. Later on, under unfortunate circumstances, the same mountain pass would witness the exodus of thousands of refugees, who would spend two years wandering around. Băiulescu declared that he had been favor by fate now, as he had been in 1916, to be, in his quality of leader of the territory, the first to express the Romania's feelings of profound veneration, boundless love and sincere adherence to the Romanian dynasty, who completely identified with the interests and aspirations of the Romanian people.¹¹

Expressing his profound emotion caused by the manifestations of affection towards the royalty, the King met with prefect Băiulescu and Leo Bohățiel, director of the Transylvanian Railway Company, inquiring about the county's state, especially the sanitary one and the situation regarding food supplies. Accompanied by the two, the Sovereigns set out for Brașov.

Towards the evening, the royal train reached Brașov. "Endless cries of joy fill the air. People weep with joy and happiness." When the King stepped out from the train, the military band played the royal hymn in his honor. After the report offered by general Eremia Grigorescu, commander of the Brașov garrison and hero of the Mărășești battle, followed the troops inspection there were speeches by archpriest Vasile Saftu¹² and by the vice mayor of the town of Brașov, Fabritius. Archpriest Saftu declared that "the heavens had opened" with the arrival of the Sovereigns. "Our dear father, our beloved Mother, the ground you tread on until the Tisa, the Danube and the Dniester is holy Romanian ground, touched by the noble blood of our ancestors, parents and brothers." The King answered archpriest Saftu by means of word filled with love for Romania, expressing his boundless joy "in those holy moments" and extended his hand to him, a symbol of the promise "to defend you as my beloved sons". Vice mayor Fabritius spoke on behalf of the Saxon community, assuring His Majesty of the faith and devotion of the German population.¹³

Queen Mary was presented with flowers by the presidents of the "Romanian Women's Union" and of the "Red Cross". The bouquets were wrapped with ribbon featuring the colors of the Romanian flag and the words: "To Queen Mary, Empress of our hearts". After the Sovereigns had conversed with the attendees, the royal train set off amidst the cheers of the people,



to Oradea Mare. Everywhere, the stations the royal train passed were festively adorned and the Sovereigns were welcomed with sincere wishes of health and happiness.¹⁴

At Oradea Mare – a town where the Romanian troops had protruded on April 20th – the Sovereigns were expected, on May 23rd, by generals Gheorghe D. Mărdărescu (supreme commander of all the Transylvanian troops), Ștefan Holban (commander of the 6th Infantry Division), Scarlat Panaitescu and part of the members of the Ruling Council: Iuliu Maniu (president and owner of the Ministry of Internal Affairs), Aurel Lazăr (Justice), Aurel Vlad (Finances), Octavian Goga (without a portfolio), Romul Boilă (Ministry of Communications), Ioan Suci (organization and preparation of Security), the Greek-Catholic bishop Demetrie Radu, the Roman – Catholic bishop Nicolaus VI. Szechenyi and a significant number of the inhabitants of Bihor.

Queen Mary noted after the event:

“We arrived in Oradea Mare after a night’s journey, and I was awakened early by the sound of cheer. I went to the window in order to greet the peasants who were all in a state of frantic ecstasy. For them this is freedom after centuries of oppression, and we, Nando and myself, and not our army, are seen as the liberators”¹⁵.

Above the station flew two airplanes, recently captured from the Russian Bolsheviks. After stepping out of the train, the Royal Family inspected the Romanian troops. Iuliu Maniu delivered an emotional welcome speech. Visibly moved, the King thanked the attendees, declaring that “the unification gained by means of so many great and holy Romanian sacrifices – belongs from now on to eternity”. Furthermore, the Sovereign uttered beautiful

words about the manner in which the Romanian army had fulfilled its duty¹⁶. The prefect of Bihor county, Coriolan Pop, offered the Sovereign, as a sign of loyalty, the traditional bread and salt, assuring him of “the eternal gratitude of the Romanian people”. From the station the Sovereigns, accompanied by a triumphal procession, headed towards the Orthodox Cathedral. The city streets were “adorned with triumphal arches, flower gates and flags – and thousands of peasants had laid flowers, leaves, and branches all along the path they treaded.” The crowds “were weeping with joy, witnessing this unbelievable day of happiness and Romanian pride.” At the orthodox cathedral, and then at the unified one, *Te Deum* prayer was performed, as a sign of gratitude to God for “these days of great national celebration”.

After the service, the Royal Family watched the procession of troops and inhabitants of Bihor, the latter dressed in “the most picturesque traditional garments”. On this occasion, in acknowledgement of his courage on the battlefield, general Mărdărescu was awarded the Mihai Viteazul order, generals Holban and Panaitescu – the order of the Star of Romania, and general Constantinidi – the Great Cord of the Romanian Crown¹⁷. The newspapers declared that peasants coming from over two hundred communes had participated in the ethnographic procession, a total of two hundred thousand people. A reception followed hosted by the Greek Catholic bishop’s palace, attended by members of the Ruling Council, representatives of the clergy, of the authorities, the prefects of the counties of Bihor, Arad, Cenad, Bichiș, with the Roman – Catholic bishop Szechenyi in attendance, as well as educational and administrative Hungarian authorities.¹⁸

Notes

1. See V.V. Tilea, *Acțiunea diplomatică a României. Noiembrie 1919 – martie 1920* (Sibiu: Tipografia Poporului, 1925), 14 – 15.
2. Gheorghe Brătianu, *Acțiunea politică și militară a României în 1919. În lumina corespondenței diplomatice a lui I.I.C. Brătianu* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1939), 35–36.
3. Biblioteca Națională a României, fond *Saint-Georges* [Romania’s National Library, *Saint-Georges* collection], file no. 497, memorandum by Take Ionescu regarding the foundation of the Small Entente. See Eliza Campus, *Din politica externă a României (1913–1947)* (Bucharest: Editura Politica, 1980), 190.
4. Gh. Brătianu, *Acțiunea politică și militară*, 35–36.
5. See Al. Dușu, Ctin. Botoran, M. Retegan, *Transilvania în evoluția relațiilor româno-ungare. O abordare mai puțin cunoscută* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1993), 36.
6. Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, fond *Paris* [MAE, Paris collection], file 54.
7. Nicolae Iorga, “Baza monarhiei românești”, article published in *Neamul Românesc* and reprinted in *Patria*, I, 98, June 18, 1919, “Însemnătatea călătoriei Familiei Regale la noi,” 1.
8. “Regele și regina în Ardeal”, *Unirea Poporului* (popular issue of *Unirii*) XIX, no. 18, May 29, 1919, 7; *Patria* I, no. 78, May 23, 1919, 2.
9. He was the first Romanian mayor of the city of Brașov, holding this position in the period from 29.08.1916 – 08.10.1916.
10. “Regele și regina în Ardeal”, *Unirea Poporului*, 7.
11. „Primirea făcută MM. LL. Regele și Regina”, *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, 80, no. 102, May 24th 1919, 1.
12. Priest Dr. Vasile Saftu (1863–1922), professor at the Sibiu theological seminar (1892–1895), is elected archpriest of Brasov in 1911.

- He was the main organizer of the events in Braşov dedicated to the achievement of the Act on the 1st of December 1918.
13. „Suveranii în Ardeal”, *Unirea* (Blaj), no. 109 from May 27th 1919, 2; „Regele și regina în Ardeal”, *Unirea Poporului*, May 29th 1919.
 14. „Suveranii în Ardeal”, 2.
 15. Maria, regina României, *Însemnări zilnice* (Bucharest, Historia Press, 2006), 185.
 16. „Vorbirile Regelui în Ardeal”, *Patria*, no. 85 from the 1st of June 1.
 17. „Suveranii în Ardeal”, *Unirea* (Blaj), May 27th 1919, 2; „Regele și regina în Ardeal”, *Unirea Poporului*, May 29th 1919, 7.
 18. *Neamul Românesc*, May 24th 1919, 2.

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