

Behind the Scenes of a National Show: The Coronation of King Ferdinand I and Queen Maria at Alba Iulia (15 October 1922)

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Abstract: The present study examines the complications that the confessional situation of King Ferdinand I (namely the fact that, as a Catholic, he was excommunicated for almost two decades by the Holy See due to the flagrant violation of certain rules of conduct, and the reconciliation granted to him by the pontifical court at the end of the World War I presupposed the observance of strict conditions) generated in relation to the design and conduct of the royal coronation in Alba Iulia, on 15 October 1922. The plans of the various political decision-makers regarding the coronation ceremony, or the intentions of the Orthodox Church (an institution that had aspired to mark the event from a religious point of view) were meticulously negotiated at the top of the Catholic Church, a scenario of the coronation ceremony having thus been staged (*mise en scène*) in accordance with the requirements formulated by the pontifical diplomacy. This is therefore the aim of the present study, namely to untangle, for the first time in historiography, the complicated threads of an important public spectacle – the coronation of Romanian sovereigns in Alba Iulia – in whose preparation political intrigue, religious passions and diplomatic pressure were consumed.

Keywords: Reconciliation, nuncio Marmaggi, ceremony, diplomatic pressure, secular celebration

Abstract: În culisele unui spectacol național: Încoronarea Regelui Ferdinand I și a Reginei Maria la Alba Iulia (15 octombrie 1922). Prezentul studiu analizează complicațiile pe care situația confesională a regelui Ferdinand I (anume faptul că, catolic fiind, a fost excomunicat vreme de aproape două decenii de către Sfântul Scaun din cauza încălcării flagrante a unor norme de conduită, iar reconcilierea care i s-a acordat din partea instanței pontificale la finalul Primului Război Mondial a presupus respectarea unor condiționalități stricte) le-a generat în raport cu proiectarea și

desfășurarea încononării regale de la Alba Iulia, din 15 octombrie 1922. Planurile diverșilor decidenți politici vizavi de ceremonia încoronării sau intențiile Bisericii ortodoxe (instituție care se ambiționase să tuteleze din punct de vedere religios respectivul eveniment) au fost minuțios negociate la vârful Bisericii catolice, fiind pusă în scenă (*mise en scène*) o regie a festivității de încoronare în acord cu exigențele formulate de diplomația pontificală. Aceasta reprezintă așadar miza prezentului studiu, anume de a desluși, în premieră istoriografică, complicatele ițe ale unui important spectacol public – încoronarea suveranilor României la Alba Iulia – în a cărui pregătire s-au consumat intrigi politice, pasiuni religioase și presiuni diplomatice.

Cuvinte-cheie: reconciliere, nuntul Marmaggi, ceremonie, presiuni diplomatice, sărbătoare laică

A fundamentally changed Europe. This is how the old continent can be characterized at the end of the more than four years during which it had been the main scene of the armed confrontations during the Great War and after the judges of the Peace of Paris formulated, after long deliberations, their sentences.¹ The redrawing of national borders and the relocation of power poles to the international arena were the result not only of the outcome of the war, but also of the new political ideas (self-determination, democracy, collective security, etc.) that guided state reconstruction after that date.² Although the peace forum had sought to identify optimal solutions to the national problems that repeatedly disturbed European peace throughout the nineteenth century, this was difficult to achieve, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where peoples, different languages and cultures were so intertwined.³ Forced to admit that it was virtually impossible to create ethnically pure state entities, the artisans of peace sought to include explicit guarantees in the content of the treaties, so that the new states would not discriminate against or persecute minorities who found themselves within their borders.⁴ After all, it was not the nation-states, but the multinational

¹ Emile J. Dillon, *The Inside Story of the Peace Conference* (New York, London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), 45–50; Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and his Peacemakers. American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), XI–XIII.

² Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle, London: University of Washington, 1974), XII.

³ Philip Longworth, *Crearea Europei de Est. De la preistorie la postcomunism*, trans. Eugen Stancu, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002), 93–98.

⁴ Carlile A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors. The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences, 1919–1937* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1937), 4–5; Georges Castellani, *Storia dei Balcani (XIV–XX secolo)* (Lecce: Argo, 1999), 457–466.

formations that replaced the old empires that had dominated the region's geopolitics for centuries.⁵ Hence the impression that the decisions of the Peace Conference created an even greater tension in the Middle Danube Basin than the one that preceded the world conflagration.⁶

Undoubtedly, the Romanians took full advantage of the territorial chance that was offered to them at the end of the World War I.⁷ To take into account the motivations of the unifying acts of the provinces with Romanian majority population to the Romanian Kingdom would mean to engage in a discussion with multifactorial explanations. Attributed by some to a vocation,⁸ and by others to the context of the era in which it was achieved, the union of the Romanians' destinies was able to awaken constructive energies in them and to urge them to look towards the future with a high dose of optimism. Few were those who, at the beginning of 1918, still truly believed that the motive that had urged Romania to make the choice in the summer of 1916 could be achieved in the near future.⁹ The gloomy prospect of a peace imposed by the enemy, the occupation of the territory and the exploitation of its resources, the social and economic disorder and deprivation, the constant search for political solutions to alleviate the many negative effects – all made up the complex image of the unfortunate situation in which Romania was in the final year of the war. However, the course of the events was far from predictable. Their evolution on a regional scale also affected the Romanian space, which made possible, for example, the appearance of the decision to unite the Moldovan Democratic Republic with Romania, on 27 March / 9 April, 1918.¹⁰ The territories inhabited by Romanians from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in turn, reacted to the changes in the balance of power between the two fighting camps. For many contemporaries, the defeats suffered by the imperial army in the aftermath of the three battles on the Piave River were able to herald the collapse of the dualist state.¹¹ By the fall of 1918, under the influence of the World Peace Program enunciated by US

⁵ Iván T. Berend, György Ránki, *East Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977), 82–83.

⁶ Béla Köpeczi (ed.), *Histoire de la Transylvanie* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 621.

⁷ Marcel Țirban, "Problemele noii epoci," in Marcel Țirban (ed.), *Istoria contemporană a României* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2001), 19–27.

⁸ Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Originile și formarea unității românești*, ed. Ion Toderașcu, transl. by Maria Pavel (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 1998), 297–302.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 264; James P. Niessen, "Naționalismul românesc: o ideologie a integrării și a mobilizării," in Peter F. Sugar (ed.), *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea*, transl. by Radu Paraschivescu (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002), 235.

¹⁰ Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român* (Bucharest: Univers, 1998), 46–48.

¹¹ Valeriu Leu, Nicolae Bocșan (ed.), *Marele Război în memoria bănățeană (1914–1919)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012), 64–65.

President Woodrow Wilson and the ideas propagated by the Russian Revolution, the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire organized in the form of councils and national guards.¹² The Romanians were no exception to this institutional trend, laying the foundations of a National Council in Budapest, with the declared intention of collaborating with the similar Hungarian body. As the prospective options of the Romanian political leaders became clear, the Central Romanian National Council (C.N.R.C.) became the coordinating pole of the actions resulting from the organization of the Assembly in Alba Iulia.¹³ If this meeting gained a special status through the significance of the decisions adopted, it is no less true that the formal separation of the Romanians from the fate of Hungary was perceived as occurring at the time of the solemn declaration made in this regard by Alexandru Vaida Voevod, in the Hungarian Parliament on 18 October 1918.¹⁴ However, like the other territories that had announced their accession to the Kingdom of Romania, Transylvania also had to accept the clarification of its international status in the proceedings of the Peace Conference.¹⁵ Uncertainties were not lacking among the Romanian political elite in Transylvania either.¹⁶ The way of perfecting the union, conditioned or not, sparked heated discussions that lasted until the very moment preceding the important meeting. The reservations that some Ciscarpathian political leaders had towards the political world in Bucharest¹⁷ can be attributed to the trends of political thought noticeable in the public debate of the last two decades in Austria-Hungary on the identification of new formulas for the institutional articulation of the dualist state, in response to the pressure exerted by the increasingly fierce

¹² Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, 139–143; Zaharia Boilă, *Memorii* (Cluj-Napoca: Biblioteca Apostrof, 2003), 23–24, 112.

¹³ Valer Moga, "Națiunea în discursul politic românesc din Transilvania anului 1918," in Valer Moga, Sorin Arhire (eds.), *Problema Transilvaniei în discursul politic de la sfârșitul Primului Război Mondial* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2009), 35.

¹⁴ Boilă, *Memorii*, 71, 80, 84.

¹⁵ For a more in-depth approach, see Vasile Vesa, "Transilvania la Conferința de Pace din anii 1919–1920," in Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Năgler, Magyari András (eds.), *Istoria Transilvaniei*, vol. III, *De la 1711 până la 1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2008), 629–647; Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, "Transilvania la cele două Conferințe de Pace de la Paris (1919–1920 și 1946–1947)," in Cornel Grad, Viorel Ciubotă (eds.), *1918. Sfârșit și început de epocă. Korszakvég-korszakkezdet. The End and the Beginning of an Era* (Zalău, Satu Mare: Editura "LEKTON" – Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, n.d.), 487–489.

¹⁶ Zoltán Szász, "Revolutions and National Movements after the Collapse of the Monarchy (1918–1919)," in Zoltán Szász (ed.), *History of Transylvania*, vol. III, *From 1830 to 1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 774.

¹⁷ Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român*, 273–274; Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, *Memorii*, vol. I, Alexandru Șerban (ed.) (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1994), 119; vol. III (1997), 124, 154–155.

national movements. The federalist solution was one of the options conceived at the time, to the formulation of which the Romanian ideology fully contributed.¹⁸ Therefore, the transfer of Transylvanian Romanians to the political and cultural horizon of the Romanian state was deeply marked by the experience of the last decades of interaction with the increasingly annoying centralism of the Hungarian state. If, in Alba Iulia, an agreement was finally reached regarding the unconditionality of the decision to attach the province to the Romanian Kingdom, this did not prevent the phasing of the union.¹⁹ The establishment of a Grand National Council, although it proved to be a difficult functioning body, corresponded to the desire to endow the province with a legislative forum until the organization of general elections for the Parliament of Greater Romania, and the creation of the Governing Council laid the foundations of the institution with an executive role, in charge of managing a geographical perimeter that was constantly expanding, as the Romanian troops advanced towards Budapest.²⁰ In addition to these concrete decisions, an equally important role was played by the decisions desired by the Transylvanians to represent the basis for the functioning of the new Romanian state. The “nine-point declaration” adopted at the Alba Iulia Assembly was intended to be a true charter of the rights and rules of the government of the new country.²¹ It was built on the principles of national freedom, respect for individual and collective rights, the application of non-discriminatory treatment of the Romanian state vis-à-vis its new citizens, governance based on democratic rules, the application of fundamental reforms such as the extension of the right to vote or the redistribution of land ownership.²²

The establishment of a provisional administration in the territories detached from the political center of Budapest was meant to pave the way

¹⁸ Here, it would suffice to mention Aurel C. Popovici, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Groß-Österreich. Politische Studien zur Lösung der nationalen Fragen und staatsrechtlichen Krisen in Österreich-Ungarn* (Leipzig: Verlag von B. Elischer Nachfolger, 1906).

¹⁹ Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, vol. IV. 1918-1919 (Bucharest: Editura Institutului de arte grafice “Eminescu”, 1927), 173-174.

²⁰ Romul Boilă, “Consiliul Dirigent,” in *Transilvania, Banatul, Crișana, Maramureșul 1918-1928*, vol. I (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1929), 89; Gheorghe Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent la consolidarea statului național unitar român (1918-1920)* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1985), 8-15.

²¹ Sándor Biró, *The Nationalities Problem in Transylvania 1867-1940. A Social History of the Romanian Minority under Hungarian Rule, 1867-1918, and of the Hungarian Minority under Romanian Rule, 1918-1940*, trans. Mario D. Fenyo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 472.

²² The complete text of the resolution can be found in Ioan Scurtu, Liviu Boar, Marga Chiva, Gernot Nussbächer, Monica Vlaicu (eds.), *Minoritățile naționale din România 1918-1925. Documente* (Bucharest: Arhivele Statului din Romania, 1995), doc. 6, 119-120.

for these provinces to integrate into the institutional and power structures of the new Romanian state.²³ Rightly, the declarations of union in Chişinău, Chernivtsi and Alba Iulia, despite having been confirmed, with some territorial adjustments, at the table of peace negotiations, they were only the starting point of a difficult and long process, but one that was absolutely necessary: the unification.²⁴ This involved the implementation of strategies to make political institutions compatible and to improve governance techniques, given the plurality of traditions existing at the level of each province that now made up the bundle of the young Romanian state.²⁵ In other words, the transposition of the union into institutions and laws capable of providing the coherence and consolidation necessary within the fragile state construct. It is understood that the success of this large-scale political project, that of the “unitary nation-state,” directly depended on the successful completion of this endeavor. As expected, different or even opposing views were formulated by the Romanian leadership. Simply speaking, there were two directions of action: the first consists in consolidating around a centralizing pole and extending the legislation, the customs of the exercise of government from the “mother state” to the “newcomers”. This political paradigm was also encouraged by the fact that the proclaimed unions with the Kingdom of Romania from the spring to the winter of 1918 were made, as we have seen, without imposing special conditionalities (except for the Bessarabians, who renounced them as soon as the Transylvanians decreed union without such special clauses), and the Romanians in those regions had limited experience in governing.²⁶ In this case, the unification was synonymous with integration by absorption, with assimilation.²⁷ The second perspective projected an additional focus on the regional nuances, on the individualizing local

²³ Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent*, 41–43; Aurel Galea, *Formarea și activitatea Consiliului Dirigent al Transilvaniei, Banatului și Ținuturilor românești din Ungaria (2 decembrie 1918 – 10 aprilie 1920)* (Târgu Mureș: Tipomur, 1996), 133–135.

²⁴ Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român*, 59; Josef Macha, *Ecclesiastical Unification. A Theoretical Framework together with Case Studies from the History of Latin-Byzantine Relations* (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 11–16. The author borrows and adapts the conceptualizations made by Amitai Etzioni, *Political Unification. A Comparative Study of Leaders and Forces* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), and applies them to the analysis of the inter-church relations, with a particular emphasis on the union from Brest (1595–1596).

²⁵ Niessen, “Naționalismul românesc,” 231.

²⁶ Vaida-Voevod, *Memorii*, vol. II (1995), 15, 24.

²⁷ Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român*, 67; Aurelia Știrban, Marcel Știrban, *Din istoria Bisericii române unite de la 1918 la 1941* (Satu Mare: Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 2005), 128–129.

traditions, proposing a staged approach of the parts that had come to compose the whole.²⁸

In the new post-war context, the Romanian state was forced to submit to the efforts of internal reconstruction, which were crucial after a war that had made the population, resources and institutions face unprecedented challenges. The Romanian leaders were forced to admit that Greater Romania was far from depicting the image of a perfect unity, given the ethnic, linguistic and cultural mosaic within it.²⁹ After all, in the dowry of each province, there was a notable percentage of non-Romanian population. The biggest complications in managing the situation of the minority ethnic groups were encountered by the Romanian administration in Transylvania due to the fact that their leaders related differently to the decision of union made by the Romanians. After a period of uncertainty, the Saxon community clarified its political behavior, recognizing and adhering to the union of Transylvania with Romania,³⁰ its gesture thus expressing the hope that the principles enunciated in Alba Iulia would be applied indiscriminately.³¹ However, the Hungarian community did not show the same attitude, to which it seemed impossible to admit that the millennial Kingdom of St. Stephen had collapsed in such a short time. The prospect of becoming a *minor gens* within a Romanian-led state, to which they were related in terms of a varied inventory of cultural and ethnic stereotypes, compelled many ethnic Hungarians to either leave the territories now administered by “Romanian imperialism” or to show passive opposition within the new state, whose geographical legitimacy they flatly refused to recognize.³² The difficulties of accommodating ethnic Hungarians to the new political and societal environment were maintained in the following years by the hope that the segmentation of Hungary was only a temporary reality.

²⁸ Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent*, 41–53; Sorin Radu, “Unificarea administrativă a României Mari în gândirea politică a lui Iuliu Maniu,” *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica*, 2-3 (1998-1999): 15–27.

²⁹ Paul E. Michelson, “Romanian Unity 1859, 1918, 1989: Beginnings, Opportunities..., and Illusions,” in Kurt W. Treptow (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Romanian Culture and Civilization 1600–2000* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 53; Elemér Illyés, *National Minorities in Romania. Change in Transylvania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 33–39; Ioan Scurtu (ed.), *Istoria românilor*, vol. VIII, *România întregită (1918–1940)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 31–35.

³⁰ Köpeczi (ed.), *Histoire de la Transylvanie*, 638; Illyés, *National Minorities in Romania*, 73. For the text of the declaration from the general assembly in Mediaș, see Scurtu, Boar (ed.), *Minoritățile naționale din România 1918–1925*, doc. 9, 126–128.

³¹ Szász, “Revolutions and National Movements,” 779.

³² Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors*, 279–280.

The task of the politicians who took over the government in the first years after the war was far from easy. The battle for borders in the halls of the Parisian palaces represented the priority zero for the Bucharest political class, closely supported by the representatives of the provinces that had declared their union with the Romanian Kingdom. As it is known, Romania started with high hopes on the road to gaining peace.³³ It was one of the European states that, before the outbreak of hostilities, had made territorial claims from all the neighboring countries.³⁴ But the Romanian diplomatic mission was received rather with reservations in the French capital, given the fact that Romania had not shown impeccable military loyalty during the war, having signed a peace treaty with the enemy.³⁵ However, the chancelleries of the victorious powers did not remain inert in the lobby made by the states with which Romania disputed its territorial possessions. A real mechanism of political pressure and public propaganda was operating behind the scenes of the Peace Conference, seeking to tip the scales to the advantage or disadvantage of some of the competitors.³⁶ But the decisions taken at the green table of the peace negotiations finally confirmed the Romanian claims, even if not in the form of the maximum desideratum. In retrospect, the most important decisions enshrined in the five treaties signed during the two years of peace talks laid the foundations for a rather fragile geopolitical system, which soon had to face the nation's defeated vindictive ambitions.³⁷ For Romania, this fact became a serious reason to promote, in the period that followed, a system of regional alliances, put in the service of cooperation and guarantee of border security.³⁸

The situation was not easier to manage from within either. The end of the war brought not only economic problems, but also social instability, a phenomenon that the authorities tried to control by resorting to extreme measures to repress the demonstrations.³⁹ The implementation

³³ Sherman D. Spector, *România și Conferința de Pace de la Paris. Diplomația lui Ion I. C. Brătianu*, trans. Sorin Pârvu (Iași: Institutul European, 1995), 91-114.

³⁴ Peter F. Sugar, "Naționalismul, ideologia victorioasă," trans. Radu Paraschivescu, in Peter F. Sugar (ed.), *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002), 19.

³⁵ Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român*, 100; Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947*, 2nd edition, trans. George G. Potra, Delia Răzdolescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 303-304.

³⁶ Dillon, *The Inside Story of The Peace Conference*, 136-183.

³⁷ Sugar, "Naționalismul, ideologia victorioasă," 348-349.

³⁸ For a more in-depth approach, see Eliza Campus, *Politica externă a României în perioada interbelică (1919-1939)* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975).

³⁹ Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria Românilor în secolul XX (1918-1948)* (Bucharest: Paideia, 1999), 93-94.

of the agrarian reform meant not only fulfilling the application of certain measures adopted even during the war in order to satisfy the sons of peasants who constituted the bulk of those mobilized, but also an urgency meant to spare social frustrations and to alternatively provide the chance for an unhindered development of national sentiment.⁴⁰ The first post-war years can also be seen as a period of searching for optimal political formulas to ensure the stability and governance of the country, to design and apply the laws necessary for the political consolidation of the new state. It was the stage of probing the Bucharest political scene, as actors, by some of the leaders of the parties of the united provinces, to identify the relations between the main political forces in the Kingdom or to redefine their ideological profile. However, despite all the impasse inherent in the successive period of a hard and long war, or the difficulties of adapting millions of new Romanian citizens to the traditions and standards of the adoptive state, marking the public space through demonstrations had the role of highlighting all these essential transformations, but also to relax, after a period of calamities and prolonged deprivations, the society as a whole.⁴¹ To the festive days of old Romania, the more recent celebration days marking the moments when the various provinces had declared their union with the Old Kingdom were added, as well as those present in the official calendars of each province, days whose relevance had not been lost in the new context after 1918. There was a need for a solemnity that would shed light on Romania's new place on the map of post-war Europe and that would depict the image of a country on its way to internal consolidation. Such a festivity could only center on the institution around which the Romanian society was united in the hard years of the war and which had become a symbol of the rebirth that followed: the Romanian Crown.

If the idea of crowning the Romanian sovereigns began to circulate in the 1920s, the first concrete measures regarding the organization of such an event were taken by the cabinet led by General Alexandru Averescu.⁴²

⁴⁰ Berend, Ránki, *East Central Europe*, 86-89; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare 1918-1930*, trans. Vlad Russo (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 19-21; Emil Petrini, "Reforma agrară," in *Transilvania, Banatul, Crișana, Maramureșul 1918-1928*, vol. I, 297-298.

⁴¹ For an analysis on the role played by festive days in the modern society, see Simona Nicoară, "Metamorfozele sărbătorii sub impactul sensibilităților moderne (secolele XVI-XIX)," *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, IV/1 (2005): 124-132.

⁴² Ioan Scurtu, "Consecințele Marii Uniri din 1918. Viața politică din România în anii 1918-1923," in Ioan Scurtu (ed.), *Marea Unire din 1918 în context european* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, Editura Academiei Române, 2003), 327; C. Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, vol. VI, part VI (1919-1922), Stelian Neagoe (ed.) (Bucharest: Machiavelli, 1996), 263-264, 310-313; For a comprehensive

The establishment of a “coronation commission” under the auspices of the Prime Minister's colleague-in-arms, General Constantin Coanda, and the metropolitan-primate, Miron Cristea, had the difficult role of establishing, in detail and in collaboration with the Royal House, the script of the entire event, and to strongly highlight its unique symbolic and ideological valences.⁴³ The respective commission outlined the general coordinates of the action planned to take place in the autumn of 1921, and established that the two venues would be the two centers whose older and newer historical symbolism was obvious to all: Alba Iulia and Bucharest. However, it would appear that the sovereign's sympathy for General Averescu was not enough to allow the latter to “patronize” an event of such importance in the biography of the new Romania.⁴⁴ In addition, the leader of the National Liberal Party, who had propelled the general to the helm of the country in the spring of 1920, said that it was time for a forceful return to the forefront of political decision-making.⁴⁵ The Liberal Cabinet embarked on an ambitious government program, focusing on the need to adopt laws vital to the new state (the most important of which was the new Constitution) and the country's economic reconstruction, given the potential amplified by expanding the territory and, implicitly, the resources. However, the list of priorities included the continuation of the preparations related to the coronation of the sovereigns, an act whose development did not have to be delayed much. That is why the construction works for the two symbol buildings, the new church in Alba Iulia and the Arc de Triomphe in Bucharest, were expedited, providing the builders with the necessary sums to complete their construction as soon as possible. However, the politicians who made up the parliamentary opposition did not express the most favorable opinions regarding the announced coronation event, accusing the ruling party leader – Ion I.C. Brătianu – of pursuing the confiscation of a holiday whose role was supposed to be that of providing the image of a strong national solidarity between Romanians, by brutally politicizing it. The stance taken by the protesters was amplified by the great disappointment of the electoral score obtained in the elections of March 1922, which made them blame the unfavorable result on the undemocratic

analysis of the “Averescu myth”, see Daniel-Valeriu Boboc, “Alexandru Averescu și mitul salvaționist în România interbelică,” in Alexandru-Florin Platon, Bogdan-Petru Maleon, Liviu Pilat (eds.), *Ideologii politice și reprezentări ale puterii în Europa* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2009), 305–325.

⁴³ Antonie Plămădeală, *Contribuții istorice privind perioada 1918–1939. Elie Miron Cristea. Documente, însemnări și corespondențe* (Sibiu, Tiparul tipografiei eparhiale, 1987), 359.

⁴⁴ Scurtu, “Consecințele Marii Uniri din 1918,” 328; Argetoianu, *Memorii*, vol. VI, part VI (1919–1922), 264.

⁴⁵ *Istoria românilor*, vol. VIII, 253; Scurtu, Buzatu, *Istoria românilor*, 145.

methods used by the party called to power. Taking note of the signs of reluctance issued by many political leaders, the king did not shy away from summoning them to the council, on which occasion he asked them to overcome interparty dissensions and to show fidelity to the Romanian Crown, sharing with the entire nation the great joy brought by the recovery of the brothers of the same blood under a single scepter, after centuries in which they had lived separate destinies.⁴⁶ The king's call for conciliation and unity had different echoes in the political class. If some party leaders finally agreed to confirm their presence at the festivity (among them: Alexandru Averescu, Alexandru Marghiloman, Nicolae Iorga), others (Iuliu Maniu, Ion Mihalache) remained consistent with the positions initially formulated, choosing to boycott the scheduled celebrations.

But the details related to the celebration of the coronation of the sovereign disturbed, at that time, not only the waters of the Romanian politics. The ecclesiastical elite in the Kingdom, especially the Orthodox and the Catholic, also showed an increased interest in the way the event should take place. The claims that the Orthodox hierarchy be assigned a substantial role in the event were considered legitimate, in view of the fact that, after the establishment of Greater Romania, the number of the adherents to that denomination increased considerably, namely to over 70% of the total population of the new state.⁴⁷ Beside the quantitative advantage, the privileged position ensured by the Constitution of old Romania paved its intimate relationship with the state, to which it offered its council not always with the most beneficial consequences.⁴⁸ The same fundamental law imperatively established a series of duties for the members of the Royal House, to be carried out for the "dominant religion of the Romanian state." The most neuralgic article that had the worst consequences for the incumbent sovereign was the one that provided for the obligation that "the descendants of His Majesty must be raised in the Orthodox religion of the East." Imposed as a *raison d'état* since the ascension of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty to the Romanian throne, the abovementioned constitutional paragraph produced tensions and even fractures in the relationship between the royal family and the Holy See. The lack of direct heirs of King Carol I caused the

⁴⁶ Scurtu, "Consecințele Marii Uniri din 1918," 328; Argetoianu, *Memorii*, vol. VI, part VI (1919-1922), 311-313.

⁴⁷ Illyés, *National Minorities in Romania*, 37, 219; Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*, vol. II, *Neam, limbă maternă, religie* (București: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), XXIV.

⁴⁸ Olivier Gillet, "Orthodoxie, nation et ethnicité en Roumanie au XXe siècle: un problème ecclésiologique et politique," in Maria Crăciun, Ovidiu Ghitta (eds.), *Ethnicity and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe* (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 1995), 348-349.

aforementioned constitutional article to take effect only with the descendants of Ferdinand I. This was the main reason why the future sovereign of Romania was denied, starting with 1900, the administration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁴⁹ In fact, the situation was not unique in the area. The ruling Saxon-Coburg Gotha House of the Bulgarian neighbors was in a similar position. There, Ferdinand's entrustment of Crown Prince Boris to the religious education of the Orthodox Church caused the rebellious monarch to be denied the remission of sins and communion until the serious error was rectified. In the Romanian case, the separation between the sovereign and the Catholic Church lasted more than two decades, the reconciliation being the result of fierce negotiations between the two parties.⁵⁰ The confessional affiliation, but especially the exceptional situation of the Romanian sovereign, recently returned, like a prodigal son, into the arms of the Catholic Church, made the Holy See's interest in his attitudes and behavior to be increased and legitimate. At the time of the coronation preliminaries, there was already a representative of the sovereign pontiff in Romania, in the person of the nuncio Francesco Marmaggi, the titular archbishop of Adrianople,⁵¹ whose difficult mission was to reorganize the various branches of the Romanian Catholic Church, according to the new postwar context, was intertwined with the illusory hope that the Orthodox Romanians would adhere *en masse* to the Catholic faith.⁵² The premises of that ambitious plan were not exactly unfounded if we were to consider the prestigious capital held (at the organizational level, of the tools of dissemination of the teachings of faith or of social involvement) by the Catholic Church within the Orthodox world in

⁴⁹ Raymund Netzhammer, *Episcop în România. Într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase*, vol. I, Nikolaus Netzhammer, Krista Zach (eds.) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005), 19, 83; Francesco Dante, "Sui rapporti tra Santa Sede e Romania tra Ottocento e Novecento," in Ion Cârja (ed.), *I Romeni e la Santa Sede. Miscellanea di studi di storia ecclesiastica* (Bucharest, Rome: Scriptorium, 2004), 129.

⁵⁰ Netzhammer, *Episcop în România*, vol. I, 826; *Ibid.*, vol. II (2005), 909, 919-920; Marghiloman, *Note politice*, vol. IV, 1918-1919, 210; Adela Herban, *România-Vatican 1920-1940. Relații diplomatice* (Deva: Călăuza, 2002), 64; Marius Theodorian-Carada, *Acțiunea Sfântului Scaun în România. De acum și de întotdeauna* (Bucharest: Editura Autorului, 1936), 13. For more details in this respect, see Lucian Turcu, "Com'è avvenuta la riconciliazione del re Ferdinando I di Romania con la Chiesa cattolica? (la fase postbellica)," in vol. *Dal cuore dell'Europa. Omaggio al professor Cesare Alzati per il compimento dei 70 anni*, a cura di: Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ovidiu Ghitta, Ioan Bolovan, Ana Victoria Sima (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2015), 363-376

⁵¹ Giuseppe De Marchi, *Le Nunziature Apostoliche dal 1800 al 1956* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1957), 225.

⁵² Mózes Nóda, "The Historical, Political and Ecclesiastical Background of the 1927 Concordat between the Vatican and Romania," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 9/27 (2010): 284-285.

general⁵³ and the argument that the neo-Latin roots of the Romanian language and of the Romanian people predisposed Romanians to an approach to the Western Catholic civilization.

As it is known, the plans of the hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding the coronation ceremony of King Ferdinand I and Queen Maria were ambitious. The metropolitan-primate had imagined a ceremony that would surpass in pomp and significance that which had been attended in a similar situation by the former King Carol I.⁵⁴ After careful consideration and analysis, the Orthodox hierarchy managed to embody the religious service of a coronation that compiled specific elements of the similar ceremony at the Court of Russian Countries and the Byzantine imperial tradition. Given the significance of the event, even the typical religious ritual projected was subjected to a thorough discussion with high dignitaries and officials of the Royal House, requiring their consent so that it could be put into practice. Ionel Brătianu and Nicolae Mișu represented the institutions just mentioned, with which Miron Cristea was forced to “negotiate” the content of the religious act scheduled for the coronation down to the smallest details. The discussions on this subject began in the first decade of September 1922, when October 15 had become a certain date for the long-awaited event. Step by step, the outline of a religious service was drawn, which strictly established the boundary between admissible and inadmissible, abandoning ideas such as: the administration of the royal anointing, the unfolding of the coronation inside the place of worship, the blessing of the crowns at the ceremony scheduled to take place outside the church, the modification in any way of the standard of *Te Deum* service. The natural question that deserves to be asked is: what made the politicians of the time consider a series of ideas projected by the high Orthodox clergy regarding the coronation ceremony completely unacceptable? Or, in other words, who directed the coronation scenario from the shadows, establishing exactly what “role” the characters involved in that “play” would play?

The diplomatic representative of the pontifical sovereign in Bucharest was interested in knowing the plans related to the coronation in detail, thus seeking the fair relationship of the Romanian Catholic Church to that event. Taking advantage of his position, his personal contacts with representatives from the top of the Romanian state or with people close to them, the nuncio Marmaggi not only managed to keep up with the ideas that were expected to be put into practice at the coronation ceremony, but

⁵³ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere în România contemporană. Studii și eseuri* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2005), 459.

⁵⁴ Plămădeală, *Contribuții istorice privind perioada 1918–1939*, 336.

also to intervene decisively in the conduct of the ceremony. The nuncio had set two main objectives: first, to prevent by any means the metropolitan-primate from crowning or administering the sacrament of anointing to a Catholic monarch, as was King Ferdinand I; second, to obtain a written order from the pontifical sovereign forbidding Greek Catholic hierarchs from attending the religious ceremony officiated by the Orthodox clergy on the occasion of their coronation.⁵⁵ The plan of the nuncio seemed to advance rapidly in the desired direction, since only a day after he had confessed to the Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest the two aforementioned goals just, he succeeded in obtaining from the Prime Minister, with whom he had arranged a meeting on that subject, the promise that the king would not be anointed by Metropolitan Cristea, and his crown would not be blessed, since the adornment that had belonged to his uncle, who had been blessed at a similar ceremony in 1881, was to be used. Also, it was expected that a *Te Deum* would be celebrated in the Orthodox church in Alba Iulia, and at a certain moment of that religious service, the two sovereigns would leave the place of worship, in order to climb a tribune previously arranged in the churchyard, receiving, from the hands of the presidents of the two Chambers of the Romanian Parliament, the crowns that the king was to place on his head and on that of his wife, too. After completing this act, the crowned sovereign was to deliver a speech, to which he was expected to receive an answer, and then the monarchs would return to the church to witness the continuation of the religious service. In this way, the nuncio considered that the central act of the festivity would receive an exclusively civil character, which left room for the Catholic episcopate to be present.⁵⁶

On 11 September 1922, the nuncio Marmaggi wrote to Pope Pius XI's Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri, informing him of the coronation negotiations and of what he had succeeded in obtaining as certainty from the organizers.⁵⁷ First of all, the prelate-ambassador acknowledged that the importance he attached to the issue of the coronation of the Romanian monarchs led him to countermand the leave he had scheduled for that period. Entering the main subject of the epistle, the nuncio announced to the high pontifical dignitary that, since August of that year, the central newspapers published the news that, in a Council of Ministers, the decision

⁵⁵ Netzhammer, *Episcop în România*, vol. II, 1151. For an extensive discussion, see Petru Magdău, Ion Cârja, Lucian Turcu, "L'atteggiamento della Chiesa greco-cattolica romana nei confronti dell'incoronazione dei Re Ferdinand e Maria ad Alba Iulia nel 1922," *Anuarul Institutului de studii italo-român. Annuario dell'Istituto di Studi Italo-Romeno*, XII, (2015): 65–92.

⁵⁶ Netzhammer, *Episcop în România*, vol. II, 1151–1152.

⁵⁷ The complete document is in Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereinafter referred to as ASV), *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 100r–106r.

had been made to organize the coronation ceremony of the Romanian sovereigns, in October, in Alba Iulia, "from the hand of the orthodox metropolitan-primate." The idea of organizing such a festivity by no means new, only the years of the war and the desperate situation of Romania at that time prevented its implementation. After the creation of Greater Romania, that plan was revitalized, and the city of Alba Iulia was chosen as the venue, especially for political reasons, the nuncio emphasized. The inspiring and supportive employee of the planned event was considered to be Queen Mary, who had expressed concern that the work on the coronation church had not progressed as desired or was hampered by the fact that some parts of the building had not proved strong enough. The responsibility for organizing the event fell to the Liberal government, but as for the program of that event, which was not finalized at the time of its writing, the final say belonged to the sovereign. In order to be fully aware of the case, the nuncio delivered to the Secretary of State a series of data regarding the antecedents of similar solemnities for Romanians. He noted that the Principles of Wallachia and Moldavia were always enshrined in a Byzantine-inspired ceremony. The last Romanian leaders consecrated in that way were Barbu Știrbey in Bucharest and Grigorie Ghika in Iași, in 1849. The successor of the two, Alexandru-Ioan Cuza, escaped such a custom, and a new festivity of that kind was organized only in 1881, when Romania proclaimed itself a Kingdom. Then, King Carol I, a Catholic like the incumbent monarch, and the prime minister wanted to avoid a ceremony that would have given royalty the character of a monarchy of divine right, which is why they agreed to remove all elements that could have been reminders of the Old Regime. That solution met with the assent of the Royal House and many political and religious complications were thus avoided. The ceremony took place as follows: on 9 May, at the appointed time, the President of the Council of Ministers and the Minister of Finance took to the Metropolitanate the two crowns, one of steel, intended for the king, and one of gold, which was to be given to the queen. The next day, the two sovereigns took part in a *Te Deum*, a service during which the two ornaments were placed on a table with the Holy Scriptures. After completing that office, the sovereigns returned to the Royal Palace, where the president of the Senate offered the crown to the King, and the president of the Assembly of Deputies, to the queen. From then on, the two crowns remained in the Throne Room, until 1916, when they were evacuated along with Romania's treasury, in light of the German occupation. Unlike the balanced formula of the festivity that had been chosen four decades prior, in the case of King Ferdinand, the idea of inserting the ritual of anointing into the ceremony, or the possibility of the

Orthodox metropolitan crowning the two monarchs had been strongly circulated. In connection with these plans, which had aroused concern among the Catholic clergy since their acquaintance, the nuncio had had the opportunity to speak directly with the King Ferdinand I, in July 1921. The sovereign did not hesitate to categorize as mere rumors the ideas circulating at that time in connection with the coronation, an event whose development he did not consider to be imminent, as was then believed at the level of public opinion. The nuncio did not miss the opportunity to draw the sovereign's attention to the harm he would cause by agreeing to the implementation of the circulated scenario, even at the level of unconfirmed information, and to the potential negative consequences for both his personal relationships, as well for the country he led, with the Catholic Church. The reasons that led his uncle to adopt a cautious attitude in a similar situation should have guided him as well, considered the nuncio, especially since he had recently obtained the reconciliation with the Catholic Church, being the sovereign a country with nearly four million Catholics and with whom the Holy See had agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Although he had not obtained the assurance from the sovereign that he would not allow gestures to discredit or offend his own Church, the nuncio concluded the account of this episode by emphasizing the king's overt concern about what was being told. The issue of the coronation was put back on the table with the Liberals' coming to power, and the nuncio sought to personally meet with the head of the ruling party, but did not succeed in the first phase. He contacted the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I.G. Duca, before to whom he repeated the arguments he had presented to the king a year before, emphasizing the embarrassing situation in which the Romanian sovereign and the country's government would place themselves in relation to the Holy See, which generously proved their goodwill towards Romania. At such a wake-up call, the senior Romanian official found it appropriate to say that the goodwill the nuncio was talking about should put the Catholic Church in a less uncompromising position, a statement that abruptly ended the discussion between the two. The rather harsh attitude of the government led Marmaggi to intensify contacts with the representatives of the Royal House, without completely giving up the relationship with some members of the executive. Because he intensely desired to avoid being to the curious looks or comments that might easily arise in such situations, the nuncio considered it appropriate that the connection with the royal family be mediated by a third person. Prince Barbu A. Stirbey, with whom the nuncio had also collaborated on the reconciliation between the sovereign and the Catholic Church, once again became the messenger of the royal will, Marmaggi requesting a first

meeting with him in order to discuss the coronation problem on 6 September 1922. The prince had stated that the Catholic Church would have no reason to be offended by a possible coronation of Ferdinand by the metropolitan-primate, since the king was a Catholic only as a private person; as sovereign, he was the head of the nation and of the country, in which Orthodoxy had the attribute of "dominant religion of the state." To this argument, the nuncio hastened to answer that the king could not give up the profession of the Catholic faith at will, and if he wished to be crowned or consecrated by a hierarch, then it seemed natural to appeal to the representatives of the Church to whom he belonged. In addition, the nuncio felt obliged to amend his interlocutor's statement on the status of Orthodoxy in the Romanian Kingdom, stating that such a privilege could not be spoken of in the case of territories attached to the Old Kingdom or even the latter, given that the old Constitution was suspended at that time, and the new one would much more fairly regulate the status of the denominations in the new Romania. The king's envoy was of the opinion that renouncing royal anointing would mean the disappearance of the impediment *communicatio in divinis* for Catholic hierarchs, an idea which was in turn nuanced by the nuncio, who stated that an act such as the coronation of a king by an Orthodox hierarch assumed a religious character, since it was accompanied by ritual and prayers. Wanting to end the game of negotiations and retorts, the nuncio informed prince Stirbey that the only acceptable solution for the Holy See was to minimize the role of Orthodox prelates. The king could not afford a further deterioration in his relationship with the Catholic Church, and it was up to him whether he wanted the representative of the pontifical sovereign in his country and whether the Catholic episcopate were to take part in the coronation ceremony. The two interlocutors broke away from this blunt position, with Prince Stirbey pledging to present the contents of the discussion to the king, whom he intended to visit in Sinaia, where the monarch had retired on holiday. On 10 September, the nuncio responded affirmatively to the invitation of the king's trusted man to visit him, on which occasion he was informed of the royal decisions. Thus, after having been informed of the position of the Holy See, the sovereign invited the Prime Minister to an audience, informing him that he wished to have a coronation ceremony as close as possible to that of his predecessor on the throne, in which the emphasis was to be on the civil moments of such a ceremony. More precisely, the king wanted the two crowns to be taken to the church in Alba Iulia on the eve of the solemnity, a mission that would belong to the president of the Council of Ministers and to one of the members of his cabinet. The king's crown was to be exempted from the ritual of blessing;

only the crown attributed to the queen was to receive the blessing of the Orthodox prelates, which was not to be done with the two cloaks with which the sovereigns would clothe themselves on the occasion of the feast. On 15 October, the sovereigns would arrive in Alba Iulia by royal train, heading straight for the place of worship. An ordinary *Te Deum* was scheduled there, and, at one point, all participants would go out into the churchyard, where the sovereigns would climb a podium arranged beforehand. After the speech prepared for the event, the king would receive from the president of the Senate the crown that he intended to put on his head, and from the president of the Assembly of Deputies, the queen's crown, which he was to place on the queen's crest. After marking these gestures accompanied by the sound of trumpets, the sovereigns were to return to the church to attend the end of the *Te Deum* service. In addition, the king expressed his wish that the nuncio be present at the coronation ceremony, together with the entire Catholic episcopate in the country, appreciating that, following the above scenario, there were no reasons to prevent their participation in the great feast of the ruling family and the whole country. In addition, the sovereign believed that the choir of Catholic bishops could mark the event by celebrating *Te Deum* in the city's Latin rite Cathedral, adjacent to the new Orthodox Church. In fact, the office of that religious service would be, out of the same sovereign desire, the obligation of all priests, regardless of denomination, throughout the country. All these changes in the initial program, the king considered, were likely to satisfy the claims of the Holy See, since they were all that could be offered in the conditions of Romania at that time. In addition, the motives that generated them had to remain undiscovered, so as not to give rise to dissatisfaction or resentment in Orthodox circles.

These were the details that ended Francesco Marmaggi's letter to Cardinal-Secretary Gasparri. The nuncio considered the result obtained on the basis of the concession tactics satisfactory. A coronation of King Ferdinand I by a Catholic prelate could have been requested, but was unlikely to have been obtained, the letter's signer said. However, the greatest achievement, from the nuncio's viewpoint, should be considered that the recent assurances of the sovereign avoided the danger of the Orthodox metropolitan placing his crown on his scalp, since the planned ceremony would be tailored to the principles of the one held 40 years prior.

Only two days passed before this extensive report was drawn up, until a new letter sent from 5 Esculap Street in Bucharest took the path of the Holy See.⁵⁸ Through it, the nuncio hurried to announce to the secretary

⁵⁸ The complete document in *Ibid.*, f. 123r-124v.

of state of the sovereign pontiff that he had managed to get the meeting he had wanted with Ionel Brătianu, who, as expected, was aware of the latest changes in the coronation program, made at the express request of the king. The head of the Romanian cabinet seemed to be reconciled with those changes; he only wanted to obtain the opinion of the Pope's representative on one detail: the assistance of the Catholic episcopate to the religious service officiated by the Orthodox clergy, in the conditions in which the participation of the representatives of the other religious communities in the country had already been confirmed. The Romanian political leader had been informed that at the wedding ceremony of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia with Princess Maria of Romania, in the summer of that year, in Belgrade, the religious service officiated by the Orthodox clergy was attended, without restraint, by the Catholic bishops of the country. Under these conditions, the Holy See could not apply the double measure, forbidding the Romanian Catholic hierarchs to take part in the service that the Orthodox bishops were to perform in the new cathedral built in Alba Iulia. At the end of his interlocutor's reasoning, the nuncio felt compelled to state that he was not in a position to judge the reasons that led the high pontifical authorities to allow the presence of Croatian and Slovenian bishops at the Orthodox ritual of the royal wedding in the neighboring kingdom, hoping that the Romanian royal government would not compel the Catholic bishops of any rite to participate in the religious functions of another denomination, without the approval of their supreme ecclesiastical authority. Upon receiving this categorical answer, the high Romanian official did not insist. Instead, he was interested in identifying ways to compensate for the absence of Catholic bishops from the Orthodox Church, suggesting to the nuncio the opportunity to officiate a religious service in the city's old Roman Catholic cathedral of Alba Iulia. In order to establish the conduct of the representatives of the Romanian Catholic Church towards the event scheduled to take place in the Transylvanian city, the author of the letter announced that he had summoned to his residence the Greek Catholic Metropolitan, Vasile Suciu, Raymund Netzhhammer, Archbishop of Bucharest, and the Bishop of the diocese of Transylvania with residence in Alba Iulia, Gusztáv Károly Majláth, for the 19th of that month. In the end, the nuncio expressed his hope that the hierarchs would not hinder his plan, and if that were to happen, he would ask for the assistance of the Holy See.

When all seemed agreed upon through dialogue and sufficient efforts had been made efforts to reconcile the intentions of the organizers with the demands of the Catholic Church, the publication on 14 September,

in the form of a press release, of the program of the festivities, stated that the coronation would take place inside the Orthodox place of worship, so that only then the two sovereigns could show themselves to the crowds gathered in the public square;⁵⁹ this determined the nuncio Marmaggi, who was in Rome at that time, to ask, through a dispatch sent to Barbu Stirbey, to explain whether the journalistic information was true or it had to be blamed on the lack of information of the person who released it.⁶⁰ The answer to this perplexity was not long in coming. By telegraph, from Azuga, the close relative of the royal family informed the nuncio that the program that had been published two days before in several publications in the capital contained numerous errors, including the one related to the coronation of their majesties.⁶¹

The first recorded reaction of the Secretary of State to the amount of information provided by the nuncio on the issue of the coronation appeared on 19 September.⁶² Then, in the form of an encrypted telegram, Pietro Gasparri informed the Pope's delegate in Bucharest that, in order to avoid any obstacle to the attendance of the Catholic clergy in Romania at the ceremony, it was absolutely necessary for it to take place outside any non-Catholic sacred space; also, the sovereigns had to go to the coronation place directly from the residence where they were to be housed in Alba Iulia. After the coronation, their majesties needed to return to their homes, and the Catholic and Orthodox hierarchs could retire to their churches to officiate. The Cardinal-Secretary of State was also interested in knowing whether in Romania the service of *Te Deum* had been assimilated by folk songs or was considered a strictly liturgical service.

After the scheduled discussion with the representatives of the Latin and Greek rites of the Romanian Catholic Church, which tried to standardize their behavior towards the celebration of the coronation of the Romanian sovereigns, the apostolic nuncio sent a new letter to Cardinal Gasparri, informing him of the decisions of that meeting.⁶³ The prelate-ambassador was quick to ask whether the coronation ceremony in the courtyard surrounded by porticoes of the Orthodox Church was able to change the instructions sent by encrypted telegram, for which he was willing to make every effort with the Bucharest executive. In addition, the nuncio felt compelled to give a number of clarifying details: the first of

⁵⁹ Netzhammer, *Episcop în România*, vol. II, 1152.

⁶⁰ ASV, *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 125r.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f. 126r-127r.

⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 129r.

⁶³ The complete document is in ASV, *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 130r-v.

these was related to the fact that the sovereigns did not have a royal palace in Alba Iulia and that their residence during their stay was going to be an apartment adjacent to the Orthodox church, to which they had access only through the cloister of the monastery. Then, the request that the sovereigns not take part in the religious function of the Orthodox Church, at least the one reserved for officiating after the coronation ceremony, was considered impossible by the nuncio, given that their majesties had already appropriated their custom to attend such religious services several times a year on national days. Regarding the nature of the *Te Deum* service, the services are associated with a double character: a liturgical function (with the specification that the liturgical language was not different from the vernacular), but especially the offices celebrated on the occasion of the holidays, which were customarily attended by state dignitaries and representatives of the countries with which Romania had stable diplomatic relations. At the end of his letter, the nuncio did not forget to stress that both the Court and the Romanian government attached great importance to the presence of the Catholic bishops at the coronation ceremony.

An important clarification of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the coronation ceremony of the Romanian sovereigns was brought by the telegram received from Rome on 23 September.⁶⁴ In it, Pietro Gasparri clearly stated that if the coronation ceremony began with the officiating of the *Te Deum* in the Orthodox Cathedral, continued with the act of coronation in the churchyard and ended with the *Te Deum* service, that festivity had an undoubted religious character, in which the presence of the nuncio and the Catholic hierarchs was strictly forbidden. In similar cases, such as the coronation of Edward VII or George V, the Holy Office ruled that the papal legate and the Catholic episcopate should not take part in the acts that took place in the Protestant Cathedral, establishing instead the celebration of distinct sacred functions for the king. The nuncio was mandated to convey to the government in Bucharest that the Holy See did not intend to impose any particular, discriminatory provision in the case of the coronation of Romanian sovereigns, but could not allow the presence of its ecclesiastical representatives at a non-civil ceremony. Taken in these terms, the situation did not seem to become simpler in any way. Quite the contrary. Carried out even without any intervention from the Orthodox hierarchs, the civil character of the coronation was annulled if the act were to be framed by two religious services. The presence of the Catholic episcopate was conditioned by the establishment of a clear delimitation between the two moments of the feast, without the resumption or continuation in any way of the Orthodox divine service or the insertion of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 134r-v

religious gestures in the civil ceremony. The new data on the issue seem to have raised concerns and serious questions about the real chances of the presence of the Catholic episcopate, in those conditions, even at the civil ceremony. The nuncio expressed all these thoughts to Cardinal Gasparri in a new letter written on 25 September.⁶⁵ Declaring from the outset that he would abide by any decision of the Holy See, Marmaggi raised a number of doubts about the similarity invoked in the Secretary of State's telegram between the coronation ceremonies of Edward VII or George V and the one envisaged in the case of the Romanian sovereigns. Specifically, the nuncio emphasized that the coronation ceremony in Alba Iulia was not scheduled to take place inside the church, like those of the English kings, but in the cloister, which looked like a public square, where, 40 meters away from the atrium of the church, more precisely at the entrance to the cloister, a stage was to be installed, on which the act of coronation was to take place. Then, unlike the English precedents, the Romanian case was not to include the ritual of consecration. After all, the Catholic bishops, if the Holy See were to approve of their presence, would not have to partake in any non-Catholic religious prayers or services. And the reasoning stated by the Secretary of State, according to which the framing of the coronation ceremony between two religious functions would give it a religious character, seemed to be amendable to the nuncio. The negative consequences that could result from the absence of Catholic prelates at the coronation ceremony should not be overlooked, Marmaggi said. Especially due to the fact that, at the level of the Romanian government and public opinion in general, there was the expectation that the Catholic nuncio and episcopate would be present at the celebration of the coronation of Romanian sovereigns, and a possible absence risked to be perceived as an act of vexation to Romania. The evidence in this respect was the general offensive, at that time, against the political parties that had announced that they would not take part in the coronation, and a similar decision by the Holy See would only have the Catholic Church joined with the dissidents and subjected to public reproach. The nuncio finally announced his intention to pay a visit to the head of the Romanian executive the next day to inform him of the contents of the latest instructions received from the Holy See.

He had scarcely finished writing this letter that a new epistle signed by the nuncio was on its way to Rome, carrying with it the message of a deep concern.⁶⁶ Francesco Marmaggi announced to Pope Pius XI's Secretary of State that he had unsuccessfully tried to obtain hearings from

⁶⁵ ASV, *Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari. Romania*, no. 37-38, 1922-1924, fasc. 30, f. 19r-23v.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 25r-27r.

the head of the Romanian cabinet, then from Prince Barbu Știrbey, in order to present the contents of the telegram sent on the 23rd of that month. The intention of the nuncio was to ask the Romanian prime minister and the king's adviser for approval on the suppression of one of the two parts of the religious ceremony scheduled for the day in question, so that there would be a clear delimitation between the church service and the actual act of coronation. Suspecting the difficulty of obtaining such a decision, the nuncio did not hesitate to suggest to the Secretary of State that the principle stated in the respective letter, according to which the framing of the act of coronation between two sequences of the religious service would imprint on the actual coronation a religious character, could hardly find support in canon law. For the papal representative in Romania, things were as clear as could be, even in the way they had been presented at that time: the act of coronation was unequivocally distinct from the two parts of the scheduled religious service (the first before it took place and the second after its conclusion) both by its nature (no ritual or prayer being foreseen), and by the prism of the circumstances in which it was to take place. In the Orthodox Church, the main role was to belong to the metropolitan-primate, but outside, it was to belong to the king; in the same way, the venue was different, as was the special audience (in the cathedral, the access was limited to about 300 people, while thousands of Romanians were to be present outside), stressed the nuncio, in an effort to show that the central point of the entire event scheduled for 15 October was represented by the act of self-coronation of the king. Given the importance of the issue thus raised, the Secretary of State's response was not long in coming.⁶⁷ Pietro Gasparri urged the nuncio to urgently request an audience with the king, which he would use as an opportunity to bring to his attention the Holy See's view of the disciplinary impossibility of Catholic prelates attending the religious ceremonies of other Christian denominations. But this was not the only mission entrusted to the nuncio in Rome. The novelty was that the nuncio was asked to persuade the Romanian sovereign to accept that the civil coronation ceremony be held in a public square and not inside the church cloister, a condition which, if accepted, would facilitate the presence of an extraordinary representative of the Holy See and of the Catholic bishops of Romania.

The lack of flexibility of the Romanian authorities, vigorously pressured in those days by the Orthodox clergy and the influential groups around them, regarding the latest requests made by the Roman Curia, undoubtedly contributed to the decision to make the Romanian nuncio tasked with coordinating from Constantinople the rescue of Catholics from

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 29r.

the Archdiocese of Smyrna, caught in the whirlwind of the Greco-Turkish war.⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, the nuncio's departure from Bucharest at the end of September put additional pressure on the Romanian authorities, which were threatened not only by the prospect of the absence of a prominent diplomatic representative from the coronation ceremony of the Romanian sovereigns, but also by the danger posed by the potential degradation of the - recently restored - relations between King Ferdinand I and the Catholic Church. During the visit made to the head of the Romanian cabinet with the intention of announcing his departure in the new mission and to present the latest requests of the Holy See in the matter of coronation, the nuncio had the opportunity to observe the indignation with which the high dignitary received the news that the diplomatic representative of the Pope would not be able to take part in the coronation ceremony, which was only two weeks away.⁶⁹ Ionel Brătianu used the occasion to convey to the nuncio that a new change in the program of the holiday was impossible, especially since the pressure exerted by Orthodox prelates was overwhelming.⁷⁰ During the absence of the nuncio from his post, the secretary of the Nunciature, Vittorio Cavagnis, had received the delegation of charge of affairs from the Holy See, being the person in charge of the attempt to harmonize the program of festivities in Alba Iulia with the requirements of the Roman Curia. The first signals, in the new context, came from Rome, shortly after the announcement that to the nuncio had been assigned a task that forced him to leave Romania. Vittorio Cavagnis was mandated to inform the Romanian government that the Holy See would appoint a pontifical delegate for the coronation ceremony of the country's sovereigns if all requests made by the Catholic Church were to be accepted by the Romanian side.⁷¹ It was only a matter of time before the Romanian officials, faced with a situation that threatened to weaken the country's international image and the recently established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, complied with the non-negotiable demands of the pontifical courts. On 2 October, Secretary Cavagnis informed Cardinal Gasparri that the government had approved the modification of the coronation program so that it would take place in the public square in front of the Orthodox church,⁷² and two days later he was able to deliver the news that the final part of the religious service, which involved the re-entry of the newly crowned sovereigns into the Orthodox

⁶⁸ Netzhammer, *Episcop în România*, vol. II, 1157.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ASV, *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 146r.

⁷¹ Ibid., f. 143r-145r.

⁷² Ibid., f. 147r.

Cathedral, had been suppressed by the organizers.⁷³ Under these conditions, nothing stood, at least at the declarative level, in the way of the presence of the Catholic episcopate at the coronation ceremony of the Romanian sovereigns, a festivity which by the manner and place of its development met the conditions of an act relieved of any religious symbolism. Once the impediments invoked by the Holy See were removed, the Romanian authorities did not fail to take the necessary steps to obtain, from the Roman Curia, the mandate of a special delegation for the coronation ceremony. After several options were considered, including the official representation of the Holy See through a delegation led by one of the nuncios in Vienna, Belgrade or Warsaw, the Secretary of State informed the Romanian diplomatic mission that the Holy See would ask the nuncio Marmaggi to interrupt the mission with which he had been charged at that time in Constantinople in order to attend, as the extraordinary representative of the sovereign pontiff, the coronation ceremony of the kings of Romania.⁷⁴ The presence of Francesco Marmaggi at the coronation ceremony, insisted on by the head of the Romanian diplomacy, Minister I. G. Duca, was made possible by the return of the nuncio to Bucharest on the night of 12 October, when the letter of accreditation as extraordinary nuncio and the credentials were issued.⁷⁵ Returning to Romania and guaranteeing that the coronation ceremony would take place as agreed by the organizers of the event with the Holy See, the nuncio Marmaggi hastened to send King Ferdinand I, in confidence, a letter expressing his gratitude for the malleability shown by the sovereign to the wishes of the Catholic Church regarding the organization of the coronation ceremony.⁷⁶

The short time left before the festivities was marked by a no less intense telegraphic correspondence between the nuncio and the Secretary of State, generated by the desire of the pontifical officials to ensure that the organizers of the event in Alba Iulia had no intentions of making any further changes in the program they had agreed to with the Holy See. In the event that such changes were to occur, however, without prior notice from the pontifical forums, the nuncio was empowered to intervene, even by interrupting or leaving the ceremony.⁷⁷ Relying on the seriousness and good intentions of the Romanian side, the Holy See wanted to honor the celebration of the coronation of Romanian sovereigns by issuing a congratulatory letter addressed by Pope Pius XI, to the “son” of the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, f. 149r.

⁷⁴ ASV, *Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari. Romania*, poz. 37–38, 1922–1924, fasc. 30, f. 40r–41v.

⁷⁵ ASV, *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 160r, 217r, 218r.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 169r–170r.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 164r.

Catholic Church, King Ferdinand I of Romania.⁷⁸ In addition, in honor of the event, Cardinal-Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri himself attended the *Te Deum* service held in the church assigned to Romanians in Rome, along with all the heads of diplomatic missions at the Holy See.⁷⁹

In these circumstances, the coronation ceremony took place in accordance with the scenario agreed between the Romanian government and the Holy See, as the reports sent immediately after the consummation of that act by the nuncio Marmaggi to the Secretary of State and other Roman departments pointed out.⁸⁰ Those exposures are also important because they have the power to clarify other backstage details of the Alba Iulia celebration of that day. For example, immediately after his return from Constantinople, the nuncio hurried to Alba Iulia (compelled by the fact that he had not yet received the credentials of Extraordinary Delegate of the Holy See, thus being unable to comply with diplomatic protocol, like the others external missions, which included the presentation of letters of accreditation to the royal residence in Sinaia), where, on the evening of 14 October, he organized a conference at the residence of Bishop Majláth, to which only the united episcopate was invited, knowing that government officials (especially Minister Banu) had put pressure on the Greek-Catholic hierarchs – during his absence from the post – to take part in the religious service in the Orthodox Cathedral.⁸¹ Another pressing issue that the nuncio had to deal with was the unofficial information that the absence of any Catholic bishop from the civil coronation ceremony would lead the Romanian government to ask the Holy See for its immediate revocation. After all, not all Catholic bishops in Romania had been invited by the organizers to attend the celebration in Alba Iulia, such as the bishop of Iasi, Alexandru Cisar, or the bishop of Cenad, Julius Glattfelder, and their absence, corroborated by the fact that some of them had not taken the oath of allegiance to the Romanian sovereigns, could easily be considered an offense brought by the Romanian Catholic Church to the representatives of the Romanian state.⁸² The solution devised by the nuncio was as simple as it was efficient: he sent each bishop a telegram requesting, in an imperative

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 161r-v.

⁷⁹ *Unirea*, XXXII/42 (21 Oct. 1922): 3.

⁸⁰ A.S.V., *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 171r-172v; 213r-214v, 222r-226r; *Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari. Romania*, poz. 37-38, 1922-1924, fasc. 30, f. 47r-51r, 64r-69r. See also Ion Gorun, *Încoronarea primului rege al României întregite la Alba Iulia și la București* (Bucharest: IG Hertz, n.d.).

⁸¹ A.S.V., *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 213r.

⁸² Z. Străjanu, "Culte minoritare în Transilvania," in *Transilvania, Banatul, Crișana, Maramureșul 1918-1928*, vol. II (1929), 840; Mózes Nóda, *Biserica romano-catolică din Transilvania în perioada interbelică* (Cluj-Napoca: Studium, 2008), 30-31.

manner, to be present at the coronation ceremony of the Romanian sovereigns. In addition to the Greek-Catholic hierarchs, Archbishop Netzhammer, Bishop Majláth, Bishop Glattfelder and Canon Emmerich Bjelik, the titular bishop of Thasus, attended the public ceremony of the coronation. The Bishop of Satu Mare, Tibor Boromisza, whose advanced age and health problems did not allow him to reach Alba Iulia, and the Bishop of Iasi, Alexandru Cisar, who had not been invited in time by the organizers, remained absent.⁸³

This overview shows that the coronation ceremony of King Ferdinand I and Queen Maria of Alba Iulia from 100 years ago was strongly shaped by the papal diplomacy, which imposed strict conditions on the religious ceremony (supervised by the Orthodox Church), which made the coronation look like an exclusively secular show, far from the plans originally conceived by the politicians in Bucharest or by the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy.

⁸³ A.S.V., *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Romania*, no. 5, fasc. 12, f. 171r-172v.

