

## SUCEAVA'S STUDENTS CONGRESS FROM 1935

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**Rezumat:** *Congresul studențesc de la Suceava, fără să iasă în evidență, a fost un succes pentru organizatori. Societățile studențești de la Cernăuți au dovedit încă o dată că sunt în fruntea mișcărilor naționaliste din țară și că au puterea creării unei baze electorale importante pentru Mișcarea Legionară. Din lucrările congresului, se pot trage și câteva concluzii asupra nevoilor și problemelor cu care studenții români de la jumătatea deceniului patru al secolului XX se confruntau. De la probleme firești precum locurile de cazare în cămine insuficiente, problema burselor, a taxelor de școlarizare până la lipsa unei perspective clare după absolvire, situația studențimii interbelice dovedește o actualitate pe care nu o discutăm aici. Apoi se remarcă o serie de probleme naționale pe care studenții le-au ridicat cum ar fi raporturile cu minoritățile, problema sectelor religioase sau susținerea unor lăcașe de cultură cum era Teatrul din Cernăuți. Aceste probleme ne duc la concluzia că sentimentele naționaliste erau puternice în sânul tineretului, care dorea schimbarea realităților românești prin îndepărtarea elementului minoritar din viața țării și de creare a unor mecanisme sociale și politice pentru uniformizarea culturii române într-o provincie cu un mozaic etnic complex.*

*Nu au lipsit nici manifestările fățișe de simpatie pentru Mișcarea Legionară, apelul la liderii dar și la „martirii” extremei drepte. Orientările ideologice, dezbaterile de opinii, personalitățile intelectuale de prestigiu și curentele politice ale anilor '30 au canalizat energiile tinerei generații, găsind expresie în toate aspectele vieții social-politice a Bucovinei. Frecvențele congrese dovedeau nu numai caracterul naționalist extremist al studențimii române ci și faptul că acesta era convins de rolul său în crearea unui embrion al societății civile urbane, intelectuale și românești. Problema naționalismului și încercările de excludere a minoritarilor din viața publică și privată a României era de maximă actualitate la jumătatea anilor '30.*

This study does not want to be one related with the intellectual history of Romania between the two World Wars, but a mention of an unknown moment from the activity of Romanian studentship movement that was attracted by the right extremism. This was the only way that could solve the development's problem of Romania, as they thought. Promoting the national and cultural unity of Great Romania, the young generation, was easily attracted by the extremist movements, especially by nationalism and anti-Semitism of the right parties. As students have seen in political actions, they found a way of solving their own difficulties; the right extremists, especially the Legionnaire Movement, perceived them as the main tool to get to their goals.

The Romanian nationalism, yet before the first World War, was active mostly in the intellectual and students' circles. A visible way for the Romanian nationalism of that time was The National Romanian Christian Students' Union

(UNSCR). It was founded in 1920, as The General Union of Romanian Student Societies (UGASR), and later was renamed in 1923 as The National Romanian Christian Students' Union. This association, "the flag" for the whole Christian-orthodox students from Romania, suffered a nationalist deviation, when the fans of nationalist ideology took its leadership. In the 1930ies, it was lead by members of Legionnaire Movement such Traian Cotigă or Gheorghe Furdul and was transformed from a studentship organization into a public sustainer by the party lead by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

In every city with universities – Bucharest, Cluj, and later Chişinău – the students were gathered in several cultural groups and societies. In 1930 was founded The Student Center of Cernăuţi University. Even if this type of association of bucovinian students was not – from the beginning – the supporter of the extreme right parties, the crisis years worsen the wealth and conditions of living for students; also, it generated a wish for radical solutions<sup>1</sup>. Disappointed by the failure of the democratic governs, more and more young people have become closer to the National Christian Defense League of the Legionnaire Movement. In 1935, Leon Țopa, student, and later assistant at Cernăuţi University, said, "he has all sympathy for the organization of Iron Guard and that all the studentship have to support the League and the Guard"<sup>2</sup>. Starting from "the 1922 generation", the Romanian studentship expressed their wishes on various occasions such their congresses in cities with important universities as Cluj, Iaşi and Cernăuţi but also in others: Oradea, Timișoara, Arad, Chişinău, Braşov, Brăila, Craiova. The Cernăuţi students were present to all the national meetings, following the general line of thinking.<sup>3</sup>

An unknown congress of that period was that one organized in 1935 in Suceava, the ancient capital of Moldavia, a city without university at that time and without Romanian intellectual elite well defined. Organized in the same year when the party "Totul pentru Țară" ("*All for the Country*") was founded, the congress's goal was to strengthen the unity of the students for the next years. It was not very large as that from Craiova having much more, a local character, of the students from Bucovina but with invited representatives from other universities<sup>4</sup>. There was an important reason for the chore of location: Suceava was a small town, with less than 20,000 inhabitants and the possibility of less violent incidents than in Cernăuţi or Iaşi cities. Then, the town was the old capital of Moldavia, in its glory days and for that reason, the legionnaire nationalism could gain a good profit and evoke old great figures of the past<sup>5</sup>. The main organizer of Suceava congress was Dumitru Străchinaru, the president of "Students' Circle" from Cernăuţi University. The difficulties to get all approvals made him suggest that he is going to "bring together all "arrow-men" from Bucovina for the congress"<sup>6</sup>. The Senate of Cernăuţi University refused to approve a congress that was going to be held in the heart of Bucovina. Therefore, the Students Center of Cernăuţi asked permission of the Suceava's local authorities to hold the congress in the town. "In Suceava, we have no doubt that the good image will be positive and there will be a re-confirmation of us. We have no doubt that the local administrative authorities, the prefect and the mayor, the representatives of the church and of the education institutions will support the

studentship in the material and spiritual way, because this congress has to be a major event of Romanian brothers' ship"<sup>7</sup>. This was the statement of Traian Brăileanu, one of the leaders of Legionnaire Movement from Bukovina, and the sociology professor at Cernăuți University. The presence of the academics between the lines of the legionnaires is well known. Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu underlined their role: "from here it results that the first has to be the teacher then the politician" while dreaming the place where a certain type of Romanian is going to be educated.<sup>8</sup>

Both, the Department of internal affairs and the leaders of Cernăuți University agreed with the idea of Suceava's congress.<sup>9</sup> More than this, the local authorities put at the disposal of the participants railway's wagons and the travel was, mostly, well-organized and under the eyes of legionnaire's "nests" leaders. Their accommodation was the duty of 65 Infantry Regiment from Suceava. Lieutenant Nitu from that unit offered accommodation in his place for the important guest, general Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Grănicerul.<sup>10</sup> The congress held its sessions in the hall of Polish House during 8 to 10 of July 1935.<sup>11</sup>

It has begun with a religious ceremony of priest Iarovici from Suceava, on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1935. The Congress was an important event in the history of Bucovina's Legion. They had many participants, mainly legionnaire students that revealed the intentions of the Movement regarding the students. From the beginning, dr. Ioan Țurcan took a speech on "*O reacție necesară*" ("A necessary reaction"), criticizing the political parties. He also spoke about the new spirituality that is present in the middle of the students that were adherents or sympathized with the Movement and its ideas. Finally, he spoke about the command of Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu: 'we have to give up to our own life, to decide on our own death, as our Captain taught'.<sup>12</sup> Reading such a message, the founding of the "death teams", at Târgu Mureș congress, one year later, seemed explicable. A Suceava police report stated the presence of clerk Ortisie Popescu<sup>13</sup>, the head of "St. John" monastery, at the congress. The student Leon Țopa – who represented "Junimea Society" – put the society under the Legion command. In addition, Tarasievici and representatives of similar organizations such as "Dacia", "Moldova" or another from Bucharest, Oltenia, Muntenia, Banat and Ardeal did the same. They sent greeting letters to the king, the archbishop Nicodim of Moldavia, the chief-ministers Constantin Angelescu and Ion Nistor, but to Zelea-Codreanu, A.C.Cuza, Al. Vaida-Voievod and Traian Brăileanu too.<sup>14</sup>

In the same day, they participate at a *TeDeum* for the dead legionnaires in the Saint John monastery and at a parade at the Ciprian Porumbescu monument. In the afternoon, they organized a trip to the historical sites: Zamca monastery and the Suceava Fortress.<sup>15</sup>

On July 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, with the same host, Iarovici the priest, the lawyer Negură from Cernăuți spoke about the history of Romanian studentship.<sup>16</sup> The problems of students from Cernăuți were general for all the country. The lack of accommodation seats in the dormitories, the conditions, the big fees and the low scholarships were frequent problems at the universities from Bucharest, Iași and Cluj. The increase of students after 1918 and the unequal dynamics of the Romanian educational system of that age were the causes of that discontent.<sup>17</sup>

In a letter addressed to the students, professor Traian Brăileanu concluded that “from the students’ movement has to born one single idea whose soul to be C.Z. Codreanu”.<sup>18</sup> He justified the militant spirit of them, writing: “the students don’t have to get involved in politics. Well said and fair. They don’t have to do politics in a way that is done by those who don’t want them to do it”<sup>19</sup>. On July 9<sup>th</sup> there were an artistic festival and a speech given by the poet Radu Gyr. In the end, he spoke about the relation between teacher and student<sup>20</sup>.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, the speech of Nae Popescu developed a theme on the reports about the problems of church and of the religious sects. The students Sandu Pavelescu, Leon Țopa and G. Macriniuc spoke about a sensitive subject in Bucovina: the relations with the Ukrainian minority. Excepting the old problem of ‘*numerus clausus*’, the Romanian students claimed Romanian language exams for students belonging to minorities. They considered it a way to encourage the Romanians to study and to ensure the right number required by administration and public services<sup>21</sup>. They asked to ban the use of Ukrainian language in the religious ceremonies, to exclude the teachers that do not use Romanian language, and the closing of Ukrainian student societies<sup>22</sup>. Dumitru Străchinaru gave a speech about the economical status of the Bucovina region, accusing the Jewish community that exploited the “poor peasants whose work is ignored”<sup>23</sup>.

There were voices that protested because of the banned “Iron Guard” and they sang “*Vouă liberalilor, Vouă țăărăniștilor, Vouă tâlharilor!*”<sup>24</sup>. In this context, the student Macriniuc spoke about a new legionnaire party – the party “*Totul pentru Țară*” [All for the Country] – described as ‘an interest for all Romanians’. He also spoke about all dead legionnaires; among them was mentioned Sterie Ciumetti. The vice-president of “Student Center” of Cernăuți, Vasile Posteuca, named the “nicadori”, those who, in his opinion, have “opened the way of Romania for tomorrow”. The local authorities noted that the students that were not adherents of Codreanu left Suceava when they seen that “the Congress became a political meeting for the “Iron Guard””<sup>25</sup>.

On the other side, the students debated on few other themes. Colomițchi talked about the inferior situation of Romanians in the second and third levels of activity in Suceava County. The other student, Țintă, protested against the closing of National Theatre from Cernăuți. Antoniu, the representative of “Student Centre” of Cernăuți expresses his sorrow for interdiction put on the students to participate at the “Days of Restoration”<sup>26</sup>. The problem touched by the student Simion Lăzăreanu was a statement entitled “*Viața materială și nevoile studențești*” [The Material Life and the Student Needs]. He spoke about the problem of accommodation in the dormitories, about the fees and scholarships. The others students from Cernăuți – Pașcovici, Cozma, Tarasievici – and Cârciu from Iași completed the speech with their details and facts<sup>27</sup>. Traian Brăileanu touched on other problems about Cernăuți University. He was not satisfied seeing students from Bucovina going for study at other universities, while – he thought – the number of Jewish students was too large. Other suggestion proposed by the Cernăuți professor was the founding of Medicine, Commerce and Polytechnics Departments in the capital of Bucovina<sup>28</sup>. The last

speakers were the students from other universities of Romania. Having in view the situation and bad conditions from universities, the protests against minorities, especially Jewish one, were easily justified. Finally, those difficulties were reduced to a few, and the extreme right wing seemed to be the only one capable to solve them<sup>29</sup>. When Congress ended, there were minor incidents between students and the police and gendarmerie forces<sup>30</sup>. The Congress took place in the period when the student movement was passing for the level of sympathy to militants regarding the Legion of Codreanu, as it was stated at the Craiova Congress<sup>31</sup>.

Taking advantage of the students' presence at the congress, Zizi Cantacuzino-Grăniceru tried to open a voluntary work camp in Tișăuți village. Vasile Posteuță and 30 other young people tried to force the Gendarmerie fences to get inside the village where they wanted to build a church<sup>32</sup>. Their plan failed when the priest and an official stopped them for entering and delayed the construction of the church<sup>33</sup>. Mardarie Popinciuc has been sent to inspect the number of soldiers that were in the village, saying he is going to visit a relative. Because their number was relatively small, they entered inside individually during the night, and after that, they met in the center of the village where they sang legionnaire hymns. They were quickly arrested and brought to Suceava, but their action was perceived "as an example in Tișăuți, that the legionnaires are here"<sup>34</sup>. In general, there were no severe incidents, and the leaders asked the students to keep calm and not provoke the authorities. It was like an exercise done to prepare the following events, and Codreanu was aware of this when he stated to the students Centers "the best behavior and good will with everybody, beginning with your teachers and ending with anyone from the street. An elite fighter isn't rude, provocative, and inelegant in gestures or speech"<sup>35</sup>.

In conclusion, the Suceava Congress was a success for the organizing without incidents, or severe events. The student societies of Cernăuți proved that they were strong, well organized and able to give electors for the Legion. In a short time, between July 20 and August 20, 1935, "The Free University" was inaugurated in Câmpulung Moldovenesc, as an institution organized by "Junimea Society"<sup>36</sup>.

In addition, the Congress had shown the needs and the demands of the Romanian students of the mid forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from the normal requirements such as accommodation in dormitories, the problem of scholarships, fees, and the lack of a safe perspective after graduation, till the national themes as those related with minorities or Cernăuți theatre. These problems bring us to the conclusion that the national feelings were very strong among the youth people. They wanted a change, the change of Romanian realities by isolation of the minorities, and the making of new social and political structures in a province where there was a complex ethnic and cultural landscape. It was evident that there was sympathy for the Legion, the veneration for the leaders and for the "martyrs" of the right extreme wing. Their ideological orientation, the various opinions, the intellectual personalities that were present and the political themes of the 1930ies have modeled the congress and the hearts of the new Bucovina generation. The influence of some university professors was overwhelming. If Nae Ionescu was the leader for all of Romania, then

Traian Brăileanu was the leader for Bucovina. His role was important. In this way, it explains his influence and presence at the manifestations. Those frequent congresses proved not only the nationalist character of the students, but the fact that they were convinced by the important role they had to play in the creation of an embryo for civil, intellectual society. The problem of nationalism and the attempts of exclusion of minorities from the public and private life were very real in the mid 1930ies.

#### NOTES:

1. The societies were Junimea, Arboroasa, Academia Ortodoxă , Bucovina and Moldova. For details about them, see Dan Jumara, *Societățile academice românești din Bucovina în perioada interbelice*, Iași, Junimea, 2005;
2. *Ibidem*, p.337;
3. For example, at the Congress of Craiova, in 1935, among the organizers were legionnaire students from Cernauti. See Mardarie Popinciuc, *Pentru Țară pentru Sfânta Cruce*, Buenos Aires, 1985, p.82-98;
4. Starting from 1934, there were student meetings, supporting the Legion in small towns as Băile Herculane or Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Aurelian Chistol, *România in anii guvernării liberale Gheorghe Tătărescu (1934-1937)*, Târgoviste, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, 2007, p.426-427;
5. Stephen the Great had an important place in the Romanian personalities gallery, see Radu Florian Bruja, *Ștefan cel Mare în imagologia legionară*, in 'Codrii Cosminului' the new edition, 10 (20), 2004, p.93-97;
6. The "Arrow men brotherhoods", started in 1906, had an important role in the process of emancipation of Romanians from Bucovina, continuing to activate after 1918. Dumitru Străchinaru has organized few events with them in 1933-1934 in Cernăuți, see Dan Jumară, *Societățile academice cit.*, p.306-310; A detailed description but a very personal one of Suceava's congress may be read in Mardarie Popinciuc, *Pentru Țară .cit.*, p.99-116;
7. In original, „La Suceava, nu ne îndoim că bunul renume nu va știrbit cu nimic, ci dimpotrivă își va primi o nouă confirmare. Tot astfel nu ne îndoim că autoritățile administrative, prefectul și primarul, apoi reprezentanții ai bisericii și ai școlii, vor da tot sprijinul moral și material studențimii, pentru ca acest Congres să fie o înălțătoare manifestare de solidaritate românească” Traian Brăileanu, *Congresul studenților bucovineni*, in "Însemnări sociologice", year I, no.2, May 1935, p.31;
8. Constantin Papanace, *Stilul personal de luptă. Concepția tactică a Căpitanului*, Bucharest, Lucman Press, 2004, p.263;
9. Suceava National Archives, Suceava National Archives, from Suceava Prefecture, 9/1935,f.72;
10. The National Central Historical Archives (from here A.N.I.C.) the part of Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.117; see also Mardarie Popinciuc, *Pentru Țară .cit.*, p.110;
11. The good relations between the Romanian and the Polish student communities were well known; with this occasion, two groups of legionnaire students went to Poland for work in a camp in Spala. A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police department, 232/1935, f.142;
12. Originally, „să renunțăm la propria noastră viață, să hotărâm asupra morții noastre, căci așa ne-a învățat Căpitanul” *Ibidem*, f.116;
13. Ortesie Popescu 'a small but tough [man], with white beard just like the nobles were during the time of Stephen the Great' as wrote the student Mardarie Popinciuc, one of the

- members of "Arboroasa" comitee, imprisoned in the Austrian reign because of the letter sent to king Ferdinand, Mardarie Popinciuc, *Pentru Țară .cit.*, p.103;
14. A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.129, see also vol.II f.226-339;
15. *Ibidem*, 131, see also vol.II, f.330;
16. The complete list of the Congress was published in the local press; the most noticeable speeches were 1.The history of Student Life and, especially, of Bucovinian students. (Ioan Negură); 2. The Material Life and the Student Needs (S. Lăzăreanu); 3.The Romanian Component situation and the Schools from Bucovina (Al. Pavelescu); 4. The Ukrainian Problem (Leon Țopa); 5. The Jew Problem and Numerus Clausus (Ion Bârleanu); 6. Citizenship Education (G. Macriniuc); 7. The Church Problem and Religious Sects in Bucovina (Nae Popescu); 8. The Spiritual Orientation of Students (Ion Țurcanu), „Suceava”, 7 iulie 1935, p.1-2;
17. The situation of Cernăuți University was very well described by Zvi Yavetz, a Jew from Cernăuți and an ex-student, see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România mare 1918-1930*, Bucharest, Humanitas, p.283;
18. Originally, "din mișcarea studențească trebuie să se nască o singură idee a cărui suflet este C.Z. Codreanu" A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.125-126;
19. Traian Brăileanu, *Congresul cit.*, p.30;
20. A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.132-133; see also "Suceava", July 7<sup>th</sup> 1935, p.1;
21. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură cit.*, p.320;
22. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.132-133
23. *Ibidem*. f.109;
24. *Ibidem*, f.116;
25. *Ibidem*, f.132-133;
26. *Ibidem*, f.116
27. *Ibidem*, f.125-126;
28. Traian Braileanu, *Congresul cit*
29. apud Dan Jumară, *Societățile cit.*, p.356;
30. A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935, f.119;
31. Michelle Rallo, *România în perioada revoluțiilor naționale în Europa*, Bucharest, Sempre, 1999;
32. A.N.I.C. Internal Affairs Department, General Police Headquarter, 232/1935,f.120, see also vol.II, f.339;
33. *Ibidem*, f.125;
34. *Ibidem*, f.116;
35. In original „o cât mai desăvârșită și mai plină de bună cuviință purtare față de toată lumea, începând cu profesorii voștri și terminând cu lumea de pe stradă. Un luptător de elită nu este niciodată obraznic, îngâmfat, provocator, necuviincios, neelegant în gesturi și vorbe” *Dosarul Mișcării Legionare*, Elisavaros Press, Bucharest, 2002, p.12;
36. Dan Jumară, *Societățile cit .*, p.184;