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Romania's Great Union and the Anti-Communist Discourse[1]

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Abstract. This text re-constructs the evolution of anticommunist ideas and practices during the period of Romania's 'great union', while it also sketches the international context that enabled this evolution. It is a genealogical discourse analysis that serves for a better understanding of Romania's present political and social climate. The political, diplomatic and military process of crafting 'Greater Romania' between 1918 and 1919 rested fundamentally on the anticommunist discourse. This discourse functioned as a pretext for the armed interventions in the desired territories. It also helped to securitize and pacify these three territories. The Romanian army entered Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania with the goal of protecting the local population against Bolshevik disorders and 'anarchy'. The anticommunist discourse evolved from the panic generated by retreating Russian soldiers and the 'anarchy' they created towards the fear of contagion with the revolutionary 'psychosis'. The answer to the communist threat was invariably violent and militaristic in nature. The ideas and issues raised by the communists were never legitimized as a political project but as a crime and a pathology that could destroy society. In this context, what we now refer to as 'the Great Union' was largely the substitution of social and economic projects with the hegemonic narrative of anti-communism.

Keywords: *anti-communism; history of Romania; First World War; security; Transylvania; discourse analysis.*

Introduction

This text argues that Romania's annexation of territories between 1918 and 1919 was legitimized by anti-communism.[2] The military interventions in Bessarabia,

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Bukovina, and Transylvania were motivated by the need to eliminate Bolshevism. This was articulated as a threat to the external and internal security of the Romanian state. The anti-communist discourse evolved from the panic generated by retreating Russian soldiers and the 'anarchy' they created towards the fear of contagion with the revolutionary 'psychosis'. The answer to the communist threat was invariably violent and militaristic in nature. The ideas and issues raised by the communists were never legitimized as a political project but as a crime and a pathology that could destroy society. In this context, what we now refer to as 'the Great Union' was largely the substitution of social and economic projects with the hegemonic narrative of anti-communism.

In 2019, Romania's politics is overwhelmingly dictated by anti-communism. The neo-liberal model that underpins the country's economy is constructed in stark opposition to Romania's communist past (Mireanu 2019a). The new middle class also defines itself in opposition to communism. Any anachronistic, corrupt, or degenerate trait of the society is seen as pertaining to the communist era (Simionca 2012: 143). Conversely, the lower strata of Romania's society – the poor, the homeless, the Roma people, etc. – are labelled as socially assisted and therefore tributary to the communist patterns of state dependence. The Social Democratic Party is demonized as the heir of Romania's Communist Party. Despite the fact that most of its policies benefit the entrepreneurial class, there have been consistent country-wide protests against this party. Most protesters label it as 'the red plague' (Atanasoski–McElroy 2018: 282). As a corollary, during the past three decades, any left-wing political project in Romania had at some point to defend itself against the accusation that it is 'spreading communism'.

As such, I consider it crucial to track the anti-communist discourse back to its roots. The origins of this discourse in Romanian politics stretch back as far as 1917 and are closely related to the very formation of the modern Romanian state. Although I perform this task here as a historical excavation, I do not claim this text to be a purely historical tract. Rather, it is a genealogical discourse analysis that ultimately serves for a better understanding of Romania's present political and social climate. This genealogical enterprise re-constitutes the evolution of anti-communist ideas and practices during the period of Romania's 'great union', while it also sketches the international context that enabled this evolution.

Having said this, the paper proceeds as follows: first, I will present Romania's military interventions in Bessarabia and Bukovina, and I will show how anti-communism served to legitimize these interventions in the name of preserving security. Secondly, I will show how anti-communist energies turned to domestic affairs as Romania was considered to be under a dramatic revolutionary threat towards the end of 1918. Thirdly, I will dwell upon the annexation of Transylvania to show how anti-communism helped Romanian politicians craft a 'crusade' against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in order to secure the province and the

western border. Fourthly, I will present the international context and how anti-communism played a major part in the Paris Peace negotiations of 1919 that led to the official recognition of Romania's enlarged borders. I will also highlight the crucial role of Prime Minister Brătianu in these negotiations and the ways in which he used the anti-communist discourse to his own advantage. The paper's conclusion will summarize the evolution and the various functions of the anti-communist discourse in the crafting of Romania's 'great union'.

I. Anti-Communism and the Great Union

I.1. Bessarabia: Saving Appearances and Appeasing the Big Landowners

Bessarabia became an autonomous republic within the Russian Federative Republic in December 1917. In the winter of 1917–1918, the parliament (*Sfatul Țării*)[3] asked the Romanian army in three distinct instances to intervene in the newly established state in order to maintain peace and order and to hold back the 'anarchy' that the retreating Bolshevik Russian troops were allegedly causing. It was not only the military that had brought Bolshevism to Bessarabia but also a series of local groups that were in direct connection with Lenin's government. These groups were opposed to the increasingly close connection between *Sfatul Țării* and Romania. This tension escalated especially after the Russian troops reached Chişinău upon being chased out of the provisional Romanian capital, Iaşi, in December 1917 (van Meurs 1994: 62).

On 26 January 1918, a first Romanian division, under General Ernest Broşteanu's command, entered Chişinău (Muşat–Ardeleanu 1983: 562). In his memoirs, Duca[4] acknowledged the need at the time to justify this military intervention. This was done through a manifesto that would 'save appearances' and would serve as a guarantee for the local population that the Romanian army was not there to annex territories or to 'take the land and the fruits of the revolution away from the population' (Duca 1982: 49–50). In this sense, the Romanian military presence in Bessarabia has been discursively articulated as a peacekeeping mission, and it was aimed strictly against the 'anarchy' caused by the Bolshevists.

The following weeks saw continuous fighting between the Romanian and the Bolshevist armies. In March 1918, Romanian Prime Minister Averescu[5] signed

3 *Sfatul Țării* was the first legislative body of the autonomous Republic of Bessarabia, established in the last weeks of 1917.

4 Ion Gheorghe Duca (1879–1933) was a Romanian politician, descendant of an aristocratic family, and member of the Liberal Party. He was assassinated by the Iron Guard while serving as Prime Minister.

5 Following his military success in opposing German advance in the fall of 1917, Marshal Alexandru Averescu gained a good deal of popularity and served as Prime Minister between 29

an agreement with the Odessa-based Rumcherod, led by Cristian Rakovski,[6] regarding the end of hostilities and the withdrawal of the Romanian army from Bessarabia (van Meurs 1994: 67–68). However, the international scene had changed in the meantime as Russia and the Central Powers had signed the peace accord at Brest-Litovsk,[7] and Romania was negotiating the Peace Treaty of Bucharest. The Romanian government was granted permission by the Central Powers to annex Bessarabia in exchange for the loss of Dobrogea. Under these conditions, the Romanian troops remained in Bessarabia, and this officially became Romanian territory on 27 March 1918, only weeks after the Averescu–Rakovsky deal.

It is important to highlight that this first territorial victory of Romania was disputed not only by Lenin's government but also by the local Bessarabian population. Contrary to what the official Romanian propaganda claims, it was not only Russian soldiers that caused the 'anarchy' of those days. The local peasants actively resisted the Romanian army and its annexation (van Meurs 1994: 65). The proclamation of Bessarabia's independence in December 1917 envisioned an especially radical political programme, which included land reform through the expropriation of great landowners, universal suffrage, etc. It is noteworthy that none of these reforms were adopted at that time in the Romanian Kingdom. Therefore, the imposition of the Romanian establishment seemed to be a giant leap backward and a political deception. 'The ethnic Moldavian peasants […] were well aware that a Romanian military intervention could turn the socio-economic revolution in Bessarabia into a Romanian nationalist revolution' (van Meurs 1994: 65–66). Indeed, a good dosage of nationalist ideology was needed to legitimize this establishment. It is well known that the great landowners in particular asked with enthusiasm and urgency for the 'union' with Romania. They felt threatened by the so-called 'bolshevist' measures enacted by *Sfatul Țării*, which started to expropriate land and was therefore endangering the estates of the aristocracy.[8]

January and 4 March 1918.

6 Cristian Rakovski was one of the most controversial personalities in the communist movement of the first part of the 20th century. Born in Bulgaria, he was expelled from Romania in 1907, returned a few years later, and then travelled to Russia, where he joined the Bolsheviks. He was a staunch opposer of Bessarabia's annexation to Romania.

7 The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was signed on 3 March 1918, and it left Romania to fight alone on the Eastern Front against the Central Powers.

8 See *Memoriul Uniunii marilor proprietari din Basarabia, înaintat guvernului român din 10 martie 1918*; available at: http://centenarulromaniei.ro/memoriul-uniunii-marilor-proprietari-din-basarabia-asupra-starii-in-basarabia-inaintat-guvernului-roman-din-10-martie-1918/ (in Romanian). See also: Marghiloman 1927, III: 416, 457.

I.2. A Province 'Steeped in Bolshevism'

At first, Romania's political élite did not show particular excitement over the annexation of Bessarabia.[9] A good part of Romania's territory was under the occupation of the Central Powers, and the threat of a new military campaign was looming over the Iaşi government. Mackensen was certain that his army could occupy the rest of Romania in a matter of weeks. In May 1918, the Romanian government was forced to sign the Bucharest Peace Treaty. Considered by most Romanian historians as a catastrophic national humiliation, this Treaty was in many respects generous for the Romanian government. It guaranteed the evacuation of Bucharest and Wallachia, and it also re-asserted King Ferdinand's rule, which was severely threatened after he had declared war on his German uncle in 1916.[10] Dobrogea was promised to Bulgaria as a compensation for Romania's annexation of the Cadrilater region following its pointless military intervention in the Second Balkan War of 1913.[11] Despite it being extremely severe and practically turning Romania into a German colony, the Bucharest Treaty demonstrated a certain largesse on behalf of the Central Powers towards the Romanian government that had intentionally generated enmity through its actions. The Central Powers could have opted not to have a peace treaty altogether since they had the military capacity to occupy all of Romania in 4–6 weeks (Marghiloman 1927, III: 366).

As a supplement to this generosity, and, of course, out of clear strategic and geopolitical interests, the Central Powers allowed the humiliated Romanian government to annex Bessarabia. Therefore, following the Bucharest Peace Treaty, Romania ended the war with a larger territory than it had had upon entering it. In spite of all this, the Romanian political élite were utterly disappointed. The Bucharest Treaty was considered to be an embarrassment. Prime Minister Marghiloman, who managed to gain a handful of concessions from the Central Powers, including Bessarabia, was labelled a national traitor, and his political career was dead and buried after 1918. In this context, when King Ferdinand met Czernin[12] in Răcăciuni, he lamented the severe peace conditions imposed on the country and declared that the loss of Dobrogea could suffocate Romania and

9 For the marginal position occupied by Bessarabia in the nationalist imaginary of the time, see: Boia 2014: 64–65.

10 Following the war declaration, Ferdinand was expelled from the Hohenzollern family to which Kaiser Wilhelm II also belonged.

11 The Second Balkan war of 1913 also ended with a peace signed in Bucharest. However, at that time, Romania saw itself as a rising regional power and demanded South Dobrogea from Bulgaria despite that territory had never had any Romanian ethnic majority.

12 Ottokar Czernin was the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister between 1916 and 1918. The twenty-minute private meeting between him and the Romanian King at Răcăciuni in February 1918 was requested by the Austro-Hungarian side as a way to begin negotiations for the peace treaty.

that gaining Bessarabia could not constitute consolation for all this. As Czernin recalls, 'the King replied that Bessarabia was nothing to him, that it was steeped in Bolshevism' (Czernin 1919: 266). Duca was also alarmed at the time since a good deal of Bessarabians were 'almost socialists' and were put off by the Romanian government's conservatory stance (Duca 1982: 90–91, 155).

I.3. Bukovina: Romanian Peacekeeping, Take Two

The situation of the former Habsburg province of Bukovina is strikingly similar to Bessarabia. In November 1918, Prime Minister Marghiloman issued an order to General Iacob Zadik to cross the neutral line north of Bessarabia and enter Bukovina. This order came as a result of a rebellion in a regiment from Lipcani, where soldiers 'drove out their officers, who were almost all Romanians' (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 113–114).[13] The gendarmeries of Suceava, Gura Humorului, and Ițcani 'begged' for the protection of the Romanian troops 'against the Bolsheviks, who plunder' (Marghiloman, 1927, IV: 114). In a situation comparable to the Bessarabian case, the Romanian Government saw the Bolsheviks as a threat to the domestic peace of the region. The need to preserve this peace served as an alibi for Romania's armed intervention. Just like Broşteanu had done in Bessarabia earlier, Zadik also issued a 'proclamation' in order to justify the invasion of Bukovina's territory (Muşat–Ardeleanu 1983: 618). Once the military occupied this territory, the declaration of the 'union' with Romania followed unhampered and cemented Bucharest's authority in the province (van Meurs 1994: 70). The nationalist narrative quickly silenced any traces of social or economic projects.

During these first two instances of Romanian anti-communism in 1918, the government's attitude towards the communist threat was purely military. It sought to assert and enforce its authority over the new territories. Communism was seen as an external threat that endangered mostly the ruling classes. First of all, the communists were republicans. This was a direct threat to the Romanian dynasty, rattled as it already was by Berlin's accusations of treason (Argetoianu 1993: 65). Secondly, communism caused the abolition of military hierarchies in Russia's army, which led to soldiers being unpredictably violent and unruly. Initially, this was solely a public order issue. The so-called 'anarchy' generated by the Bolshevists was not seen as an ideological problem but merely as a perpetual turmoil, a belligerent state of things that could worsen Romania's situation during its occupation by the Central Powers (Argetoianu 1993: 64). Thirdly, anti-communism became a catalyst for improved relations with the former enemies during Marghiloman's government and his complaisant stance towards the Central Powers. The latter sought to render Romania an ally against Bolshevik Russia and also to gain Bucharest's support for transporting troops through Bessarabia for a

13 This citation and the following ones were translated from Romanian into English by the author.

planned attack against the Red Army. Marghiloman summed all this up when he noted: 'right now we have the same interests' (Marghiloman 1927, III: 356–357). Finally, anti-communism was also seen initially as a way for the ruling élite to reinforce its power against attempts at land reform that came from more or less revolutionary political forces such as in Bessarabia.

II. December 1918: 'A Wind of Bolshevism Is Sweeping through the Land'

Romania re-entered the war in the fall of 1918. In the context of this extension of war time, anti-communism became an internal strategy that served to silence the voices of discontent and to repress further those for whom the war only meant the stepping up of precarity, hunger, diseases, and daily violence. As Gerwarth and Horne (2012: 44) point out, for the winners of the war, Bolshevism threatened to undermine this victory by 'turning the world upside down' and attacking the established authority.

Thus, anti-communism received an ideological coating. The official discourse was increasingly about the 'contamination' of society with the Bolshevism brought in from Russia, Germany, or even Bulgaria (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 158; Argetoianu 1993: 63–64). Already in October, Marghiloman's government expressed fears that if it attacked Germany, then the latter would retaliate with 'a revolution in order to stop the mobilization' (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 90). In the midst of the general discontent brought by the increased precarization of daily life, King Ferdinand 'the Unifier' declared himself frightened by Bolshevism and asked the authorities to submit the returning soldiers to military hierarchies as soon as possible so that they would not rebel against their officers (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 106, 110, 185).

December, the same month during which the 'Great Union' was proclaimed, saw intense workers' protests in Bucharest.[14] The authorities were initially reluctant to intervene. However, on 13 December 1918, the police opened fire on a group of workers in the centre of the capital and beat up several other workers who were protesting in front of the Royal Palace (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 189–190).

The social conflicts of that period have been retrospectively retold as a scourge, a pathological element that hampered the natural evolution of the country towards the 'Great Union'. The fact that the population was unhappy with its deplorable living conditions was judged to be a result of foreign influences. These foreign influences were supposed to be tackled with violence, and certainly with the utmost degree of nationalist propaganda. Through the discourse of anti-

14 See: https://iasromania.wordpress.com/2013/04/29/cronologie-a-miscarii-sindicale-din-romania-de-la-inceputurile-ei-pana-in-1933/ (in Romanian).

communism, governments in Central and Eastern Europe stigmatized as 'foreign' any opposition that threatened the status quo (Gerwarth–Horne 2012: 51).

Duca spoke of a 'wind of bolshevism' that swept through the country. This bolshevism was not seen in connection with legitimate antagonisms between oppressed and oppressors, based on political and social issues; instead, it was discursively articulated as a 'psychosis' (Duca 1982: 160). Blinded and rendered paranoid by his privileged status as a boyar, Duca saw the influence of Russia, and especially that of Cristian Rakovski, in this psychosis (Duca 1982: 155, 159; Spector 1995: 143). The latter was a Romanian citizen and led the Romanian socialist movement in the first decade of the century. After he had been banished from Romania, he led, in turn, the communists from Odessa and Kiev. During this time, he constantly proclaimed his love for the Romanian people but not for its reactionary ruling élite (Duca 1982: 46).[15]

III. Transylvania: The Romanian Crusade against Béla Kun

The current nationalist mythology tells the story of the 'Great Union' as a succession of 'national assemblies' that, in an exercise of direct democracy, unanimously decided to join the motherland (Mireanu 2019b). The naiveté of such a narrative, however, it is in an astounding dissonance with the ways in which politics was, and still is, practised in capitalism. Anyone who imagines that the masses, or 'the people' had any audible voice in the era of Brătianu and of those who opened fire on protesters in 1907 and 1918 lacks all historical sense. The most telling counter-example of this narrative is the annexation of Transylvania, which is celebrated every year as the consummation of the 'Great Union'. Not only was the act of 1 December almost useless from a diplomatic and political point of view – being at most a symbolic gesture –, but the completion of Romania's territorial enlargement took at least one more year after that event. It required endless negotiations, blackmail, diplomatic and military interventions, resignations, and scandal for Bucharest to become the capital of Transylvania and the Romanian Western border to look the way it does today (Spector 1995, Mireanu 2019b).[16]

To begin with, the 'national assembly' of 1 December 1918 did not guarantee the Romanian Government any legal claim to Transylvania. The province was

15 See also: https://jurnalul.antena3.ro/scinteia/istoria-comunismului/strigat-revolutionar-impotriva-romaniei-58085.html (in Romanian).

16 It is also well known that for the Romanian élite in Transylvania the union with Romania had not always appeared as the preferred option, and in 1918 there were a number of alternative projects and ideas regarding the future of the province (Boia 2014: 78–84, Abrudeanu 1930).

de jure still part of Hungary, as stipulated in a treaty signed two weeks prior to the 'Union Act' of Alba Iulia. This treaty was the Belgrade Armistice signed by Hungary on 13 November with the Allied Powers. Since formally Romania was at that point bound by the Bucharest Peace Treaty, and was therefore in a state of peace with the enemy, it was not invited to negotiate and sign at Belgrade. The Armistice managed the newly created Republic of Hungary's exit from the War.[17] It had a purely military role, and in no way did it signify a loss of Hungarian territory. At most, it stipulated that Hungary should withdraw its troops west of Mureş River (Cartledge 2011: 304). Yet, at the same time, it guaranteed Budapest that the Hungarian police and administration would remain in place in the evacuated territories, as elsewhere in Transylvania (Krizman 1970: 85–86). It is noteworthy that even the Romanian politicians who signed the Union Treaty of 1 December recognized that any Romanian borders and Transylvanian territories would have to be officially granted by a subsequent peace conference (Spector 1995: 87). Therefore, when the Romanian army crossed the Carpathians into Transylvanian territory and broke the Belgrade Armistice demarcation line on 14 December, both Hungarian and Allied statesmen protested and saw it as a breach of international law (Hitchins 2011: 325, Spector 1995: 96).

In order to justify what some quarters saw as an abusive act, the Romanian politicians and generals brought the anti-communist narrative into play once again. As early as November, General Coandă argued that Transylvania 'is full of Bolshevism and we would be guilty if we remained indifferent' (qtd in Torrey 1988a: 281). At the same time, the Romanian National Council in Transylvania requested the Romanian government for military aid against Bolshevism (Torrey 1988b: 301). Once this aid came, and the Romanian army crossed the mountains, its commanders reported that Hungarian socialists were spreading revolutionary ideas (Torrey 1988b: 304). The army arrested the Hungarian commissioner for Transylvania, István Apáthy, based in Cluj, and the charges brought against him included 'the dissemination of Bolshevik tracts' (Torrey 1988b: 305).[18] To this, we must add the numerous strikes operated by miners, railroad and telegraph workers in December 1918 and the following months. These work stoppages were brutally repressed by the Romanian army, which saw them as yet another sign of Hungary's communist propaganda in Transylvania (Torrey 1988b: 305).

17 The Hungarian Republic was declared on 31 October 1918 (and formally on 16 November) and was led by a group of people who gravitated towards Count Mihály Károlyi. It is noteworthy that in their political programme, publicized on 25 October, the Hungarian National Council declared the repudiation of the Bucharest Peace Treaty that had subdued Romania a few months prior (Dent 2018: 8).

18 Doctor István Apáthy (1863–1922) was also accused of facilitating the so-called Székely Division's military attacks on the Romanian army in mid-January. He was taken to Sibiu and imprisoned for one year. See also: *Românul*, 16 January 1919, p. 2; available at: http://dspace.bcucluj.ro/jspui/handle/123456789/16539 (in Romanian).

The Hungarian Government, however, decided on a pacifist approach to its foreign policy towards Romania. Led by Count Mihály Károlyi since the Aster Revolution of October 1918, this centre-left government was strongly pro-Entente and placed its hopes for territorial integrity in the outcomes of a future peace conference (Nagy 1971: 122). These hopes were permanently shattered on 20 March, when French Colonel Vix delivered the Supreme Council's decision to offer Transylvania to the Romanians (Cartledge 2011: 307). Subsequently, Károlyi resigned, and a coalition of Social Democrats and Communists led by Béla Kun took over the government (Hajdu 1979: 12–15).

This government was divided over its foreign policy stance. On the one hand, most Social Democrats wanted Hungary to retain its borders and, if necessary, take up arms against Romania and Czechoslovakia in order to defend the national interest. There were enough nationalist voices in the Hungarian left to back up this line (Hitchins 1983: 196, Tőkés 1967: 183). On the other hand, the communists were more internationalists in their views and opted for a sustained political effort towards the recognition of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and its internal consolidation. Complementarily, the communists sought the eventual expansion of the proletarian revolution to other countries – a mechanism which they hoped would facilitate their foreign policy as nationalist solidarities would be replaced by workers' solidarity (Low 1971: 138–139, Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 184).

As commissary for foreign policy, Béla Kun had to balance these two currents. Initially, on 27 March 1919, he explicitly advocated international revolution as a way to ensure the survival of Hungary's Soviet regime (Nagy 1971: 125). Faced with General Smuts' mission to Budapest in April, Kun proclaimed that Soviet Hungary does not base its foreign policy on territorial integrity. At the same time, he warned against 'imperialistic occupation' by Allied forces – including Romania – as a means to solve territorial issues (Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 179). This internationalist stance placed Kun at odds with the Social Democrats, who requested martial mobilization to stop the Romanian advance (Nagy 1971: 132, Hajdu 1979: 106).

The new Hungarian Red army was born in a spirit of nationalism (Dent 2018: 156, Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 171). Its chief commander was Aurel Stromfeld, a senior Austro-Hungarian officer whose main goal was to prevent the dismemberment of his country (Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 209, Cartledge 2009: 77). When in June 1919 Kun insisted on the creation of the independent Slovak Soviet Republic and then withdrew the Hungarian army from what was essentially Hungarian territory, Stromfeld resigned, and many officers felt betrayed by the communists (Cartledge 2009: 78).

The discourse regarding the Bolshevik nature of the Hungarian military effort against Romania in the spring and summer of 1919 is a distorted view on the complex politics of the Budapest government. There was never a 'communist consensus' regarding foreign policy in this government. Rather, there was a

constant struggle between nationalism and internationalism as opposite policies (Tőkés 1967: 188–192). Béla Kun had to make concessions in order to maintain the balance of the governing coalition. These concessions meant attacking Romania and Czechoslovakia in order to satisfy the national and nationalist interests dominant in the Hungarian political scene at the time. Kun embraced nationalism instrumentally in order to maintain his alliance with the Social Democrats.

On the other hand, the Romanian Government headed by Brătianu could easily label Hungary's territorial claims as a 'communist threat' and thus legitimize an attack on Budapest. As Spector sums up the matter, 'the communist seizure of power threatened to block Romania's acquisition of territory. A Romanian crusade against Magyar Bolshevism could be coupled with a land-grab similar to the occupation and subsequent annexation of Bessarabia' (Spector 1995: 139). The Allies were already growing impatient with what they saw to be Brătianu's excessive territorial demands. An attack on a communist threat thus served Romania's strategic interests perfectly. This was very much so, especially since Brătianu and a number of French generals managed to couple these interests together with the Allies' (and mostly French) strategy against Bolshevik Russia.

This strategy concerned mostly the occupation of Odessa and Crimea, which was within the French sphere of influence in the East (Spector 1995: 158, ftn. 29). The French 'Army of the Danube' landed in Odessa in December 1918. Romanian troops, which were quite poorly equipped for fighting, joined the French and left for Odessa already in January 1919 (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 211). By February, the Bolsheviks were inflicting heavy damage on the Allies, and General Berthelot was sent to Odessa, followed in March by d'Esperey (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 233; Torrey 1988a: 286). Soon enough, the military disaster in Crimea was imminent. The French troops were highly susceptible to Bolshevik propaganda, which played on their exhaustion with the war (Torrey 1988a: 285). Marghiloman estimated that three-quarters of the French troops had already been 'Bolshevized' by the end of March (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 289).

In this context, Berthelot picked up on the idea of a *cordon sanitaire* – a defensive front from the Baltic to the Black Sea (Torrey 1988a: 288). The French strategy of armed offensive did not prove itself to be successful and was thus replaced by this 'sanitary belt' that would contain communism and not allow it to spread out of Russia (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 284). Odessa was abandoned exactly when Béla Kun came to power. Therefore, the attack on Hungary in mid-April was part of the wider French–Romanian strategy in the region (Leuştean 2018: 54). The anti-communist campaign in Hungary was a means to keep Russia from gaining a foothold in the area and to keep the French influence intact after the Odessa disaster.[19]

19 The Allies saw Soviet Hungary as an outpost of Russian Bolshevism in Central Europe (Low 1971: 138).

The French concept of *cordon sanitaire* was a strategic as well as an ideological discourse. It implied the containment and ultimate destruction of communism in all the places where it sprouted. It ultimately rested on a complex articulation of fear, where communism became a threat to the security and identity of the whole European establishment. Therefore, anti-communism became one of the main drivers of the Paris Peace Conference. In the next section, I will show how this discourse operated at the level of the Peace Conference and how Romania benefitted from it.

IV. Anti-Communism at the Paris Peace Conference

IV.1. The Pan-European Bolshevik Panic

In the spring of 1919, during the Paris Peace Conference, the need to wipe out communism from Europe became more than a question of strategy. In March 1919, British Prime Minister Lloyd-George, along with a number of his advisers, drafted a 'memorandum' that contained 'some considerations' addressed to the Paris Peace Conference. In this note, he refers to Bolshevism as 'the new peril' threatening Europe and the world. His analysis succinctly sums up the general feeling of dread pervading the European élite at the time:

> There is a deep sense not only of discontent but of anger and revolt amongst the workmen against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other. […] Bolshevik imperialism does not merely menace the States on Russia's borders. It threatens the whole of Asia, and it is as near to America as it is to France. (Lloyd George, 1938: 407, 412)

In the same way, President Wilson's secretary reported that 'the poison of Bolshevism was accepted because it is a protest against the way in which the world has worked' (Dutt 1936: 47).

As negotiations were under way in Paris, the 'Great Four' were busy organizing the offensive against Russia and subsequently against Hungary. In February 1919, Marshall Foch crafted a full-scale 'crusade' against communism (Thompson 1967: 203, Lloyd George 1938: 392). As Spector mentions, Foch 'proposed to employ Polish, Czech, Finnish, Greek, White Russian, Serbian and Romanian troops to eradicate all traces of Bolshevik sympathy in East Central Europe and to advance against Russia' (Spector 1995: 134). It is noteworthy that Foch's plan contained wording that labelled communism as a pathogen that needed to be contained and

eliminated lest it 'infects' other areas (Low 1971: 140). This vision is identical to Berthelot's subsequent concept of the *cordon sanitaire* that I mentioned earlier.

Thus, anti-communism had ultimately reached the level of a well-structured ideology. As two scholars put it, 'Bolshevism stood for the negation of ordered society and civilization – and as such was personified by the figure of death or criminality' (Gerwarth–Horne 2012: 46). The Council started to take many decisions dictated by the Bolshevik threat (Spector 1995: 132). As I have already mentioned, France was engaged in unsuccessful heavy fighting against the Red Army in Odessa (Spector 1995: 158, note 29). The French soldiers stationed in the Ukrainian port became 'mined' with the Bolshevik 'pathogen' (Marghiloman 1927, IV: 314, 289) and began to riot against their superiors. Moreover, there were thousands of Russian soldiers in France who, even if they were not necessarily bolshevized, were constantly rioting and engaging in violence (Dillon 1920: ch. XII).

In the context of post-war famine, of endless strikes,[20] of the French soldiers' revolt in Odessa, and especially of the declaration of communist republics in Bavaria and Hungary, the leaders of the Entente declared communism as their main enemy (Carr 1953: 128–129). The post-war world appeared to be 'turned upside-down'. As Dutt argued, the Allies' continued war enterprises in 1919 were paralysed by 'revolt after revolt in the invading armies as well as in the forces at home, strikes and unrest in the imperial countries, refusals of the dockers and transport workers to handle munitions and supplies for the counter-revolutionary armies' (Dutt 1936: 48). Any form of social unrest, whether anarchist, feminist, working class, or military insubordination, was seen as 'Bolshevism' (Gerwarth–Horne 2012: 44).

In another instance of anti-communist fear, 'White' counter-revolutionary movements began to sprout all across Europe. Many former officers from the German and Austro-Hungarian armies described their experiences of returning home from the front in 1918 and 1919. This 'home' was for them 'an entirely hostile world of communist upheaval' marked by 'the collapse of military hierarchies and political order' (Gerwarth 2008: 187). Many European cities were in a state of revolt against the old order embodied mostly by the aristocracy. It is no wonder then that a number of these returning officers, who were traditionally extracted from the martial nobility, found themselves 'humiliated' and 'stripped of their military decorations' by mobs of communist-inspired folk (Gerwarth 2008: 188). Faced with this threat to their social privileges, many aristocrats became 'overrepresented in the counter-revolutionary movements of Central Europe (Gerwarth 2008: 189). Once in power, these movements enacted a series of authoritarian and extreme-right measures such as laws of exception and strengthening the police and the military against internal enemies. These measures resulted from the 'fear of revolution' (Gerwarth–Horne 2012: 43).

20 For a review of some of the social movements, strikes, and revolts of the first half of 1919 in the world, see: Dent 2018: 152–153.

IV.2. Brătianu at the Paris Peace Conference

Romania's prime minister and absolute leader, Ion I. C. Brătianu, made good use of the anti-communist card as well. At that time the most powerful man in Romania, he was an arrogant and cunning politician with an inexplicable ability to maximize his gains and, no matter what the situation was, to always land on his feet, as a winner. Brătianu supported what was at the time named 'neo-liberalism', which was an attempt to reform the old liberalism of 1848 with a number of 'national solidarity' reforms (Hitchins 2011: 41–2, Zeletin 2005: 189). These reforms implied a combination between thick nationalism and economic anti-Semitism (Zeletin 2005: 120, 124). The latter was quite fashionable in Romania in that period, and it determined the anti-communist attitudes of the Romanian neo-liberals. The narrative was that the Jews had brought communism to Romania (Duca 1982: 47), which is a trope that remains valid even to this day (Iancu 2012).

In Paris, Brătianu used anti-communism as a tool to reach his purposes, holding the threat of bolshevization over the heads of the Great Powers. In fact, he was not the only a 'small country' delegate to have abused this threat during the Peace Conference. Anti-communism became the favourite blackmail method of such countries. Anytime their delegates felt that their territorial claims were being ignored, they would invoke the threat of a communist revolution in their respective states (Dillon 1920: ch. XI).

Already in February 1919, Brătianu pointed out the 'necessity that the Romanian army occupy those territories that belong to Romania [Banat, Transylvania, and Dobrogea]; in all these Romanian territories some people are provoking nuisances and organizing bolshevism' (Iordache 1994: 421, Spector 1995: 132). Faced with what he saw as the Allies' dismissal of his territorial claims, Brătianu started threatening them with his own resignation, which would allegedly have led to anarchy and communism in Romania since nobody else would have been capable of running the country during those days (Spector 1995: 149, 169). Saint-Aulaire also saw the liberal government as the only force with the necessary political authority to provide 'the most solid base against Russian and Hungarian Bolshevism' (qtd in Iordache 1994: 429). Brătianu was not very original: some German politicians and generals shared the same catastrophist discourse, and they were threatening the Allies with domestic revolutionary chaos in case they imposed harsh peace terms on Germany (Gerwarth–Horne 2012: 44). To Lloyd-George, Brătianu explained how granting Romania's territorial claims would strengthen the king's and the government's authority and in turn prevent the 'common danger' of communism (Iordache 1994: 424). As Spector noticed regarding Bucharest's propaganda against Béla Kun's government, 'by stirring up panic about the Bolshevik terror, Brătianu could proclaim it his duty to the Allied

Powers to march on Budapest and oust the Kun regime. At the same time, he could annex the claimed territory' (Spector 1995: 142).

Brătianu and the Liberal Party required anti-communism to justify their nationalism, which was needed as a legitimizing factor for continuing military action in the context of the massive precarization of the population. Some historians see the occupation of Budapest as 'the ending of Romania's national war against the communist Hungarian government, which was opposing the freely expressed will of the Romanians in Transylvania' (Iordache 1994: 449). Only such an infusion of nationalism can explain why the population of Transylvania accepted Romania's authority. Some scholars of that time knew that, ever since the first years of the century, Romanian peasants in Transylvania had had a better life than those in the 'Old Kingdom' (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1910: 403–404). The liberal policies of territorial annexations were able to solve the internal problematic situation by 'satisfying the national sentiment that dominated other sentiments and inoculated the country against Bolshevism' (Iordache 1994: 429).

In terms of foreign policy, Brătianu's government was in a dire and embarrassing situation at the beginning of the Peace Conference. Romania could hardly be considered an allied country on the victors' side after having signed with the Central Powers an armistice that guaranteed territorial gains. Moreover, Brătianu's claims on the Banat region brought him into a dispute with the allied state of Serbia (Lloyd-George 1938: 953–955). By seeking to have the border extended as far West as the Danube, Brătianu's claims threatened Serbia's integrity and security, whose capital is on the river (Spector 1995: 102–104, 148). Overall, Brătianu's intransigency ran against any sense of diplomacy. By claiming the rivers Tisa and Danube as borders, Brătianu placed geopolitical interests above the Wilsonian principles of national self-determination (Spector 1995: 148). In this way, he stood against the dominant trend of the Conference.[21] Quite soon, he became the most disliked politician in Paris (Bonsal 2001: 204). Even Queen Mary's visit in the French capital failed to improve his reputation (Duca 1982: 184–185).

The Romanian Prime Minister needed the anti-communist crusade in Hungary to re-establish his position in the Conference and to have an upper hand in his territorial demands. Romania's military intervention against Béla Kun made the former a bastion of Western civilization in South-East Europe. In tune with Romania's classic nationalist discourse, which stated its prominent role as defender of Christianity, the anti-communist mission in Hungary served to compensate for the lack of respect that Brătianu imagined the Allies had towards his country's sacrifices during the Great War.

21 For the most comprehensive account of Brătianu's conduct and policies during the territorial negotiations in the Paris Peace Conference, see: Spector 1995. See, for example, pp. 150–151 for the Maramureş region and pp. 147–150 for Banat.

As a matter of fact, the armed intervention in Hungary was yet another ordeal for a badly equipped army, whose soldiers had not yet seen the land reforms promised before the war. Such an army could only be persuaded through nationalist and anti-communist propaganda to take part in yet another conflict.[22] Moreover, despite all the nationalist flaunting of Romania's historians,[23] Béla Kun's government did not need the Romanian army's invasion of Budapest to crumble as it had been dismantling for several days prior to that (Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 307). What the Romanian army did achieve, however, was to ensure its barbaric reputation through looting Budapest (Spector 1995: 218, Kaas–Lazarovics 1931: 308).[24] Moreover, the Romanian army paved the way for the anti-communist and anti-Semite White Terror in Hungary (Bodó 2004: 144, Bodó 2011: 147).

Conclusions: The Functions of Anti-Communism and the 'Great Union'

The political, diplomatic, and military process of crafting 'Greater Romania' between 1918 and 1919 rested fundamentally on the anti-communist discourse. This discourse had two functions. First, anti-communism functioned as a pretext for the armed interventions in the desired territories. It served as an 'invitation' to take military action against the Bolshevik threat. Secondly, anti-communism helped to secure and pacify these three territories. In Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania, the Romanian army entered with the goal of protecting the local population against Bolshevik disorders and 'anarchy'.

On an external level, anti-communism had three functions: first, it was a convergence factor between Romania and the Central Powers after the Bucharest Treaty. Secondly, it was a strategic factor for increasing territorial and political power during and after the Paris Peace Conference. Thirdly, it was the discourse through which Romania placed itself again in the constellation of civilized countries since it was in the avant-garde of a West-led crusade.

22 On the mobilization of the army at the end of 1918, see: Marghiloman 1927, IV: 133, 142, 157, 222.

23 For a review of Romanian historiography on the Romanian–Hungarian war of 1919, see Mireanu 2019b (in Romanian), and a longer (unpublished) version is also available here: https://ceu.academia.edu/ManuelMireanu.

24 For two detailed, opposed, and biased accounts of Romania's occupation of Budapest, see: Bandholtz 2000 and Clark 1932: 204–221. The first author served as the US representative to the Inter-Allied Supreme Command's Military Mission in Hungary during Romania's occupation; his account of this period illustrates numerous incidents between the Romanian army and the local Hungarian authorities. Bandholtz's book, which has never been translated into Romanian, bears the mark of his dissatisfaction with Romanian officers and politicians. Charles Clark, on the other hand, was more sympathetic to Romania and took the task of correcting what he saw as an unjust propaganda taken in the West against it. Bandholtz has a memorial statue in the centre of Budapest, while Clark became an honorary member of the Romanian Academy.

On an internal level, anti-communism served to criminalize any resistance to the establishment and any protest against social and economic conditions. It also served to pacify the discontent population, thus avoiding any civil confrontation between 'reds' and 'whites', such as those that were happening almost everywhere in post-war Europe (Gerwarth 2008). The fight against communism legitimated the political status quo and reinforced the authority of the Romanian monarchy, which was also undermined by numerous scandals at the time, and also that of Brătianu's autocratic rule, who had become known as the 'maker of the Union'. Moreover, on the internal level, anti-communism legitimated the nationalist discourse, according to which all revolutionary demands are brought in the country by 'foreigners' in order to destabilize the society. Such a discourse is present today as well when leftist projects are equated with 'outside' influences. By legitimizing nationalism, anti-communism served as a politics of equivalence between various antagonist groups. It thus cemented the 'union of all Romanians' around the national ideal and against communism. This union would have never happened without anti-communism.

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