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Those Who Must Not Be Remembered: The Romanian Germanophiles and Their Historiographical Posterity

Summary: In the aftermath of the Great War, following the victory of the Entente and the fulfilment of the national ideal, the former internal enemy — represented by all those who had sided with the Central Powers — was gradually erased from the Romanian public space and social memory, after initially serving as the scapegoat for almost all the misfortunes and shortcomings of those difficult years. Blamed and demonised for their opinions expressed before and after Romania's entry into the war, the intellectuals, politicians, journalists, and business owners generally known as 'Germanophiles' had to suffer the consequences for having chosen the wrong side in the war. Seen and despised as traitors to national interests, these Germanophiles were condemned by both public opinion and in historical writing. This text seeks to offer an overview of how Romanian historiography is understood to have dealt with this delicate issue, which emerged in the years of the Great War and had long-lasting effects.

Keywords: First World War, Romanian Kingdom, Germanophiles, Romanian historiography, public memory, posterity

The historiographical posterity of the Romanian Germanophiles is a very complex and delicate issue, with profound implications for the correct understanding of the general evolution of Romania during the years of the Great War and immediately after. For almost a century, mainly because of various ideological and political circumstances, it was practically impossible to approach it with the necessary objectivity and thoroughness. Following the realisation of the national ideal in 1918, the discourse

promoted by the victors in the public space was dominated by hatred and a desire for revenge against those who had betrayed Romanian national interests or collaborated with the occupiers. This rupture, which had emerged in Romanian society during the Great War, could only be healed through the exemplary punishment that these traitors — these friends of the Germans — had to suffer. Their voices should no longer have been heard; the reasons that had led them to act against the majority of the people were wrong and, as such, reprehensible in the eyes of their fellow countrymen and of history.

In certain moments, the desire for vengeance and the condemnation of those who had sided with the Central Powers resembled a veritable public and media lynching. The punishment of the traitors should have been drastic, particularly harsh, and capable of alleviating, at least partially, the suffering endured by the Romanians who remained under occupation, as well as the hardships of those who had been in Moldavia during the refuge. However, to the disappointment of some, the punitive action was incomplete, focusing only on those who had engaged in the Germanophile propaganda, particularly in the press, as illustrated by the notorious trial of journalists in 1919. Absent from the trial were those whom many would have preferred to see accused: the politicians. This had rather the opposite effect to that which the authorities had hoped for, with most of the press rallying to the defence of the accused.

Nevertheless, beyond the punishments imposed on some of the charged journalists, and beyond the arrests or public blaming of all Germanophiles, posterity would prove to be much harsher and more unfair in providing a correct and impartial analysis of their involvement in the troubled years of the Great War. Immediately after the end of the world conflict, Romanian society was deeply divided over the responsibilities for the war and to whom they were attributed.¹ Somewhat paradoxically, substantiating and presenting the victory, in which few still believed in the first months of 1918, proved very difficult.² Not only the gains, but also the terrible losses and destruction that the country had suffered needed to be justified. Explanations deemed acceptable to public opinion for leading the war were also required, especially in its first part, when two-thirds of the Romanian Kingdom had been occupied by the enemy. Credible arguments were needed to account for the manner in which a significant part of the country had been abandoned, for the poor equipping of the army in 1916, and for the inadequate and, at times, duplicitous handling of the national issue as a whole.

Within the tense context following the reinstatement of the Romanian administration in the occupied territories, the question of responsibilities proved to be a very difficult one, all the more so as, beyond the wartime rhetoric used by the Germanophiles

1 Kostaki L. 2020, 39.

2 Topor C.-L. 2020a, 23–24.

to blame the authorities who had taken refuge in Moldavia, there were real grievances about the way in which a part of the political and administrative elite had conducted themselves towards those they had abandoned under enemy occupation:

Those politically employed bureaucrats, sinecure-holders, false statesmen, whose courage had not sufficiently impelled them to face the enemy in the country, subsequently excelled in glorifying their «contribution» to the history that was happening before their eyes. At the end of the war, after a long lull, their voice miraculously revived. Many had taken their reins of power in the new Romania. They labelled themselves as «patriots» who had sacrificed themselves for the accomplishment of the great national ideal and claimed honours. Immediately after the end of the conflagration, these officials became some of the most vehement accusers. They were demanding an explanation for the decisions and behaviour of those who remained in the occupied territory, and were finding irregularities in the financial records. The semantics of the term «traitor» took on new nuances.³

Indeed, the post-war public space was dominated by the discourse of the victors. There was no place for the others who, by their own choice, had found themselves on the wrong side of history. They were deemed guilty not only for remaining in the enemy-occupied territory but also for not renouncing their opinions and convictions, even as the nation endured great suffering. Therefore, they could only be traitors and country sell-outs, enemies of the national ideal, even if, in their own way, they were still patriots and still Romanians — perhaps even more devoted Romanians than many of their former opponents. Considering these aspects, the historian Lucian Boia concluded that, after the war, ‘traitors do not deserve to be mentioned by name either’,⁴ a remark which also inspired the title of this paper.

With few and insignificant exceptions, the issue as such was fully reflected in the Romanian historical writing for almost a century, as previously mentioned. The Germanophiles were not to be remembered, only discredited and blamed for choosing the wrong side. Since the unfolding of the war had resulted in Romania emerging victorious and realising the unexpected fulfilment of the national ideal, Romania’s entry into the war in August 1916 could only be justified. The triumph of the Greater Romania project admitted no perspective other than that of the victors.

3 ‘Acei birocrați angajați politic, abonați la sinecure, falși bărbați de stat, pe care curajul nu îi îndemna să dea piept în țară cu dușmanul, s-au întrecut ulterior în glorificarea «contribuției» la istoria petrecută sub ochii lor. La sfârșitul războiului, după o lungă acalmie, vocea lor a renăscut miraculos. Mulți preluaseră frâiele puterii în noua Românie. Și-au lipit eticheta de «patrioți» care se jertfiseră pentru înfăptuirea marelui ideal național și pretindeau onoruri. Acei funcționari au devenit, imediat după încheierea conflagrației, printre cei mai vehemenți acuzatori. Cereau socoteală pentru deciziile și comportamentul celor rămași în teritoriul ocupat, găseau nereguli în registrele financiare. Semantica termenului de «trădător» prindea alte tușe’. Kostaki L. 2020, 41.

4 Boia L. 2017, 14. Romanian original: “Trădătorii nu merită să le fie pomenit nici numele”.

Several years after the war, Constantin Kirişescu published the first and probably the best-known historical synthesis in Romania regarding the Great War to the present day.⁵ Although containing a great deal of information, the book is in line with the general resentments towards the Germanophiles. Their leaders (C-tin Stere, Alexandru Marghiloman, Petre P. Carp, Virgil Arion and others) were treated without restraint and condemned for adhering to their Germanophile beliefs or for being bought with German funds. Moreover, trying to minimise the importance of the Germanophile trend, Kirişescu argued that ‘apart from the opportunists, whose most characteristic representative was the head of the Conservative Party, Alexandru Marghiloman, the Germanophile movement counted only a few sincere and even fanatical supporters’.⁶

In the aftermath of the Second World War, during the 1950s, under communist rule, the Romanian historiography was confronted with the anti-national approaches of the time, which condemned the First World War as a whole because of its imperialist character and its unfairness to participants on both sides. The supporters of the Central Powers and of the Entente were equally blamed, with communist historians of the period arguing that the only correct solution would have been the transformation of the imperialist war into a war against the bourgeoisie.⁷

Following this Stalinist and anti-Romanian phase came the so-called *national communist* period, and although it kept the idea of imperialist war, it emphasised the just and legitimate nature of Romania’s participation in the conflict. Nevertheless, in the works of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the Germanophile movement continued to be ignored, with only some of its leaders being mentioned without a proper analysis or presentation of their choices. Not even the authors of monographs dedicated to certain cultural personalities, with an obvious Germanophile background, provided a clear explanation of their opinions and the reasons that made them determined to maintain their convictions.⁸

After the revolutionary events in December 1989, Romanian historiography was freed from all official ideological constraints, and Romanian historians could finally elaborate and publish their works without fear of censorship. Nevertheless, at least in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, when dealing with the Great War, the involvement of Romania in the conflict, and the three Unions of 1918,⁹ many scholars preferred

5 Kirişescu C. 1989, the book had two editions during the interwar period (first edition, two volumes, 1922–1924; second edition, three volumes, 1925–1927) and a third edition in communist Romania in 1989 (two volumes).

6 Kirişescu C. 1989, 127.

7 Boia L. 2017, 15.

8 Zub Al. 1974; Bărcă G., Băcescu M. 1969; Vatamaniuc D. 1968.

9 27 March/ 9 April 1918 – the Union of Bessarabia with the Romanian Kingdom; 15/28 November 1918 – the Union of Bucovina with the Romanian Kingdom; 18 November/ 1 December 1918 – the Union of Transylvania with the Romanian Kingdom.

to maintain the general lines of the previous period, without paying proper attention to the need for an impartial reassessment of documents and historical facts.¹⁰ This situation is easily understandable if we consider that quite a number of them were also active before 1990, during the communist regime. Not even the official text, represented by the treatise on the history of the Romanians, published under the auspices of the Romanian Academy in 2003, opened the way for a much-needed re-evaluation.¹¹

Certain changes were noticeable in the works of an important historian like Florin Constantiniu during the 1990s.¹² However, it was not until 2009 that things really started to change in this regard. In that year, a book written by Lucian Boia was published, which was of direct relevance to the subject. Lucian Boia, a former professor at the University of Bucharest and arguably one of the most controversial contemporary Romanian historians, played a decisive role in the 'official' opening of the Germanophile dossier within Romanian historiography today. He did that by writing and publishing a very useful book, entitled *The Germanophiles: The Romanian Intellectual Elite in the Years of the First World War*. His analysis clearly proves that the Germanophile segment of Romanian society, although not very numerous, was not actually insignificant, as many other historians previously stated. The book provides very interesting insight into the individuals whose choices were directed towards the Central Powers. Lucian Boia also underlines that the red thread which connects all the dots for all Romanian Germanophiles, whether they were supporters of Germany or Austria-Hungary, and whether their feelings or convictions were genuine or not, was the fear of Russia, 'the enemy ally'¹³ which constantly provoked anxiety and worry among Romanians, especially after the Bessarabian episode in 1878.

In his book, Boia expressed the belief that 'from young historians one can finally expect a break away from the well-trodden paths of interpretations of the First World War'.¹⁴ Indeed, after this breaking point represented by the appearance of his book, the subject started to attract and to reveal its importance for those interested in correctly understanding Romania's involvement in the war and the political and military calculations of that time.

There is quite a growing number of historians and researchers who have begun to contribute to a better understanding of the subject concerning the Germanophiles, from various points of view. We can thus mention several works regarding the press history and the 1919 trial of Romanian journalists who collaborated with

10 Atanasiu V. 1997; Răcilă E. 2005.

11 Iordache A. 2003, 395–461.

12 Constantiniu F. 1997.

13 Monkevitz N.A., Vinogradski A.N. 2019. The book valorises the memoirs of the Russian generals Monkevitz and Vinogradski, published in French after the end of the Great War, in 1919 and 1926.

14 Boia L. 2017, 31.

the German occupation authorities,¹⁵ as well as political, social, administrative, institutional, and diplomatic history,¹⁶ propaganda, mentalities, and mutual perceptions of the enemies.¹⁷ And let us not forget the increasingly generous efforts dedicated to the (re)publishing of the correspondence, memoirs, and impressions of various military personnel and civilians from both sides who were involved in the Great War and had to deal with its harsh realities.¹⁸

In our opinion, considering all the aspects mentioned so far, a name that should be mentioned immediately after Lucian Boia is Claudiu-Lucian Topor, a historian and professor at the Faculty of History of 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University of Iași. His contributions and analyses were first directed towards the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913 and international relations at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Within the last decade and a half, his main focus has shifted towards military history, and during his research he began to acknowledge the importance of the Germanophile circles in Romania before and during the First World War. His latest books and articles benefit from thorough research of various archival collections in Romania and Germany, bringing to the forefront previously unknown documents and offering many interpretations that can be regarded as challenging for the official line of Romanian historiography.¹⁹ After all, one should understand that there is a clear need to contest this official discourse in order to take a step further and try to reveal the hidden and avoided realities of a matter such as the one concerning the Romanian Germanophiles:

Historical justice is very relative and depends less on the past than on the point of view of the present. At the end of the First World War, justice was proclaimed by those who had spoken out in favour of action against the Central Powers; the opponents of this solution were regarded as misguided, if not traitors.²⁰

In conclusion, one should say that this brief presentation on the posterity of the Romanian Germanophiles is intended to be an invitation to reflect upon the instrumentalisation of historical writing and the necessity of correctly analysing and understanding

15 Szabó L.V. 2018; Contoman O.A. 2017, 129–140; Ghenghea M.-C. 2022, 61–78; Ghenghea M.-C. 2024, 455–467; Ghenghea M.-C. 2025, 549–558; Bolovan I. 2025.

16 Dinu R. 2011, 63–188; Dinu R. 2016, 5–28; Popescu C. 2014; Iorga F.-L. 2015; Sora A.F. 2017, 63–87; Buruiană O. 2022, 515–542.

17 Negustor G. 2012, 59–70; Otu P., Georgescu M. 2011; Pintilie S. 2016, 79–86; Buruiană O. 2022; Ionescu A.-S. 2016–2017, 95–130; Popa B., Tudorancea R. (eds), 2018; Mihalache C., Roman N. (eds), 2020; Ghenghea M.-C. 2023a, 327–348; Ghenghea M.-C. 2023b, 41–56.

18 Only a few examples here: Polizu-Micșunești N. 2017; Velburg G. 2018; Kostaki L. 2020; Ionescu C. 2021.

19 Topor C.-L. 2010, 97–118; Topor C.-L. 2011, 70–79; Topor C.-L. 2012, 145–154; Topor C.-L. 2017a, 59–67; Topor C.-L. 2017b; Topor C.-L. 2020a; Topor C.-L. 2020b, 83–100; Topor C.-L. 2021, 23–34; Topor C.-L. 2022, 207–218; Topor C.-L. 2003, 119–134.

20 Boia L. 2017, 409–410.

the facts within their specific historical context. After all, more than 100 years later, the Germanophiles fully deserve a well-balanced and accurate historiographical approach, which would allow historians to properly establish the role they played in the troubled history of Romania during the Great War. Various nuances and aspects are still waiting to be researched and properly understood within the complicated context of those difficult years. The neutrality (1914–1916) and the occupation of almost two-thirds of the Old Romanian Kingdom still provide numerous possibilities for analysis and interpretation, greatly enhanced when referring to this interesting topic of the Romanian Germanophiles.

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