

# THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE UNION OF BUKOVINA WITH THE KINGDOM OF ROMANIA

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## Abstract

*Bukovina was the second province which made the union with its motherland, after Bessarabia. 100 years ago, on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the proclamation of the union of Bukovina with Romania occurred, an important historic moment in the building of the Romanian unitary national state, together with the previous union of Bessarabia – March 27<sup>th</sup>, - and previous union of Transylvania, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. On the same date, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the General Congress of Bukovina announced the powers of the Entente that the inhabitants of this territory decided to return to old borders, respectively to the Kingdom of Romania, “in virtue of the rights of the people to decide their own fate”.*

**Keywords:** Union, Bukovina, General Congress of Bukovina, National Council, Romanian soldiers, 100 years.

## 1. Bukovina in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

The 18<sup>th</sup> century represented for the Romanian Principalities a period in which they came to play an increasingly important role in Europe's politics and diplomacy, thus becoming the subject of military disputes between Austria, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In the beginning of the century, the Porte imposed in the Principalities the Phanariot regime, which emerged as a necessity in front of the danger posed by Christian powers. During the Phanariot area, series of wars took place between these three powers, most of the times waged on the territory of the Principalities, "by bringing their convoy of misery every time, not to mention Turkish requisitions."<sup>1</sup>

Following the armed conflict between Russia and Ottoman Empire, carried out between 1768-1774, the Treaty of Peace of Kuciuk-Kainardji was concluded, following which the old provisions guaranteeing the autonomy of the Principalities, in other words the return to old habits of the country were reconfirmed. However, after the peace concluded between Russians and the Ottomans, as a result of its diplomatic intervention, Austria obtained from the Porte, on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1775, by means of the Convention of Constantinople, the assignment of a part of northern Moldavia, on the pretext of facilitating its passage to southern Poland, that it had acquired after the first disjunction of Poland in 1771, a part that acquired the name of Bukovina ("The Land of the Beeches", in Slave languages). Therefore, by actions of venality, blackmail and military pressures materialized in the concentration of troops of Belgrade area, almost 50,000 Romanians passed under Habsburg rule. The protests of the ruler of Moldavia at that time - Grigore the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ghica – against this decision of separating his country were useless, and, moreover, the ruler was killed two

years later. In the Habsburgs view, Grigore Ghica considered himself an independent sovereign.

After Bukovina passed under the administration of Galicia, Austria pursued two objectives: to turn the province into a Slave province and the conversion of Slave population to the Greek-Catholic confession. The reasons of turning the province into a Slave one were represented by the prevention of a potential Moldavian attempt to recover this territory, while the Austrians supported the Ukrainians with their national aspirations<sup>2</sup>. This period is considered by the Romanian historiography as the worst in the history of Bukovina, an opinion shared by several prestigious Austrian Historians, as well as by some contemporary Ukrainian historians.

Under the Metternich regime, Bukovina evolved under the influence of Austria, but continued to be closely linked to Moldavia, the body from which it had been amputated. There have been a series of reforms in education, Church and in respect of the development of the agriculture, industry, crafts and trade.

A major problem was represented the leaving of the Church under the authority of the Metropolitan Church of Iași and the entry under Serb jurisdiction, which has generated many protests. This favored the creation of a so-called Ukrainian origin of the old scribes of Bukovina. In 1786 the military administration is also abolished, the attributions being transferred to the Bohemian-Austrian united chancellery of Vienna. Furthermore, the Romanian nobility failed to gain recognition of its feudal rights and the right to have a diet, which led to the withdrawal of some boyar families in Iasi. Spiritual life was making progress despite the Germanization of the Catholic Church: the traditions were preserved, transmitted and perpetuated, and the language of writing the church books remained Romanian.

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<sup>1</sup> Neagu Djuvara, O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri, Bucharest, 2002, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolae Ciachir, *Din istoria Bucovinei: 1775-1944*, Bucharest, 1999.

## 2. The main political events in Bukovina in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

As such, until 1848, Bukovina faced a more prominent Slave phenomenon, as can be seen in the census the figures of which are as follows: 209293 Romanians and 108907 Ruthenians<sup>3</sup>.

The revolution of 1848 had consequences in what concerns the national struggle of Bukovinians. The political program of the Revolution in Bukovina included, among the 12 points, the following:

- the separation of Bukovina from Galicia and the fact that it became the "Crown Country", autonomous;
- the preservation of Romanian nationality and the creation of national schools;
- manumission of peasants - by the dissolution of the statute labor and of the teind;
- detachment from the Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Karlovac.

Therefore, these four essential aspects, formulated with tenacity, represented an obvious attempt to stop the removal of Bukovina from the Romanian nature. In their turn, the Ruthenians shared two different positions within the revolution involvement: there was the Pan-Slavism and the national-Ukrainian movement.

Yet, although the revolution was stopped, the House of Habsburg fulfilled the desires of Bukovina, which became a 'country of hereditary crown, thus forming the Duchy of Bukovina. One of the effects of the year of 1848 was the dissolution of serfdom and the apportionment of property of the fugitives, and the Ruthenians benefited the most from the promulgation of the new Constitution, whose intellectual elites propagated the idea that the Ruthenians were in fact the native population and the Romanians would have arrived here later. Although the Habsburg Empire was led by absolutism rules throughout 1849-1860, Bukovina conserved its autonomy, and in 1861 it obtained several rights.

The national struggle of the Romanians from Bukovina was again stimulated by the events of the beginning of 1859, by the union of the two Principalities, as a consequence of which the foundation of the Romanian national state was laid. Furthermore, by the return to Moldavian Principality of the counties of Ismail, Cahul and Bolgrad by the Tsarist Empire, a precedent occurred which favored Bukovina in the attempt to become a part of Moldavia, and implicitly, to return to the body from which it had been amputated. The Romanians from Bukovina studying abroad (especially in Vienna) also transmitted a national revival movement.

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1861, the new Diet of Bukovina met in Cernauti, where the Romanians held the absolute majority until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki played an important role in supporting and defending Romanian interests, being

for many years President of the Diet and captain of Bukovina. During this period, the Romanians from Bukovina and not only, will fight to detach from the jurisdiction of Karlovac, in an independent metropolitan.

The effects of the Crimean War and the subsequent events that took place at the European level led to a certain decline of the Habsburg Empire, particularly affected by the defeat before Prussia in 1866, when it ceased to play a central role in continental politics. The national struggle widened within the Empire, so that the Austro-Hungarian dualism was reached, which led to a worsening of the situation of the constituent nationalities of the Empire. Bukovina was not directly affected by this because it was to remain under Austrian rule, but Austro-Hungarian dualism caused the diminishing of its relations with Transylvania and Banat, which were to be subordinated to the Hungarian part of the Empire. The Ruthenian element was favored again in the following period, the Austro-Hungarian Empire wanted to stop the Russian penetration.

By creating the University of Cernăuți in 1875, a powerful German cultural and scientific center, a Habsburg outpost was created in Eastern Europe. A Viennese newspaper, "Neue Freie Presse", made it clear that the purpose of the University of Cernăuți was to complete the Germanization of Bukovina and to throw civilization rays on Moldavia and Bessarabia<sup>4</sup>. If the Habsburgs had failed to occupy the Principalities by army means, they were attempting by economic and cultural means, thing that represented a positive aspect for the modernization and spiritual emancipation of the Romanians.

Another major event, with great importance and strong influence on the Romanians of Bukovina was represented by the Independence War, where the Bukovinian troops participated as volunteers.

On the domestic political background, the Romanian political parties of Bukovina sought to avoid a collaboration with the Ruthenians, because it was obvious that they were pursuing a policy in favor of their own claiming interests. But the claiming of Bukovina was unsubstantiated for various reasons: from the demographic point of view, the Moldavians represented the majority in this territory, and from the historical point of view the assets of the monasteries represented donation of the Moldavian vaivodes and boyars. Furthermore, after the annexation of Bukovina, the Habsburg Empire has established all laws for the new province to be translated into Romanian.

By the Treaty of Peace of Bucharest (1913), which ended the Second Balkan War, the prestige of Romania increased, representing a new impetus for the Romanians from Bukovina. On this occasion, the political, cultural and scientific contacts between

<sup>3</sup> Ilie Corfus, *Agricultura în Țările Române (1848-1864)*, Bucharest, 1982, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolae Ciachir, *op. cit.*, Bucharest, 1999.

Bukovina and the other Romanian provinces are amplified.

### 3. Participation in the First World War

Bukovina entered the stage of the Great War two years before Romania, thus becoming theatre of military operations as of August 1914, the territory being located between the two empires at war, the Austro-Hungarian and the Tsarist. In 1915, Entente tries to attract Romania at war, by offering to it the Romanian territories possessed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including Bukovina. This obviously benefited Russia which could not afford to lose a territory on which it had a strong influence and which, in its turn exerted a Russian influence on the other Romanian territories, materialized mainly by the activity of the University of Cernăuți. Furthermore, Bukovina represented a "corridor" to the Slavic people in the center of the continent: Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes and Croats. Therefore, the convention signed on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1916 provided the guarantee of the territorial integrity and the reunification of Bukovina, Transylvania and Banat to the Old Kingdom. In other words, Bukovina was recognized by Russia as a part of the Romanian unitary national state<sup>5</sup>. Romania's entry into war on the part of the Entente – and implicitly of Russia – triggered a genuine oppression against the Romanians of Bukovina.

Once with the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the entry of the United States into war, the situation became even more complicated. The Romanian political and cultural elite stood high in favor of the American intervention. The efforts made by the Romanian diplomacy came to fruition, so that in November 1918, Romania obtained a declaration indicating that the United States approved and guaranteed the national aspirations of our country.

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1918 the Constitutional Assembly is set up, which decided as a main scope the union of Bukovina with the other Romanian territories. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, the Romanian units were going into Cernăuți, and on November 27<sup>th</sup>, the building of the University was flying the tricolor. One day later, the General Congress of Bukovina established the political relationship of Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom. In other words, the Declaration of Union was read.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the peace with Austria is concluded at Saint-Germain, whereby "Austria recedes in favor of Romania, from all rights and titles on the part of the former Duchy of Bukovina located beyond the borders of Romania, as they will be subsequently set up by the main allied and associated powers."<sup>6</sup>

### 4. The Treaty of Saint-Germain

The Treaty of Peace of Saint Germain en Laye, known as the Treaty of Saint Germain represented the treaty of peace concluded between the Allies of the First World War and the newly created Republic of Austria. The Treaty was signed on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919 by the representatives of Austria and the representatives of 17 states. The treaty recognized the independence of the Republic of Austria (colloquially called at that time German Austria in order to mark the difference to Austria-Hungary), the dismemberment of the Double Monarchy was recognized de jure, by the constitution of the states of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the membership of Bukovina to Romania and South Tyrol to Italy<sup>7</sup>.

The Treaty with Austria generated great disputes between the representatives of the great powers and the representatives of smaller countries, set up or reunited, generated mainly by the territorial and ethnic issues on the agenda.

In the plenary session of May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1919, after the speech of Georges Clemenceau, the Romanian representative was heard. He stressed out that the conclusion of the peace with Austria had left no doubt on the union of Bukovina with Romania; furthermore, he made proposals on the modification of certain articles. In the text of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Romania only appeared (opinion of I.I.C.Brătianu) in order to make known the conditions which violated its political independence and seriously compromised its economic freedom. He meant that Romania had to sign a "treaty of minorities", and the great powers had the right to check if their rights were met and, furthermore, to grant "free transit" on its territory for goods and persons belonging to allied powers, which affected the state income sources. The officials of Bucharest, including the royal family considered the clause of the minorities as the preamble of the treaty, contrary to "sovereign rights" of Romania, therefore they did not agree to sign it.

The English Foreign Minister, Arthur James Balfour, suggested Romania to be drawn the attention on its attitude, namely to be told that it would not receive the territory in question until it accepted the clause of the minorities and signed the treaty

I.I.C.Brătianu rejected the control of the great powers on small states, but not the control of the League of Nations. Furthermore, he pointed out that his observations were formulated "in the name of the independence of the Romanian state" and of two principles: one concerning "peace, order, brotherhood among the populations of the same state", and the other targeting "the equality of all large and small states in accordance with their domestic law rights".

<sup>5</sup> Idem, Gheorge Berca, *Diplomația europeană în epoca modernă*, Bucharest, 1984, p. 480.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolae Dașcovici, *Interesele și drepturile României în texte de drept internațional public*, Iași, 1936, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Istoria României între anii 1918-1981, Gh.I.Ionita, Ioan Cartana, Ioan Scurtu, Gh.Z.Ionescu, Eufrosina Popescu, Vasile Budriga, Doina Smarcea, E.D.P., Buc.1981

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1919, a meeting of the government was held at Cotroceni Palace presided by king Ferdinand; Iuliu Maniu, the chairman of the Conducting Council and Victor Antonescu, the minister of the country in Paris were invited. Those present had already learned that in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, when the terms of the Treaty with Austria had been discussed, Romania had had to face “the accomplished facts”. King Ferdinand showed that the purpose of the meeting was Romania’s future attitude towards the content of the Treaty with Austria. Victor Antonescu presented a summary of the reasons why Romania could not sign this treaty. Despite the justified protest of the Romanian representatives – Antonescu informed – the treaty was handed over to the Austrian plenipotentiaries, without removing the clauses on the guarantees for minorities, the transit and the customs regime. The final decision in what concerns the attitude of Bucharest diplomacy will be made after Prime Minister I.I.C.Brătianu returns to the country.

As a reaction to the negative attitude of the Conference on the issue of the treaty with Austria, I.I.C.Brătianu left Paris on July 4<sup>th</sup>, thus considering that his country was “a sovereign state the independence of which nobody challenged.”

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the Treaty with Austria was signed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye<sup>8</sup>.

The Treaty was divided in 14 parts:

The first part consisted of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which represented a common part of the peace treaties concluded after the First World War.

The second part defines the borders of the Republic of Austria with neighboring countries: Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (subsequently Yugoslavia) and Italy. The Covenant established the independence of Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic was part of Transleithania, the Austrian part of the former monarchy), the incorporation of South Tyrol into the territory of the Italian state of Burgenland (region which, during the monarchy, was part of Transleithania, the Hungarian part, especially populated by German ethnics) in Austria. The border with the state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was partially established, the region of Klagenfurt was to be assigned to one of the two states after a plebiscite.

This third part called “political clauses for Europe” mainly includes a series of provisions on the Austria’s bilateral relations with the successor states of the Double Monarchy. Austria committed to recognize the independence of Czechoslovakia and the state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, as well as the territories which belonged to Russia on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1914 (the Baltic States, Finland, Poland).

Section fourth (articles 59-61) established the waiver of Austria in favor of Romania to any rights and

titles on the parts of the former Duchy of Bukovina under the possession of Romania. The wording is ambiguous and was used because the borders between Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland were established after the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace of Saint Germain, but it represents the international recognition of the union of Bukovina with Romania.

Furthermore, this section defines the area of Klagenfurt where the population was mixed (Slovenian and German) where a plebiscite was organized in order to establish the will of the majority of the population to belong either to Austria or to the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.

Of particular importance was Article 88, which provided that the independence of Austria was inalienable, unless the League of Nations had consented to this effect. For this reason, Austria was required to refrain from any action that would compromise its sovereignty. This article was intended to prohibit the unification of Austria with Germany (another state defeated in war).

The fourth part (Austrian interests outside Europa) provided the waiver of the Republic of Austria to a series of treaties and rights of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy in relations with Morocco, Egypt, Siam (Thailand) and China.

The fifth part (military clauses) provides the limitation of military capacity to 30,000 militaries, including officers.

The other nine parts of the treaty contained provisions relating to the compensations to be paid by Austria, to the Danube shipping regime for the organization of rail transport between Austria and the other states (particularly important, taking into account Austria’s position in the European rail system) etc<sup>9</sup>.

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1919, I.I.C.Brătianu resigned from the position of prime minister; a new government of technicians was set up, led by general Arthur Vaitoianu. There were several final notifications delivered to Romania at the Peace Conference, whereby it was required to sign the Treaty with Austria, but the authorities of Bucharest did not fulfill the requirements.

After the parliamentary elections of November 1919 the government of the “Parliamentary Block” was set up, chaired by Alexandru Vaida-Voievod. Between December 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919 various representatives of the Block were engaged in discussions with the representatives of the Entente, and on such occasion Al. Vaida-Voievod declared that his government was going to accept the ultimatum (the 12<sup>th</sup>), under certain conditions; he called for the waiver to the “shameful preamble” of the “Special Convention” of the Treaty of Saint-Germain where it was deemed that the independence of Romania had been recognized in 1878, under the condition of the amendment of art.7 of the Constitution. Thanks to the efforts of Victor Antonescu, the deadline for the expiration of the

<sup>8</sup> Istoria Românilor, vol. VIII, University Professor Ioan Scurtu, coordinator. Petre Out PhD, Enciclopedica Publishing House, Buc. 2003

<sup>9</sup> Principiul Naționalităților, Romulus Seisanu, typography of newspaper “Universul”, Buc. 1935

ultimatum was postponed from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1919 and the modification of the letter and spirit of the treaty of minorities. The allied representatives communicated their approval on the change of the treaty of minorities, provided that the ultimatum was accepted.

The recognition of the union of Bukovina with Romania raised a low number of issues, but its registration with the Treaty of Saint-Germain was postponed; the registration was to be made after the set up of the borders with the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

During the negotiations for the conclusion of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the British and the French resisted the desires of the Americans of not to grant Romania the whole Bukovina, based on the decision of the General Congress of Cernăuți. The Americans forced Romania to separate the basin of Ceremus river which economic interests were in the direction of Galicia.

The Romanian diplomacy, when informed on the division of Bukovina, refused to accept the solution and preferred a common border with Poland in Eastern Galicia. Its efforts were focused on the rewording of art.59 which, in the original text, did not recognize Bukovina as a territory belonging to the Romanian state. In its new wording, the article provided: "Austria waives in favor of Romania all rights and titles on the part of the former duchy of Bukovina, located beyond the borders of Romania", the borders being those set out in the Unification Decision of November 15/28, 1918. Although the amendments did not abolish the principle under which the great powers (the Council of the League of Nations) assumed the right to "protect" the interests of the minorities of Romania, removed or diminished other clauses affecting the national dignity and sovereignty of the Romanian state.

The representative of Romania at the Peace Conference, general C. Coandă signed, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919, 6 p.m., the Treaty with Austria and the treaty of minorities. The document was dated December 9<sup>th</sup>. The positive part of the Treaty of Saint-Germain concerned the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian dualist monarchy and the recognition of the revolutionary processes that had taken place in the

territory of the former empire in 1918. This was also noted by deputy Ion Nistor, who, on the occasion of the ratification of the Treaty by the Assembly of Deputies of Bucharest, declared: "I believe that the abolition of Austria (dualist monarchy) and the ratification of this treaty does not only entail the return of Bukovina to the motherland but, moreover, this treaty has a much greater significance. The dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian kingdom gave us back Bukovina, Transylvania and Banat, this long-awaited dismemberment made possible our national unification."

## 5. Application and consequences of the treaty

The borders of Austria with neighboring countries were delimited in the following years. The territory of Burgenland entered under the possession of Austria, but in Șopron (Odenburg in German), together with other eight villages, a new referendum was organized in 1921 where the membership to Hungary was decided.

The plebiscite organized in Klagenfurt showed that most of the inhabitants wanted to remain in Austria.

After the economic crisis which followed the end of the war, the Austrian state was not able to pay the damages established under the peace treaty.

Austria, unlike the all the other states defeated in the first world war, did not seek to challenge the peace treaty and return to the previous situation. The majority of the population and political class would have preferred, during the first years after the war, to join the German state, but this possibility was forbidden by the winners who did not want to strengthen Germany.

The issue of the union with Germany remained on the Austrian internal political agenda until 1938, when Austria was annexed to Nazi Germany of Adolf Hitler.

After the World War II, Austria was again recognized as an independent state (full sovereignty was recognized by the State Treaty of 1955), within the borders established by the Treaty of Saint Germain<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Istoria României, Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Serban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, Corint Publishing House, Buc.2005

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