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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

**“Astra”
between 1940 and 1944**

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Founded in Sibiu in 1861, the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People ("Astra"), through its modern vision and the creative endeavour of generations of Transylvanian intellectuals, participated in all stages of its activity to the progress of the society in which it operated. In 1950, "Astra" and many other cultural societies were abolished by a decision of the Council of Ministers, after it had been almost impossible for them to carry out any activity for the previous two years. The Association's propaganda, with its nationalist and Christian elements which had become radicalized during the war, was not only incompatible with the communist ideology, but was a dangerous competitor for it.

For "Astra", the period 1940-1944 was the beginning of the end. Although it faced difficulties of all kinds, it lived in an era of illusions, in the service of the Christian, national and eugenic ideal. It was a time when the optimism of the national culture of the years of parliamentary democracy (1919-1937) came to an end with the collapse of Romania's borders in the summer of 1940, and the fall under the sign of totalitarianism which led to the dissolution of the institution, the purging of the elite and brought all levels of social life under the state control.

"Astra" did not forget its traditional forms of manifestation, on the contrary, it enhanced them and had to give up, instead, those showing off a nationalism that was too intense: *șoimiadele*, the festivities, the ethnographic processions, in general, the sumptuous, spectacular manifestations with many participants and especially with a large audience. The reorganization of activities included the taking an emphasized nationalist stand, given the re-emergence of Hungarian revisionist propaganda, as well as the intensified application of the biopolitical principles throughout the process of analysis of the Romanian ethnic heritage. During this period, the editorial programme was also enhanced in volume and dynamism of the Association's discourse, which took on strong ethnocentrist notes.

In the 1940s, "Astra" promoted the physical, moral and intellectual prosperity of the Romanian nation; it modified its bylaws and set new directions under the influence of the Biopolitical Division headed by Iuliu Moldovan, exacerbating themes such as the preservation of the ethnobiological fund, the qualitative and quantitative increase of the Romanian biological capital and the role of family in these phenomena, with a view to saving the future of the nation. The association was intensely concerned with areas where the Romanian element was seen to be in danger: the Szekler area, the Banat area, where the decrease in the number of Romanian births was alarming. It proposed vigorous measures to

halt this ethnic decline in a comprehensive memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Finance, aiming at a deep Romanianization in multi-ethnic Transylvania. Peasantry was the target group of the concerns of Antonescu government and of the Association. In addition to cultural, economic, material and moral development, "Astra" also advocated the improvement of biological quality, continuing and emphasising social surveys in certain communes, where the researchers were accompanied by medical teams.

Having undergone permanent reorganisation during the interwar period and the formulation of a new programme adapted to the enlarged territory following the Unification, "Astra" had to face fierce competition on the cultural market. The huge number of similar organizations operating up to the outbreak of the Second World War had the 'gift' of confusing the peasantry and disintegrating the energies of those working in the field of national education. Not infrequently there was animosity on local level, with the intellectuals grouped around different organizations competing in the market of cultural stakeholders.

School and church were the two institutions on which the Association relied in its cultural and eugenic activity, most of the leaders of its entities being either teachers, professors or priests. Moreover, teachers combined their extracurricular activities with those of "Astra". The intertwining of roles and expansion of professional activity outside the institutional environment was characteristic to the intellectuals in the Transylvanian countryside. Their educational mission also reached out to the cultural field of the Association. To a lesser extent, this statement can also apply to the urban environment, which was much more difficult to impress, to attract, to penetrate and maintain in a long-lasting collective emulation, given the lack of homogeneity of the target group. More commercial, pragmatic and individualist, the urban environment has been the subject of other approaches.

Increasing the degree of participation in the deed of culture, oriented primarily towards the Romanian ethnic element - the spiritual uplift of the nation - was a constant concern for the Antonescu regime, which resorted to and used all the resources of power to persuade the intellectuals of the time, both urban and rural, to participate in this "work of national reconstruction", as the regime's internal policy was generically called, a moral restructuring of the entire society, which aimed primarily at disciplining and establishing order within the body of the nation. In Transylvania, however, a distinction must be made between the desire of part of the elite to collaborate with the regime and a sincere, patriotic, voluntary desire in the military context of the time and the painful territorial losses of

1940. In case of some of them, the motivation was doubled by a nice remuneration, which led to employment in the service of the state or subservience to the dictatorial regime of Ion Antonescu.

Between the two possibilities, where did "Astra" stand?

This paper tries to find even more precise answers to questions such as: what role did the institution play in this totalitarian regime? What was its degree of involvement? How many members of the Association's management accepted the proposal to collaborate?

If it had not received governmental aid, what would "Astra" have achieved in an extremely difficult period such as the war? Would they have survived the regime?

What kind of propaganda did the Association do during that period? Was it for the regime or for a national ideal? We will try to find answers to these are questions by analyzing documents, memoirs and central publications of the institution.

The collaboration with the Antonescu regime had as main motivation, besides the obvious pressures of the central power, also that of obtaining funds that would lead to the implementation of Iuliu Moldovan's biopolitical program. The right-wing ideological affinities paved the way for a collaboration that became visible from 1943 onwards, when "Astra" became directly involved in the propaganda policy and became a loudspeaker of the regime. Moreover, the results of the Association's activity speak for themselves: increased revenues, membership, the network of cultural circles, the number of peasant schools, conferences, publications, etc. What fuelled that ebullience? Was it just a national ideal? What was the price paid by "Astra" for the subsidies from Antonescu government?

This research aimed to highlight the lights and shadows of "Astra" between 1940 and 1944, as they reached out in a society strongly affected, like the Association, by the war and by a military dictatorial regime. The theme of "Astra" is a very complex and vast one, which is why it will always need further research and updating, both locally and nationally. The aim of this study is to deepen the knowledge of a relatively short fragment of the history of this cultural institution in order to highlight and complete the image of its activity, considering that this is a natural approach, given the emergence of recent historiographical contributions. I also aimed to highlight the less known relations of the Association with the Antonescu dictatorial regime and the role it played in the national propaganda of the time, while also following the activity of the "Astra" in relation to other cultural societies (Royal Cultural Foundation "Regele Mihai I") or institutions in Romania

(Board of Trustees of Social Works - Comitetul de Patronaj al Operelor Sociale, University "Regele Ferdinand I" of Cluj-Sibiu etc.).

Access to a bibliography, inherent to such an approach, was sometimes difficult due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic installed in March 2020, so I redirected my research largely to the online environment that offered many digitized studies available in various databases.

The archival sources consulted are at the Sibiu County Service of the National Archives of Romania - the corpus *ASTRA-Sibiu. Administrative statement (1940-1944)*; corpus *ASTRA press*: register of subscriptions to the *Transilvania* magazine (1929-1946); Register of expenses of *Foaia Poporului* printing shop and *Foaia Poporului* magazine (1943-1944); *Foaia Poporului* inventory register (1944-1947). At the National Archives of Romania I consulted the corpuses *Ministry of National Propaganda. Litigation*; *Ministry of National Propaganda. Accounting and Ministry of Finance. Directorate for the Movement of Funds*.

The bibliographical research was carried out at "Astra" County Library of Sibiu by consulting publications from the collection - *Periodicals. Foaia Poporului* (Sibiu); *Sora de Ocrotire*; *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (Brasov), *Vieața Universitară* (Cluj-Sibiu), *Revue de Transylvanie* (1940-1944), *Dacoromania. Newspaper of the Romanian Language Museum*, (1938-1948), *Geopolitics and Geohistory, Romanian magazine for South-East Europe*, etc. The periodicals *Transilvania*, *Buletin eugenic și biopolitic*, *Calendarul „Astrei”* (1940-1944), *Buletinul Extensiunii Universitare*, *Anuarul Universității Cluj* (1938-1942) and others were browsed online.

A wide range of bibliographies and periodicals were also consulted at the headquarters of the Central University Library "Carol I" of Bucharest, the Metropolitan Library of Bucharest (headquarters) or on the website of the Central University Library "Lucian Blaga" of Cluj-Napoca, at the headquarters of the County Library "Vasile Voiculescu" of Buzău, of the Library of the Buzău County Museum and in other private libraries belonging to historians from Buzău.

A particularly useful tool were the collections of documents, the *Transcripts of the meetings of the Council of Ministers. Ion Antonescu Government*, edited by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă *et alii*, in Bucharest, between 1997 and 2007 (11 volumes), various yearbooks published by cultural or scientific institutions of the time. The works of authors such as Onisifor Ghibu, Eugen Hulea, Iuliu Moldovan, Gheorghe Preda were also important sources for this study. As for the specialized bibliography, the main sources were those that dealt with the history of the Association. We mention here the contributions of

Victor Grecu, Elena Macavei, Pamfil Matei, Valer Moga, Dumitru Tomoni and others. The general context of the period has been the subject of extensive special works by authors such as Dorel Bancoş, Dennis Deletant, Andreas Hillgruber, Keith Hitchins, Lucian Nastasă-Kovács, Irina Nastasă-Matei, Zigu Ornea, Vasile Puşcaş, Aurică Simion, Ottmar Traşcă, Valentin Vasile, and Leon Volovici or thematic works and studies published by Mioara Anton, Filaret Acatrinei, Viorel Achim, Eugen Denize, Stelian Mîndruţ, Liliana Muşeteanu, Dragoş Sdrobiş and others.

Eugenics and the role of the eugenics school of Cluj under the leadership of Iuliu Moldovan have been the subject of previous research conducted by Maria Bucur and Marius Turda and also by others, such as Octavian Buda, Lucian Butaru or Vladimir Solonari, being a theme that "emerged" in the last decade in the Romanian scientific area, where Marius Turda's contributions have been definitive in the investigation of this Romanian medical trend correlated with the general European or world trend.

CHAPTER I, which deals with the adaptation of "Astra" activity to the conditions of the Second World War, was based on historical sources available at the Sibiu County Service of the National Archives of Romania, which were photocopied in full for the chosen period. Our scientific approach aimed to present an objective analysis, starting from the text of the documents, of the relations between "Astra" and the Romanian state in the atmosphere of the war years, in order to understand the evolution of this institution and the cultural phenomena in Transylvania. Thus it presents the general assemblies of "Astra", the changes in the number of members, the specific activities carried out by the departments, amplified by the input of capital coming from Bucharest and under the strict coordination of Iuliu Moldovan, the reorganization of the Biopolitical Division and the actions of the eugenicists conducted especially in the Transylvanian environment, the phenomenon of adult education prevalently oriented towards the women's segment ("mothers' schools") with a strong eugenic component, the Association's budgetary sources and assets and other aspects related to the "Astra" libraries and museums.

"Astra" not only adapted to political and military events, but even chose to align itself with the policy of the dictatorial regime and subordinated itself to it, participating in official state propaganda. Commenced under King Carol II regime when it was included in the Social Service, the self-subordination of "Astra" took on much broader dimensions under Antonescu regime, when it participated in its propaganda construction and in shaping society according to the principles of the ethnocratic state. The association became a propaganda loudspeaker in Transylvania and Banat, just as the Royal Cultural Foundation "Mihai I" became in the Old

Kingdom, Bessarabia and Bucovina. This line of subordination was drawn and brought to completion by Iuliu Moldovan, although there were reluctant (but not vehement) voices in the central committee who were in favour of maintaining a certain independence. Unable to refuse the government, Iuliu Moldovan struggled to obtain approval from the central committee to align themselves with the regime's demands. Moreover, he saw the circumstances of the moment as an opportunity to finally implement his biopolitical programme in Transylvania and Banat. This led to a radicalization of activity in this field, with the Biopolitical Division of the "Astra", with its Family Protection sub-division having, of course, the role of implementing effective measures from ideas into practice. The reorganisation of the division took place at a time when the memorandum on Romanianization proposed by "Astra" in Transylvania already had the initial approval of the government and the funds received from the Board of Trustees of Social Works in the spring of 1942, amounting to lei 5,000,000, were available for eugenic activities. The general assemblies of the Association were intended to "formalize" the actual policy of the eugenicists that were leading the institution.

The transition to a new regime was quick and the willingness of the leadership was seen from the moment the Legionary Movement was offered seats in the central committee. The adaptation "required" by the conditions of life in the new political context, dominated by the state of war, was imposed by Iuliu Moldovan. He sought to carry out a structural and functional reform of the Association's staff and of the cultural circles. Those activities were intensified under the new realities that made it possible to apply biopolitics more effectively in the territory, where the real beneficiaries of "Astra" were to be found. He attached particular importance to reforming the body of the Association, seeking to create stable and above all dynamic institutional structures that would be committed to implementing his eugenic and biopolitical programme. Significant changes in the socio-economic, political and ideological framework favoured this structural reform and Iuliu Moldovan mobilized the entire human resource by bringing in new chairpersons and steering committees at the head of the departments, with people more attached to biopolitical principles, younger and more spirited. Gheorghe Preda's and Eugen Hulea's numerous visits to the territory were primarily aimed at this objective - strengthening and increasing the Association's base by increasing the number of members and revitalizing cultural and eugenic actions in the communes. The impact of this strategy on the scale of the entire Association, which also aimed to increase the prestige and the cultural dominance of the institution in the province, is revealed by the increase in the number of members and departments (including the assimilation of the community centers of the Royal Cultural Foundation "Regele Mihai I").

Iuliu Moldovan aimed to build a much stronger institution. The time had come (in terms of ideological affinities), the money had arrived. There were also people in power circles who supported "Astra". There was also a very exciting reason for the nation: the loss of some territories, but especially of north-western Transylvania, made it possible to mobilize much more quickly the intellectuals from among whom the local activists of the Association were recruited. Many presidents of the departments who had fallen into "lethargy" or were unable to cope with the new demands and responsibilities gave way to more dynamic ones who were more attached to the principles of "greatness of the nation". In this context, the power of control of the central county departments over the peripheral structures was introduced into the bylaws (at the 1942 General Assembly). The creation of a system of active cultural circles and the expansion thereof was pursued through campaigns to set up new peripheral cells and take over community centers, the impetus for this activity being given by the regime authorities from the spring of 1943. The "fever of unusual activity" had settled in the "Astra" network. The ultimate aim was to win over, in time, all the inhabitants of the communes and towns "of Romanian ethnic origin".

The biopolitical concept was introduced after the Cultural Congress of 1930 and added to the bylaws in 1935. During the war, however, actions became more radical, the distinctive note being that of creating a biological awareness on the basis of the principle of ethnic exclusivity against foreign genetic capital. What had been cautiously and gradually announced in the interwar period had suddenly become loud and clear: biopolitics was the watchword of "Astra" during the war. Hygiene of the nation, eugenics, reorganization and re-romanization of areas with highly multi-ethnic structure and ethnic fortification of the borders were the goals of the Association, which wanted to dynamize the nation. The Christian and national impulse was a "current" of the time to which the "Astra" was successfully aligned, as evidenced by the delivery of an impressive number of conferences and popular lectures, the expansion of the library network and the care given to museums, monuments and the preservation of traditions as a form of identity affirmation. Moreover, it went further to unprecedented enhancement of adult education to increase the nation's biological capital. A relevant phenomenon is the scope achieved by peasant schools, which were mainly oriented towards the women's segment ("mothers' schools" and the eugenic curriculum). Through economic propaganda and the creation of specific structures (the Economic Council), the institution sought to train and strengthen the wealthy peasant class. The economic recovery measures in Transylvania and Banat aimed at increasing the standard of living and ensuring the future material well-being of the Romanians were directed especially towards the more prosperous segment of the villages,

with greater and immediate chances of development, but also with a greater biological potential, in the eugenicist view.

The actual participation of "Astra" in the process of Romanianization and the exclusion of Jews from various sectors of society, as commenced under the government of Octavian Goga and later propagated violently during the national-legionary state and gradually continued by the Antonescu regime, remains a subject to be studied. The policy of Romanianization, an essential component of the process of reorganisation of the state through the "national-Christian revolution", the realisation of which was envisaged in the programme of the Legionary Movement when it came to power, was applied in a chaotic and discretionary manner, with varying intensity at local level. The implementation of Romanization, which had become a national objective, set the national-legionary government apart from previous ones in terms of its methods of action, the firmness of its implementation and, above all, its particular orientation against the Jews. From 1941 onwards, the Romanianization propagated by "Astra" or by people from its circles, in various public or private institutions, sought to strengthen the Romanian majority element in the Transylvanian area. The cultural, moral and sanitary uplift, the recovery and the consolidation of the economic life of the Romanians were, in the eugenicist view, necessary exigencies in a context in which the minorities were considered more advanced and better placed in economic positions.

Political (regime changes), military (the war), social (the serious refugee problem), economic events (the crisis, the devaluation of the leu), all such permanent upheavals have marked the work of the Association, as indeed that of the society as a whole. So it was not just a question of the institution's ability to adapt, but even of a propagandistic assault on society, motivated by the warlike state and the geopolitical context of Transylvania.

CHAPTER II briefly presents and analyses the historiographical discourse of "Astra", without claiming to exhaust the theme, in a period characterised by profound ideological implications driven by the peak of political revisionism. This inevitably also had an impact on the scientific research and the ideological orientation of the discourse offered to society and to the European intellectual environment.

The content of *Transilvania* magazine, the main press organ of "Astra", was completely taken over by the Romanian nationalist rhetoric, with heavily emphasized ethnocentric component. The obsessive interest in the history of the province is a hallmark of "Astra", which dominated that chronological interval. The massive and impressive

production of publications was the result of the commitment of those who wrote driven by the goal of mobilizing the nation, by the service of the national objectives of the time and in order to counteract the Hungarian historiographical theories.

Transilvania magazine distinguished by the introduction of a new graphic formula and structure, starting in 1941, and by an increase in the volume published. The discourse of the main organ of "Astra" was centered on the history of the province, thus developing a strong cultural propaganda for the formation and strengthening of the ethnic identity and for the defence of the rights over the lost territories and especially for regaining north-western Transylvania. *Revue de Transylvanie* also participated for this goal, on the foreign level. *Transilvania*, under the editorship of Ion Breazu, entered a much more dynamic phase and the quality of the language has been improved by the numerous productions of university intellectuals. They sought primarily to promote the restoration of the state unity, focusing their attention on the spiritual mobilization of the nation and especially of the Transylvanian people to whom they were addressed.

Sibiu, a place of multi-ethnic coexistence, has become a center of cultural irradiation for the Romanians from the province. Here, identity-assertive projects were created – of ethnocentrism with strong regionalist touch- which were disseminated throughout the "Astra" network and in society through its publications. The magazine stubbornly pursued the promotion of the Romanian history, language and literature, the aim being to build a strong national awareness and patriotic feelings in the body of the nation, to whose "rescue" "Astra" was also committed.

The extremely complex situation in Transylvania, where ethnic eugenic movements, such as the Saxon and Hungarian, had been active for several decades, led to the creation of a "Romanian eugenic subculture in Transylvania"¹, whose representatives emitted a scientific ethos known in specialized historiography as the "eugenic school of Cluj". In the wake of the war, they became radicalised and took up important positions in the Romanian state. They were concerned not only with increasing scientific production, but also with implementing Iuliu Moldovan's biopolitical programme.

Ethnicist rhetoric also dominated the discourse of the magazine *Buletin eugenic și biopolitic*. It presented topics that were connected to positive eugenics such as public health, hygienic education, pro-birth politics and social welfare. It also dealt with racial issues, with genetics, biopolitical legislation and negative eugenics, such as the prenuptial agreement and

¹ The wording belongs to researcher Marius Turda.

compulsory sterilization for the mentally and physically disabled. The Romanian biological heritage was subjected to investigation in the search for a perfect (utopian) society. At its centre was the Romanian "nation" („neam”) for whose future the state had to support and apply a well-coordinated biopolitical system, like other similar contemporary systems in Europe or overseas.

Buletinul eugenic și biopolitic reflected Iuliu Moldovan's biopolitical conception in a much more dominant manner, persuasively building and promoting the eugenic ideology driven by the core concept of "nation" („neam”). The eugenic discourse in the magazine also took radical forms, with racist overtones, complementing the xenophobic and ultranationalist political discourse of the dictatorial regime. It also fitted into the speaking framework of the time, of national homogenisation and ethnic purification of the national body through the exclusion of dysgenic groups. We can therefore speak of an eugenic nationalism that was specific to this phase in the development of the magazine. At the same time, however, it must be mentioned that the progress and the modernization of society were of interest to some of the contributors in the publication of “Astra”. Thus, many topics related to the reform of the public health system were present in the pages of the newspaper, where authors were inspired from the European models of the time, adapted however to the Romanian realities.

Iuliu Moldovan and his followers aimed to create a strong eugenic movement that would first of all change the mentality of the medical profession and lead to the formation of a biological awareness. The aim was to professionalize and train the doctors in the eugenicist spirit, both passed through a national filter. A strong social responsibility for the future of the nation was attached to them, the ultimate goal being to grow a healthier and more numerous Romanian people, through well-organized public health and social welfare policies enacted by the Romanian state. At the same time, the eugenic propaganda and culture was disseminated throughout society (through speeches, conferences, publications), including first of all the elites (teachers, professors and priests) and then the most numerous class, the peasantry. Both target groups were located in the countryside, where, according to Iuliu Moldovan's conception, the "biological reservoir of the nation" was located. According to many contributors, this ethnic heritage had to be preserved in as pure a form as possible and protected from the foreign biological and cultural mixture that appeared to bring about a decay and threatened the genetic and spiritual heritage of the Romanians. At the same time, the peasantry had to be protected from the "harmful" influences of the urban environment, which brought the danger of denatality and social illnesses. The eugenicists aimed to control malnutrition, alcoholism, venereal diseases and infant mortality in the peripheral

organizations of the "Astra". Moreover, the Romanian village, seen as the material, spiritual and biological summit of the nation, a reservoir of traditions and biological vitality, was placed at the heart of the battle that was waged between maintaining traditionalism and adopting a cautious modernism. The extent to which modernity was taking hold (an inevitable phenomenon) and its nuances in particular, had to be controlled. The village had to remain traditional, protected from the interference of innovative changes and of urban mentalities. At the same time, however, it was to benefit from medical developments, from progressive health reforms and better social welfare.

The eugenic propaganda to raise the living standards of this social category gained momentum during the war. The phenomenon of peasant schools with a strong eugenic-educational curriculum reached its peak during this period. The association intensified its message through *Foaia Poporului*, aiming to build a vigorous ethnic and biological awareness in the countryside, specific to its objectives at that time and in correlation with the vision of economic regeneration of the Transylvanian village.

In general, the publications of "Astra", as well as the whole strategy of the institution, had a regional addressability. The discourse in the pages of *Buletinul eugenic și biopolitic* was addressed to the whole nation and the concerns related to eugenics regarded the whole Romanian society, reflecting of course the fruit of medical experiences in the Transylvanian area, in the organization of health care, in social welfare, in the running of peasant schools or in various other related fields. According to the eugenicists, the state had to introduce measures to protect the "Romanian biological capital" in economic, social, cultural and healthcare terms. The sparse actions of the eugenics schools in Iasi, Bucharest, Cluj-Sibiu that operated around the universities had to be coordinated through a centralized system, well set up and enacted by the totalitarian state. This was also the purpose for which the "Mareșal Ion Antonescu" Institute of Ethnoracial Biology was established at the beginning of 1944, whose very complex structure comprised many institutions of the time.

Almost two decades after the publication of *Biopolitica* (1926), Iuliu Moldovan had succeeded in creating a specialized magazine (1927), in running an Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Sibiu, in introducing a healthcare law (1930), in creating a whole generation of disciples and an eugenic school in Transylvania. Together with other professors at the Faculty of Medicine, he succeeded in training hundreds of doctors in this spirit, being considered the undisputed mentor of the school of Cluj. For 15 years, together with other doctors and eugenicists, he ran a private, non-governmental institution, which spread throughout Transylvania, in whose strategy he introduced this ideology.

Therefore, in terms of discourse, the Association stood out by promoting ethnocentrism and a eugenic nationalism, on the background provided by the identity demands of an entire generation of intellectuals committed to finding and defining the coordinates of the Romanian spirituality and territoriality. The elites were very concerned with the political management of the past and especially with the mapping of the destiny of Romanianism in history.

The chapter continues with the presentation of other publications of “Astra” or under its aegis, such as those intended for the peasantry (the Peasant Gazette, the *Foaia Poporului* (1943-1944) and the publishing programme *Biblioteca populară*) or those for intellectuals (*Biblioteca-eugenică și biopolitică a Astrei* between 1942 and 1944, the magazine *Sora de ocrotire*, the publishing programme *Biblioteca “Astra”*) and *Revue de Transylvanie* between 1940 and 1944, which was a publication for foreign propaganda.

CHAPTER III contains a brief analysis of the Romanian education system during the Antonescu regime, with a focus on the work of the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Affairs. The topic has generally been the subject of research intended for the university environment and less to the primary, secondary and vocational environment. This research aims to contribute with aspects related to this segment of the ministry activity and highlight Ion Antonescu's vision of church and school institutions.

Regarding the work of the Ministry of National Propaganda, I tried to highlight the mode of action, with references to the nationwide propaganda carried out through written press, radio, cinema and the role of the cultural associations in the propaganda system. I then described the actual contribution of “Astra” to the propaganda of the Antonescu regime, how the association was co-opted by the government in the propaganda for the Transylvanian issue, and the own agenda of Romanianization pursued in this multi-ethnic and multi-confessional area. An unusual aspect is that of the “Astra” project of action in Timoc and Serbian Banat, which, like the government project, failed due to the ban imposed by the German ally. The chapter makes important contributions on the sinuous collaboration with the Royal Cultural Foundation “Regele Mihai I” and information on the “struggle” for cultural supremacy in Transylvania between the two institutions, both summoned to collaborate under the Ministry of National Propaganda umbrella. From 1943 the red thread of the regime's propaganda was the issue of Transylvania and the salvation of the nation, with the Ministry of Propaganda coordinating a “Romanian bloc” in which it incorporated many cultural associations, including “Astra”, in the service of state propaganda, following the Nazi propaganda model. The diplomatic battle for Transylvania drew in the intellectual elites of the time, members of “Astra”, university

professors, academics, engaged in the great historiographical battle with their Hungarian counterparts.

Strongly affected by the Second Vienna Award, the Association chose its own path in this cultural realm and intensified its role in society, turning radicalized and intensifying its actions. Ethnocentrism and biopolitics were the swan song of "Astra", the specificity of this cultural association in the tense atmosphere of the Second World War.

Put at the service of national politics and of the interests of the ethnocratic state, the culture propagated through the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Affairs embraced the guiding line of the state leader. Ion Antonescu initially designed a re-education of educators (teachers and priests), a disciplining and moral reshaping within specific bodies, under the umbrella of the general objective of establishing order and morality in public life.

Constant pressure coming from the circles of power, through territorial structures and through legislation, on these two professional bodies was aimed at a massive social mobilization for the cultural, moral and religious transfiguration of the nation, from the youngest individuals in primary school, to those in university, as well as for those left out of school. Adult education took place through pre-military training, the army, the peasant and worker schools, the work of the church and cultural associations. Ion Antonescu's vision of the school and of the church was not only to reform them, but also to have them participating in shaping the whole nation, according to his soldier-like concepts. The school and out-of-school population had to be transformed, reconfigured in a national, civic and patriotic spirit. The school was called upon to build and strengthen the national awareness and the army was called upon to increase and complete the patriotic education through military training, the product being an individual dedicated to his country. Nationalism was the central strand of all messages conveyed in society. The core of the Marshal's concerns, as inoculated to his ministers, was the cultural, economic and sanitary uplift of the rural population: the peasant and the peasant soldier, the "opinca" that formed the Romanian army and sacrificed their lives to serve the ideal of restoring the unity of all Romanians in a single country watched over by the ethnic borders of Romanianism.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, in particular, was the institution that helped the totalitarian state by providing moral and social assistance to society, a role it has played throughout the centuries, regardless of the nature of political regimes. In the period 1940-1944, the clergy participated in building a so-called climate of peace and security, of trust in the Antonescu regime. During the war there was perhaps even more obvious of an intensification of the religious sentiment among Romanians. It was the fruit of a sustained campaign of moral

and religious education conducted by Romanian Orthodox Church, as directed by the "Leader of the State", but also an effect of the state of armed conflict which brought many dramas into the homes of Romanians. Another aspect that should be mentioned is the Orthodox assault against neo-Protestant religious associations and cults, as a direction of transformation and achieving religious uniformity of the nation, within the much broader program of ethnic homogenization. The social mission of the priests was to support the morale of the population, especially in 1944, when the military situation had become extremely serious. In many schools they also replaced the teachers who had gone to the front.

"Astra" draw in as collaborators the school and the church, powerful and traditional pedagogues of the nation, who became much more militant in the nationalist-patriotic and orthodoxist environment of the time. I have tried to highlight the importance of these key institutions in reshaping and influencing the society and in securing domestic stability in national and social terms. In a state of mind permanently troubled by the anxieties of war, the difficult year of 1943 when many lives were lost on the front, the political and economic insecurity that characterised 1944, the School, together with the Church and the Association, assumed a role as a builder of identity and national awareness, as well as an opinion leader in the direction of maintaining peace and social balance.

The spiritual and identity quintessence of Romanianism, dressed in an orthodoxist aura, became the central subject of the concerns of the intellectuals engaged in the regime's propaganda. The elites were caught up in a nationalist fervour, a phenomenon with interwar roots. The school and the church were transformed by the mechanisms of the totalitarian power into the main ideological agents in the formation and the spread of the national identity in the non-elite tiers of the society.

The two ministries under analysis left their mark on the Romanian cultural environment, namely the two socio-professional categories that included many intellectuals from villages and cities, members of the Association. Their intense activity brought rich fruits to "Astra": two waves of membership registrations, the organization of an impressive number of peasant schools and conferences, in the very wartime. Compared to half the number of departments at the time of the Second Vienna Award, these three important actions appear to be of very great proportions indeed.

The excessive legislation designed to bring in "reforms" in the sense sought by the Antonescu government directly affected, at first, many adherents of "Astra" (teachers, professors, priests) and less directly the Association. Dramatic events had an impact on the lives of many members, especially men, but also on their families (the concentrations of

1939-1940, the territorial losses followed by the waves of refugees, Romania's entry into the war, the casualties, aid to the afflicted, etc.). The years of the world conflict forced "Astra" to adapt to the time, to take part in helping the army, the society and the country (Loan for the equipment of the army, the Reunification Loan, collections of clothes, donations of money, donations of books and leaflets for the soldiers who were concentrated, mustered or wounded in hospitals). The association could not remain indifferent to the plight of those who remained in the ceded territory, choosing as a form of protest the *word* which took the form of conferences. On the other hand, the publications, subject to censorship, oriented mainly towards the popularization of the historical past and of Romanian, but especially Transylvanian, personalities.

The new collaboration with the Antonescu regime offered the perfect conditions for intensifying its own agenda. Government subsidies and readiness, the political and military climate, coupled with the motivation to restore the state unity and raise the quality of life of a certain (majority) nation, all led to an intensification of ethnocentrism in the various layers of "Astra" discourse and actions. There were also members who opposed this direction of collaboration with the dictatorial regime of Antonescu. Unfortunately, the documents do not provide their names. The leadership of the Association considered that the subsidies coming from the totalitarian state, which were not few, made it possible to apply on a larger scale the development or the intensification of Iuliu Moldovan's biopolitical programme in certain districts. The Eugenists, together with some historians, represented the core of the "Astra" leadership that outlined and implemented this strategy, under the guise of the democratic consultation of the presidents of the departments as from September 1942. Accessing governmental sources themselves for other institutions in which they were employees or collaborators (various research institutes, Cluj-Sibiu University), some of the "Astra" intellectuals were able to attract funds for the Association as well. Through lobby conducted by Transylvanian insiders at the higher levels of the governmental hierarchy or in the decision-making area of the established power, it was possible to provide "Astra" with the necessary resources for the implementation of the biopolitical programme. From theory, attempts and temporary local successes in the interwar period, the possibility was born to emphasize and develop eugenic actions in an area greatly extended towards the periphery (at least in terms of potential), through the involvement of the smallest branches of "Astra" - cultural circles.

The close collaboration with the state institutions triggered a reorganisation of activities in the local departments and a much greater concern for reviving cultural circles

or setting up new ones. One of the major both immediate and long-term goals was that the Romanian village in Transylvania and Banat should achieve economic progress through the development of cooperation. Another equally important objective was to raise the level of hygiene and health of the nation by intensifying the adult education programme. Access to this type of culture propagated by the Association was facilitated by specific, traditional means, but also by newer means: cinema, radio.

The activity of the Ministry of National Propaganda was approached from the perspective of those propaganda directions that interfered with the activity of "Astra". The role of this private institution in the regime's propaganda was initially one of collaboration, as it tried to preserve its independence and its own programme of action. Iuliu Moldovan was retained as president of Astra in 1940 by a government manoeuvre. The interference of the totalitarian state was in fact a continuation of that exercised by the past authoritarian regime of King Carol II, when the institution came to submission to power established by undemocratic methods. Actually, what options did "Astra" have? The pressures exerted by authoritarian, dictatorial regimes can only lead to a few options: acceptance and collaboration, refusal and dissolution, resistance and extinction. From a collaborator always open to absorbing government or power funds, the Association was transformed by the pressure of the regime, but also of the times (the imminence of a Hungarian invasion, the disastrous evolution of the war and the fear of the total loss of Transylvania) into a disseminator of nationalist propaganda and ideology. It took advantage of the ideological context and legislation favouring ethnic Romanians to implement its own eugenic and Romanianization programme. The Association's willingness to offer certain services to the dictatorial regime speaks for itself in this respect. The fervour of "Astra" during the war was due both to the fact that Iuliu Moldovan and his team mobilized their own staff to the maximum and to the state of war (the ideal of restoring the state unity). However, it was not the Association the favourite of the regime. Bucharest was still quite far away (literally and figuratively), and only the serious situation in Transylvania, the province where "Astra" was active, made it possible to take the chill off the government. The sudden rapprochement and alignment with the propaganda policy of the totalitarian state therefore occurred under the necessity of war. Caught up in this ping-pong game of power, "Astra" fervently believed in financing its own eugenic and Romanianization programme. The request was rejected, even in an offensive tone, as it was probably too audacious and too competitive for the government of Marshal Ion Antonescu, who wanted to achieve Romanianization through the state apparatus, not through a private society.

Lured by the ideological productions of Ministry of National Propaganda, "Astra" did not hesitate to draw up plans for cultural propaganda activities across the border in the Serbian Banat. Sabin Manuilă, Sabin Evuțianu, Romulus Vuia, Ioan Popa, Ilie Rusmir and Iancu Caltun were the key figures who would coordinate this foreign propaganda action in the summer of 1941. The geopolitical and military context (Romania's entry into the war on 22 June 1941) led to the blocking and failure of the actions planned in favour of ethnic Romanians in the targeted areas. The many energies invested, both material and human, were wasted due to the prohibition of the German command which did not want instability in the area's very complicated multi-ethnic and geopolitical situation, especially in the context of the attack designed against the USSR.

As to the collaboration with the Royal Cultural Foundation "Regele Mihai I", it can be stated unequivocally that it was an extremely sinuous one due to the rivalry between the two large cultural associations. "Astra" wanted to regain a dominant status in its traditional area of action and waged a permanent "war" in the territory both with members of its competitors and with its own adherents who were seduced by the government favours granted to the foundation. Under the Ministry of National Propaganda pressure, Iuliu Moldovan and Octavian Neamțu managed to reach an agreement (also rather ambiguously formulated), because the general internal propaganda programme had to be implemented. "Astra" took advantage of the context and, with the help of the regime's prefects, quickly started the absorption of the community centers, running in parallel the propaganda required by the state apparatus.

The massive casualties on the front starting from the autumn of 1942 led to a redefinition of the government's stance towards "Astra" in the propaganda games. The regime, in its desperate plan to justify a war waged alongside the German ally across the Nistru against the Soviet colossus and to uphold its rights over Transylvania, sought to create a "Romanian national bloc" of the most powerful cultural associations. Thus, the Association, along with many other cultural actors, was transformed into a propaganda loudspeaker. The mental and th emotional mobilization of the nation was to be activated by intensifying the fieldwork of intellectuals, regardless of the cultural or the scientific groups they belonged to. Faced with this task, the leadership of the Association had to explain to those reluctant or opposed to the new orientation, both in the central committee and in the territorial structures, why it officially joined the regime. Iuliu Moldovan's meetings in July 1943 with the presidents of the central county departments were aimed at explaining the involvement of "Astra" in supporting the government of Ion Antonescu, with the major national objective of regaining the north-west of

Transylvania. This was the main motivation for collaborating with the Antonescu government, a motivation fuelled by the constant fear that the province would be totally occupied by Hungary. The Orthodox confessionism of which the "Astra" leadership was accused is another mark in perceiving the image of this institution in the wartime.

The propaganda conducted by "Astra" in Transylvania and Banat under the Ministry of National Propaganda umbrella and the deviation from the traditional line of political non-involvement cast serious shadows on the institution. Iuliu Moldovan's plan to increase the prestige of the Association by participating in these campaigns failed. The image in society was compromised by the devaluation of the message conveyed to beneficiaries and because of the festivism of the authorities. More specifically, the way of communication and the way the "parade" propaganda was carried out had a low impact on the population. The propaganda work of clergymen, teachers and other public authorities, through the all too frequent public meetings, had become of less significance to the people worried about the course of the war and the difficulties of daily life. They delivered to the nation an increasingly inadequate cultural product, characterized by formalism and demagoguery and a "loud but sterile verbalism", as Eugen Hulea put it.

Thus, the status of "Astra" as a private, non-governmental institution with its own programme of activity has been altered as it has been drawn into the stream of historical circumstances. Increasing involvement and association with the actions and policies of the regime led to important achievements in the short term, but the price paid for the subsidies of the totalitarian government was equally high.

The effervescence of the "Astra" network came to an end at the beginning of the spring of 1944, like a multicoloured soap bubble that expanded to the point where it ceased to exist, like the regime it served. The lights of "Astra" began to fade and the future of the institution seemed to become uncertain in the transition to another regime. The events and the main actors of the period of "defascization" that followed overshadowed the Association's contribution to the intellectuals' collective effort to regain Transylvania. The high culture and elites were co-opted by the state to uphold the rights over the ceded territories, while the other much larger part of the intelligentsia, those who worked mainly in the countryside, were subdued by the mechanisms of the totalitarian state. Either sincerely or out of obligation, it acted on behalf of the Association to maintain and assert patriotism, to activate a national awareness in the people among whom it lived.

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