

Andreas Wild

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artisans of modern Romania
in the generation of the Great Union**

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 **FUNDATIA LAPEDATU**

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Abstract. *The brothers Alexandru and Ion Lapedatu are exemplary for the so-called generation of the "Great Union" in Romania after the First World War. Coming from a family with roots in rural Transylvania, they rose through their studies and established themselves in the political and social life of the nation, making significant contributions in culture (Alexandru) and economy (Ion) towards building Romania as a modern state that reached its peak on the eve of the Second World War. The two brothers witnessed the rise of fascism and then the communist takeover of power, ending their lives tragically and in despair. Today their story resonates ever more and the wise solutions they gave to some of the complex problems of their time are reconsidered. Their resolute actions and even the trajectory of their lives are a reference and an inspiration in addressing the challenges facing Romania in the contemporary world.*

1. Introduction: the 'modern' state

The most important contribution of the Lapedatu brothers is their active participation in the building of a modern state in Romania after the end of the First World War.

The State, according to Max Weber's definition, is an institution that has a monopoly on legitimate physical violence within a given territory. Individuals recognise the authority of the State by agreeing to obey it. In modern societies, the recognition is based on rationality reflected in legality and procedures.¹ In legal terms, the central element is the exercise of the specific functions of sovereignty: internally, enacting the rules and reinforcing them through justice and police; externally, establishing diplomatic relationships and assuring defence through armed forces. To fulfil its functions, the State has financial resources levied on the community through taxation. A modern State operates in conformity with principles like free will, individualism, and immanence.²

After the World War, Romania made considerable progress towards a modern State in a very short period of just about twenty years. This momentous episode in national history is explored here following the life and actions of the Lapedatu brothers. It is understood that this is only a partial view; obviously, an example, even if emblematic, cannot exhaustively cover a process of this complexity.

2. Historical context

2.1 Kingdom of Romania

At the end of the First World War, several regions with a significant Romanian population have been included in the Kingdom of Romania, a young State that came into being in late 19th century, in several stages:

¹ ***, "Vie Publique, Qu'est-ce que l'Etat ?", 2012

² Guillaud Frédéric, "La modernité: crise d'adolescence de l'humanité?", Le Philosophoire 2/2005 (n° 25), p. 77-88

- the Treaty of Paris (1856) that ended Crimean War, asked two principalities placed under Ottoman suzerainty, Moldavia and Wallachia, to elect a sovereign each; in 1859, they surprised the great powers electing the same person, prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, paving the way towards becoming the United Principalities.

- in 1866, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was offered the throne. He engaged in the Russo-Turkish war, was victorious in 1877, and proclaimed full independence, that was recognized by the Treaty of San Stefano and confirmed at the Congress of Berlin.

- on 15 March 1881, a new constitution conferred the sovereign the title Carol I, King of Romania.

This development gave a vigorous impetus to the national aspirations of Romanians in neighbouring countries, particularly in Transylvania, a province of Austro-Hungary, where Romanians represented the larger part of the population and had deep and long-standing national aspirations.

2.2 Three nations and four confessions

Transylvanian Romanians ("Wallachians", meaning speakers of a language of Latin origin) had considered themselves oppressed for centuries, although the reason was not always ethnic. For the most part peasants, they were serfs, like many Hungarian peasants; their Orthodox faith was discriminated against - as was the faith of the Orthodox Serbs in the region. In one way or another, they were always on the disadvantaged side in the social, religious and political order:

- In 1366, the decree of Turda signed by King Louis I of Hungary established that only members of the Catholic Church had access to the "congregatio generalis" and could be elected to the Diet; that ownership of land was established exclusively by possession of a royal certificate of donation; and permitted "the extermination of all evildoers, especially the Wallachians".

- After the de Bobâlna uprising of Hungarian and Romanian peasants in 1438, the upper social strata formed the *Unio Trium Nationum*, comprising the mostly Hungarian nobility, the Saxon

inhabitants of the cities and the Székelys as defenders of the eastern border: a kind of mutual aid pact against enemies from inside (the peasants) and outside (the Turks). Only the representatives of these three "nations" (obviously, the term has a meaning different from the modern one) had the right to be elected to the Diet.

- The so-called "Edict of Toleration" of King John II of Hungary issued at the Diet of Turda in 1568 granted these privileges also to Protestants, and allowed any congregation to choose how it wishes to preach the Gospel. Two years later, however, the Edict of Târgu Mureș established that only four confessions were accepted (*recepta*): Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian. The Romanians' Orthodox confession was only tolerated (*tolerata*). The Romanian ethnic group identified as the *Universitas Valachorum*, composed mainly of Orthodox peasants, was effectively excluded from political and social life. Its economic progress was severely handicapped: agricultural land and real estate were owned almost entirely by the Hungarian aristocracy and the Saxon bourgeoisie, who levied taxes on the extraction and transportation of minerals; had a monopoly on hunting, fishing and milling; and demanded payments for grazing, transportation of timber, etc. The peasants, mostly Wallachians, paid crushing taxes on salt, were subject to requisitions for imperial officials or military units passing by, etc.

Transylvania changed its status several times: vassal of Hungary until the Battle of Mohács in 1526; independent principality until the Treaty of Speyer in 1570; vassal of the Ottoman Empire until 1699, then vassal of the Habsburgs who succeeded the Turks: the rule recognizing three nations and four confessions survived through all these changes.

2.3 Slow progress

In 1698-1700, a new dynamic began: part of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania accepted three changes in the dogma and united with Rome, founding the "Greek-Catholic" confession: the "united" Romanians recognized papal authority and had thereby a "*recepta*" religion, which considerably improved their situation. In 1759 Maria Theresa even recognized the Orthodox confession, a decision maintained by Emperor

Joseph II but revoked by Emperor Leopold II. The openings of the 18th century, even if hesitant, allowed Romanians to progress: they now had access to higher education institutions and even managed to obtain doctorates abroad. The thinkers of the "Transylvanian School" studied in Rome thanks to their religious "union" and formed the embryo of a national intelligentsia that affirmed the Romanians' Latinity. In 1791-92, they presented to the Emperor a petition, obviously inspired by the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen": *Supplex Libellus Valachorum Transsilvaniae*. Among other things, they asked for the Romanians to be recognized as a fourth "nation". The Emperor forwarded the petition to the Cluj Diet, which at that point in time had only one Romanian deputy. The Diet decided that the three "nations" already recognized were able to represent the whole country and rejected all points of the *Supplex*.

In 1825, the Austrian Empire decided to replace Latin with German as the official language in administration. Hungary followed suite and replaced Latin with Hungarian. Now, all other nationalities felt entitled to express similar aspirations. The struggle to assert the national identity became now an element of the economic and social demands shaking Europe. It determined Hungary's evolution in the next century.

During the "spring of the peoples" in 1848, the Hungarian Diet changed the Constitution to make Transylvania part of Hungary rather than an autonomous entity; the union was subject to the acceptance by the Transylvanian Diet. Romanians called a large assembly, also attended by Saxons and Székelys, on "The Field of Liberty" in Blaj. The participants called for abolition of serfdom and equality of nationalities in politics, jurisdiction, administration, taxation, etc. It was stated, as a matter of principle, that the Transylvanian Diet cannot decide on the "union" with Hungary unless it included Romanian representatives with voting rights. Croats, Slovaks in Upper Hungary, Serbs in Banat and Romanians - all had a deep distrust of the idea of a Hungarian nation-state.³ Consequently,

³ Louis Eisenmann, "Étude sur le dualisme", Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition, Paris, 1904.

they sided with the Austrian imperial reaction that suppressed the revolution and allowed Transylvania to regain its autonomy.

After the revolution of 1848, Romanians continued to progress culturally, politically and economically. In 1861, they set up the "Transylvanian Association for the Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People" (ASTRA) in Sibiu. During Austrian neo-absolutism in 1863-64, the Transylvanian Diet in Sibiu included Romanian deputies and decided that the languages German, Hungarian and Romanian can be equally employed in administration. In 1871-72, the Romanians set up their first national bank, "Albina", in Sibiu, which was followed by other institutions able to offer affordable credit to Romanian peasants wishing to invest or buy agricultural property.

2.4 Dualism

But before these changes could be made permanent, the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 established the "dual monarchy", ushering in a period of great prosperity for Hungarians and great difficulties for the other nationalities. Hungary finally completed its union with Transylvania and launched an ambitious program to build a nation-state. In 1873, it provided itself with a capital to match its ambitions, merging three cities (Óbuda, Buda and Pest) to form Budapest. A rather progressive law on nationalities was adopted, but its application did not reflect its spirit: by virtue of the self-proclaimed superiority of Hungarian culture and based on a historical justification derived from the mythical "Crown of St Stephen" (from the year 1000!), the administration embarked on a programme of "Magyarization" of Croats, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Romanians, Serbs and even Saxons, who together accounted for more than half the country's population. To support the programme, inspired by the success of the ASTRA organization, the Hungarian Cultural Association of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület, EMKE*) was founded in Cluj in 1885. Among other things, it promoted the generalization of Hungarian-language education at all levels.

The Romanians renounced their political passivity and founded a party which was immediately declared illegal because it was organized on

a non-Magyar national basis, but it survived and in 1882 merged with the similar organization existent in Banat to form the Romanian National Party (PNR). In May 1892, on the eve of the ceremonies for the 25th anniversary of the dualist regime, a 237-member delegation of the PNR arrived in Vienna to hand a "Memorandum" to Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary. The delegation was not granted an audience, so they submitted the document to the office of the imperial cabinet, which sent it to Budapest without opening it; the Hungarian Council of Ministers returned it, also without opening it, to the home address of Dr. Ioan Rațiu, the president of PNR. Under these circumstances, PNR printed the Memorandum, 11,000 copies in Romanian and 2,000 copies in foreign languages, and distributed it throughout the country and abroad. The court of justice in Cluj found 14 of its authors ("memorandists") guilty of press provocation and sentenced them to prison terms between two months and five years, and a collective fine of 7,000 florins. But the publications and the trial had a huge international echo. Georges Clemenceau wrote in *La Justice* of May 12, 1894: "In Hungary's own interest we must wish freedom for the Romanians of Transylvania" (*Dans l'intérêt même de la Hongrie, il faut souhaiter la liberté pour les Roumains de Transylvanie*). The Norwegian playwright Björnsterne Björnson, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1903, stated in an interview in Budapest: "Believe me, sooner or later these injustices will lead Hungary to disaster".⁴ The situation of Romanians and other nationalities in Hungary was now a European political issue.

2.5 Lapedatu brothers

The Lapedatu twins, Orthodox Romanians born in Transylvania in 1876, were physically identical, practically indistinguishable. They dressed alike, had moustaches of the same shape at the same age and wear identical glasses. They have been often confused:

⁴ René Bustan, "Les relations roumano-hongroises dans la perspective de la construction européenne", *Publibook University Publishing*, 2007

- As a student, Alexandru was stopped on the street in Bucharest by Constantin Sporea, a former high school classmate of his brother, who cannot believe that he is not Ion. Sporea subjects him to a severe Latin exam that Ion could not pass, because Latin was not on the syllabus at the school of economy in Braşov followed by Ion.

- At the ASTRA celebration in 1905, Onisifor Ghibu, thinks that he saw Ion, his colleague and friend, in an office at table with Iorga, and was surprised by his cold and distant behaviour, concluding that it was because of the proximity of a celebrity; however, on leaving the room, he is surprised to meet Ion in the corridor. Ion explained him that Iorga was actually accompanied by Alexandru, who did not know Ghibu.

- Even the secret services confused them. Ion was summoned to Budapest on May 1, 1918 by Interior Minister Sandor Janos, to be questioned about the Romanian irredentist newspaper "Ardealul". Ion had no idea why. Later he learned that the minister actually protected him against a request of the Hungarian secret service to have him arrested and charged because of a 500 crowns donation to the newspaper. In fact, the donor was Alexandru, who lived in Bucharest at the time.

- On May 30, 1953, the "Securitate" agents reported in writing: "Lapedatu Ion was a university professor until 1938, when he was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs, then he was administrator of the National Bank..." – mixing up biographical data of the two brothers.

The brothers grew up in two different countries: as they were 12, Alexandru joined the mother in the Kingdom of Romania while Ion remained with the rest of the family in Austro-Hungary. But they follow similar paths, actively campaigning for the national aspirations of the Romanians of Transylvania. They understood in depth the complexity of the problem posed by the coexistence of several cultures in the same space and recognized that no structure based on the dominance of one group over the others can be sustainable. They and their generation had to find an answer to this challenge.

3. Origins, evolution

3.1 Father: Ioan Alexandru Lapedatu

The Lapedatu family originated from the village Glâmboc near Sibiu in southern Transylvania. Period photographs show the family members in traditional costume, fully integrated into the rural environment (Figure 1). Alexa, the grandfather of the two brothers, could read both Cyrillic and Latin characters and became "jude" (i.e. mayor) of the village. Ioan Alexandru Lapedatu, attended the Catholic secondary school in Sibiu in very modest conditions, receiving food sent from home once a week. An eminent pupil, he was one of the first young Romanians to receive a scholarship from the "Transylvania Society" allowing him to study in Paris after his baccalaureate.

Founded by Transylvanian students at the University of Bucharest in 1867, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, this society was a reaction to the shock caused by Transylvania losing its autonomy. It was also an expression of the national impetus triggered by the Constitution from 1 July 1866 promulgated when the new monarch of the United Principalities, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, acceded to the throne: the act ignored both the Ottoman suzerainty and the existence of the seven guarantor powers, thus foreshadowing the independence of Romania that would be realized eleven years later, by the Constitution from 1881. The Transylvania Society received donations from municipal and county councils and private persons to support young Romanians studying abroad, to help forming a Romanian intelligentsia in Transylvania and promote the ideal of national unity.⁵

In Paris, Ioan Al. Lapedatu enrolled at Collège Sainte-Barbe, then at Collège de France, and finally began his studies at the Sorbonne. Unfortunately, the courses have been suspended when Paris was occupied by the Prussian army; therefore, he left for Brussels, where he

⁵ Lucilia DINESCU, "Societatea „Transilvania” - un arbore cu adânci rădăcini în întreaga Românie", Dacoromania, nr. 51, 2010

obtained in June 1871 a doctorate in philosophy and literature with great distinction (*avec grande distinction*). He returned to Transylvania and started teaching at the Romanian Orthodox Great Romanian College in Braşov (today the National College "Andrei Şaguna"). At the same time, he became known as journalist, poet and writer, publishing in Romanian. His first wife suffered from tuberculosis and died shortly after marriage. His second wife was from the Țârca family (or Circa, in Austrian spelling): a large, well-known and well-to-do family (although she belonged to a less fortunate branch). She was from Cernatul Săcelelor near Braşov, where, on September 14, 1876, the twins Ion and Alexandru were born, in a typical peasant house, in which today there is a kindergarten (Figure 2).

3.2 Childhood and adolescence

Unfortunately, the father of the twins contracted tuberculosis and died in 1878, leaving an 18-year-old widow with one and a half years old children, and without resources. The Saxon municipality of Braşov granted the widow a small social allowance, because her husband had not completed ten years of teaching required for a pension. Family members from Glâmboaca and Săcele helped them as they could. The boys had a difficult childhood, just like their father.

They started college in Iaşi, where their mother remarried, but her second marriage was unhappy and ended in divorce. She did not have the means to keep them with her: the children crossed the border adventurously and returned to Săcele, to their grandmother, enrolling in the school in Braşov, where their father had been a teacher. Alexandru could not bear the separation and returned to Iaşi to his mother; Ion went through a crisis, went to Iaşi too only to realize that mother was really unable to provide for both of them, so he returned to Săcele. These were difficult times: both children repeated classes. Although school was free, they both had to earn their living somehow, for example by tutoring other children. Both were in the high school as the memorandists have been tried, both participated in demonstrations of solidarity with the condemned and protested oppression. Despite difficulties, they both succeeded to finish the school.

Alexandru passed the baccalaureate in Iași with mediocre grades. He tried for two years to study medicine in Bucharest, but had to give up because the curriculum did not allow for any spare time when he could have earned his living. However, in this time he took contact with the "National Committee of Students", the "Transylvania Society" and the "League for the Cultural Unity of Romanians" (in short, the "Cultural League"). In this context, he discovered his vocation for history and enrolled at the University of Bucharest. In 1903, when he completed his studies, was appointed to the Manuscripts Section of the Romanian Academy, becoming in 1904 a member of the Historical Monuments Commission. In addition, he was a substitute teacher at the St. Sava College. For the first time in his life, his income was covering his needs.

Ion, in his turn, recovered from the crises of his adolescent years, passed the baccalaureate as the first in his class and obtained two scholarships, one from the "Transylvania Society" and another one from the "Gojdu Foundation", which allowed him to study economics at the University of Budapest in rather comfortable conditions. In Budapest, he was elected president of the "Petru Maior Society" of Romanian students and was among the founders the magazine "Lucefărul", whose editorial board included young people that will become important personalities of the Romanian cultural and political life; after graduating, he will continue being a member of the editorial board for many years. Ion obtained his diploma in 1904 and returned to Brașov, where he became second secretary of ASTRA. But his capabilities were quickly recognized, and in 1905 he was appointed as director of the "Ardeleana" Bank in Orăștie.

Both brothers arrive practically at the same time, one in Bucharest, the other in Transylvania, at the beginning of their professional carriers: Alexandru in history, mainly in the academic environment, and Ion in finance, mainly in banking institutions.

3.3 Ion and the tourism

On a personal note, Ion became a keen tourist and alpinist. He got involved in hiking as he accompanied his wife, in June 1908, to the sanatorium of Dr. Marius Sturza in Wällischhof, near Vienna, where she was on a cure after the birth of their son. The doctor also gave Ion a check-up,

finding that he was overweight and at risk of heart disease: he prescribed a strict diet and advised him to avoid a sedentary lifestyle. Ion followed the prescribed regime faithfully, walked in the hills every day, and by the end of his stay, after four weeks, he had lost 10-12 kilos. He was an active member of several Romanian, German and Hungarian tourist associations and kept hiking his all life. His twin brother who did not benefit from such a prescription had a heart attack with 60.

4. Before the Great Union

4.1 Alexandru: Historical Monuments Commission and its Bulletin

As a student, Alexandru found a second family in the "Cultural League". He was photographed with his classmates and friends: an extraordinary image in which appear future well-known personalities of Romanian cultural life (Figure 3). Alexandru had a close relationship with the historian Nicolae Iorga, who, five years his senior, was his professor at the University and became his mentor.

His function at the Romanian Academy, but also his natural inclinations made Alexandru increasingly concerned with the protection of Romanian cultural heritage, becoming a true specialist and promoter of the restoration of historical monuments, defending the rigorously scientific method in the controversy over the "romantic" reconstruction of several monuments carried out in those times under the direction of André Lecomte de Nouÿ. Appointed secretary of the Historical Monuments Commission, in January 1908 Alexandre launched its quarterly Bulletin, which was to have 126 issues, only ceasing to appear in December 1945. Even today, the Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission is the most complete reference on Romanian architectural heritage. The preservation and enhancement of the historical and cultural heritage will become a cornerstone of his political action; it turned out to be profoundly significant after the Great Union.

Busy researching old manuscripts and historical monuments, Alexandru neglected his diploma exam, but brilliantly made up for the delay in 1910, graduating "magna cum laude".

During this period, he accompanied Iorga in an incident that could have finished with a duel. One day, as they were walking in front of the University, Iorga excused himself for a few minutes and went up to the chancellery. After a quarter of an hour or so he came back agitated, with his overcoat full of dust, and told to Alexandru: "You know I had a fight with Dragomirescu?" "How?" "I was in the chancellery, talking to a group of teachers. Dragomirescu who was in another group and listened to what I was saying suddenly exclaimed at me: "hodoronc, tronc!" (i.e. approximately "rabish"). Furious, I rushed and hit him on the head with my cane. He retaliated, so we fought until we were rolling on the floor. The other professors intervened and broke us apart... What do you say, shall I challenge him?" "I don't know, Mr. Iorga, I don't know about such matters", replied Alexandru. "Let's go to Callimachi⁶, to ask him". Callimachi was at dinner, but Iorga insisted on seeing him, related the incident and asked him whether he should provoke. Callimachi decided: "No, since you hit him first, he must provoke you". "Yes, but I hit him with the cane, not with the palm of my hand," observed Iorga. To this, the prince replied: "It would have been more elegant, of course, to have slapped him, but given that you were dealing with a rhinoceros⁷, the cane was good enough".

In 1910, Alexandru was accepted as a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy in the same session in which Nicolae Iorga has been elected full member. Alexandru became a full member of the Romanian Academy in 1919.

4.2 Ion: ASTRA

During this period, Ion had a remarkable evolution. He proved his capacities as he helped organizing the festivities from 19-28 August 1905

⁶ Prince Alex. Callimachi, Iorga's protector and financial backer, was considered as an arbiter in matters of honor.

⁷ This dialogue, reproduced by Alexandru in his recollections, suggests that in that time in Bucharest an uncivilized person would be called a "rhinoceros"; this is a possible source for the central idea and title of the play "Rhinoceroses" by Eugène Ionesco.

celebrating the opening of the ASTRA Museum in Sibiu. There have been 1,327 exhibitors, bringing in more than 9,000 objects forming the basis of the collections, and 6,500 paying visitors, students admitted for free, and honorary guests, coming from all regions, from Bucovina, Banat and the Kingdom of Romania. Among them, Alexandru Lapedatu and Nicolae Iorga; the Mayor of Sibiu; the representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction in Budapest; the Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest; members of the Ethnographic Association of Transylvanian Saxons, etc.

The Lapedatu brothers met again in an official setting in 1911, when ASTRA celebrated its semicentenary organizing a big festivity in Blaj. The government was represented by the prefect (*főispán*), who enthusiastically attended: he was a Hungarian who enjoyed universal sympathy and spoke fluently Romanian with the local accent. Many cultural personalities from both sides of the Carpathian Mountains came to Blaj: famous actors like Aristița Romanescu, Agatha Bârsescu and Petre Liciu from the National Theatre in Bucharest; playwright Ion Luca Caragiale and poet George Coșbuc; even aviation pioneer Aurel Vlaicu took part, demonstrating his flying skills over "The Field of Liberty". There was an ethnographic parade and a large historical and cultural exhibition with old documents, manuscripts and folk-art works. A moment of deep emotion was the appearance of the Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Transylvania and Hungary together with the Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Greek-Catholic Church accompanied by his four bishops: such a demonstration of unity overcoming religious differences had never been seen in public before. The celebrations attracted over forty thousand participants who listened to rousing speeches and sang "Wake up Romanian". Alexandru was a member of the delegation from the Kingdom of Romania in his capacity as secretary of the Historical Monuments Commission. Ion noted in his memoirs that the journalist Pasmándy Denés, a former Hungarian MP and correspondent for newspapers in Paris, London and Budapest, told Iuliu Maniu at the end of the festivities: "Until now I have never believed in a Greater Romania, but from now on I am sure that it will come true".

4.3 Ion: Solidarity

Ion was primarily a financier known and recognized for his publications in the fields of economic theory and banking practice. Appointed director of the "Ardeleana" bank in Orăștie when he was only thirty years old, he distinguished himself by a prudent and effective management of a credit institution that facilitated the economic progress of Romanian villages in the region. But he did much more: he engaged in restructuring and consolidating the entire system of Romanian banks in Transylvania.

In 1898, Partenie Cosma, director of the Albina Bank, had launched the "Conferences of Romanian Bank Directors"; between the conferences, a "Delegation" was active to carry out the resolutions. Appointed secretary of the Delegation in 1906, Ion proposed its transformation into an organization with legal personality. He energetically committed himself to the project, wrote the statutes and gained the support of both Romanian bankers and Hungarian authorities. In the first decades of the 20th century, the Hungarian administration approved only one association founded by Romanians,⁸ but Ion found a work-around, registering "Solidarity" ("Solidaritatea") in 1907 not as an association but as a financial institution as defined by an old law still in force.⁹ With Ion as its secretary, Solidarity soon came to enjoy remarkable prestige: its meetings went far beyond the strictly national framework, attracting a wide participation, including also a delegate of the Austro-Hungarian Bank, the central banking institution of the dualist regime. Solidarity's reputation rested on the normative role it successfully assumed, imposing compulsory external control carried out by experts

⁸ The only approved Romanian association was the charitable "Foundation of Romanian Journalists in Hungary", founded by Dr. Ioan Mișu at the time when he was leading the negotiations for the normalization of the relations between Romanians and the Hungarian state represented by Héderváry and Tisza (the talks ended with no result).

⁹ Apáthy Law of 1878.

appointed by Solidarity, although its only coercive means was to refuse membership to those who did not accept it. The first ten experts have been appointed as early as 1907, to guarantee the soundness of the balance sheets issued by the audited banks, ensure consistency in the accounting rules applied, and disseminate best practices.

On November 1, 1911, Josif Szeterényi, Minister of Finance in the Hungarian government, conducted an inquiry during which he summoned Solidarity to account for the external control it imposed; Ion gave a speech explaining the mechanisms and answering questions. The inquiry concluded that the private initiative of the Romanian banks was entirely satisfactory and there was no need for further intervention. But after a new minister was appointed, the ministry prepared a draft law imposing mandatory external control by a central commission to be set up in Budapest. The Parliament limited the scope of the bill, limiting it only to the banks that took loans directly from the "Central Bank of Hungarian Financial Institutions" established in 1914, in which Partenie Cosma, the President of Solidarity, was appointed to its Board of Directors, and Ion was appointed to its Council. The strict supervision in Budapest was a source of anxiety for the Romanian banks, but the risk of interference has been mitigated, once it was recognized that the local structure functioned beyond reproach.

4.4 Ion: General Insurance Bank

Ion used Solidarity as a lever to overcome another shortcoming of the Romanian financial system, namely the absence of insurance. In Transylvania in general, and in Sibiu in particular, there was a considerable number of insurance organizations: branches of firms from Hungary, Austria, Germany, and Italy, along with local mutual insurance of the Saxons. Unfortunately, most Romanians could not meet the standard solvency criteria imposed by these institutions. Ion, who published in 1900 a treatise on "The Theory of Life Insurance", demonstrated the economic viability of an institution requiring premiums and guarantees appropriate to the resources of the Romanian population

and proposed the creation a national insurance bank at the Conference of Romanian Bank Directors. He published his detailed study under the title "clarifications" (in Romanian, "lămuriri") in the Economic Review, explaining the reasons for the initiative and the expected results. Ion wrote the draft statutes himself, contacted investors and obtained subscriptions; he found a solution to each of the numerous administrative problems, and managed to receive all necessary approvals from the Hungarian authorities. The General Insurance Bank was established on August 14, 1911. Ion was appointed general manager, and later became chairman of the board (Figure 4). The bank became one of the main insurance institutions in Greater Romania under the name of "Prima Ardeleană". Ion will remain linked to this institution for over forty years, until it was nationalized by the communist regime.

4.5 Start of the First World War

In 1913, Alexandru obtained Romanian citizenship through a special law passed by the two chambers of the Parliament,¹⁰ and continued to assert himself in the academic world (Fig. MO1). Ion, in his turn, was co-opted to the Board of Directors of the Albina Bank and was elected to the Diocesan Synod of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania.

When the First World War started, the Romanian Crown Council met in Sinaia on September 3, 1914, and decided that the Kingdom of Romania will remain neutral, despite the Throne's inclination to join the Triple Alliance. By coincidence, the two brothers and their wives met the same day at Predeal, on the border between Austro-Hungary and Romania. Ion came from Săcele in Austro-Hungary, a country already at war; Alexandru from Brăila, in Romania that decided for neutrality. Neither of them records in their memoirs the discussion they had in this family council, but the conclusions can be inferred from their subsequent actions. Ion returned to Sibiu, where he continued to serve on the boards of Romanian banks. Alexandru, who was convinced that Romania's entry into the war will sooner or later be unavoidable, kept his distance from demonstrations and associations pushing for the war entry, and became

¹⁰ This was normal procedure.

the Secretary of the relief committee set up in Bucharest in support of the numerous refugees from Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina, offering humanitarian aid and helping them find work.

Indeed, Romania declared war on Germany in August 1916. Romanian troops entered Transylvania and occupied Braşov and its surroundings, reaching as far as Sibiu. Ion lived dramatic days, described in a "war diary". The members of the Albina Bank's board of directors had left the town one by one, but not Ion: he and the general manager remained in Sibiu and fought to save the bank's assets.

But the Romanian troops have been redirected to a failed offensive in Bulgaria. The German forces regrouped and repelled the Romanian army: General Eric von Falkenheyn forced the Carpathian Pass while General August von Mackensen crossed the Danube. The Romanian government leaved Bucharest, which could no longer be defended, and took refuge in Iaşi. Alexandru moved with the government.

Ion was summoned to Budapest for judicial investigation on suspicion of treason for not having organized the retreat of the Albina Bank to Budapest when the Romanian troops approached, but the investigation found no grounds for indictment. But the mother of the twins who lived in Săcele was accused of treason and imprisoned in Cluj for having raised the Romanian tricolour and offered hospitality to Romanian soldiers.

4.6 Alexandru: Romania's treasury in Moscow

German armies occupied Bucharest and advanced towards Iaşi. The Romanian government decided to shelter the country's treasury by moving it to Moscow, relying on the kinship between the Hohenzollern and the Tsar families. A first shipment with the National Bank treasury was sent to Moscow in December 1916. Alexandru has been delegate to accompany the second shipment, which included cultural goods (manuscripts, archaeological objects, etc.) as well as treasuries of private banks. He leaved for Moscow at the end of July 1917, learned in Moscow that the German offensive towards Iaşi has been halted and enjoyed the international echo of the heroism shown by the Romanian soldiers in the

battles of Mărășești and Oituz. One by one, the members of the delegation accompanying the treasury returned to Romania; Alexandru was the last one in position. He wrote a fascinating diary, experiencing the Bolshevik revolution and witnessing the seizing of Moscow.

Alexandru leaved Moscow to celebrate Christmas 1917 in Kiev and New Year 1918 in Odessa.

4.7 Alexandru: The Romanian National Refugee Committee and peace preparation

The National Committee of Romanian Refugees from Austro-Hungary was set up in Odessa in January 1918, electing Alexandru as its vice-president and then president.

In fact, it was at this time that committees were being set up in several places to campaign for the unification of various provinces with Romania: in Washington; in Paris; in Italy at Cittaducale; in Timișoara; in Cluj; in Chernivtsi. On October 17/30, the Central Romanian National Committee (CNRC) was founded in Budapest and moved its headquarters to Arad four days later.

On February 6, 1918, Alexandru returned to Iași and assisted to the installation of the German Military Mission as a consequence of the collapse of the Eastern front after the disengagement of the Russian army following Lenin's "Decree on Peace". Romania had no choice but to accept an armistice, which it did on December 9, 1917. Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, that resulted in the cessation of hostilities on the Eastern Front. The Central Powers were in a position of strength and immediately and forcefully imposed *de facto* conditions on Romania that have been then included in the Peace Treaty from Buftea-Bucharest signed on May 7, 1918; it was never promulgated by the King of Romania, who refused to do it. In general despair, Alexandru published an article in Iorga's newspaper "Neamul Românesc" entitled "The Transylvanian Question", arguing that the armistice with the Central Powers was only a temporary episode in the struggle for national emancipation: the question of nationalities in Austro-Hungary will inevitably arise at the end of the war when a solution will have to be

found, also for Romanians. From that moment on, Alexandru concentrated exclusively on the contribution he could make to the preparation of Romania's position at a future Peace Conference. As president of the Committee set up in Odessa, reactivated under the name of the National Committee of Romanians in Austro-Hungary, he addressed Ion I.C. Brătianu, president of the National Liberal Party (PNL), proposing a concise documentation on: the geographic, ethnic, social, cultural and political background of Romanians in Austro-Hungary; the evolution of relations between Romanians and Hungarians; the de-nationalization practiced in Transylvania and Bukovina; as well as the need to dismember the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as a necessary premise for post-war reconstruction. Brătianu asked him to draft himself this document; it became an essential reference used by the Romanian delegation during the peace negotiations.

But Alexandru was obviously not the only one anticipating the imminent end of the war and the need for the participants in the forthcoming talks to define their positions, although the plans of the various interested parties did not always converge. In Bessarabia, the Council of Bessarabia proclaimed independence from Russia in January 1918 and voted on March 27/April 9 to unite with Romania. The General Congress of Bukovina, set up by Romanians with the support of Germans and Poles, adopted a motion on November 15/28 declaring unconditional union with Romania, but the Ukrainians and the Jewish minority formed their own committee which voted for union with Ukraine. The Germans from Banat (the Swabians) set up a committee in Timișoara which proposed to transform the province into an independent Swiss-style state made up of cantons, in which the different nationalities could set up their own autonomous administration. In Cluj, the Transylvanian National Committee set up by the Hungarians tried to win the support of Romanians and Saxons by promising tolerance for all nationalities, but failed to overcome the distrust of the Romanians, who set up their own Senate - the two organizations managed often to work together constructively for ensuring public peace, despite the inevitable mutual suspicions and the fact that they obviously pursued different goals.

Romania re-entered the war on November 10, 1918, at Clemenceau's request, the day before Germany's capitulation. It was the last official day of war, although hostilities did not cease immediately and everywhere.

4.8 The end of the First World War and the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia

In the fall of 1918, the First World War came to an end. The first armistice was signed on September 28 by Bulgaria with forces under French command. The Ottoman Empire signed an armistice with British forces on October 30. Austro-Hungary dismembered: the Czechs proclaimed their independence on October 28 in Prague; the Croats, Slovenes and Serbs of Austro-Hungary proclaimed their independence on October 29 and announced on November 1 their union with Serbia; the Slovaks seceded from Hungary on October 30 and demanded union with the Czechs; on October 31, the Ukrainians of Galicia also proclaimed their independence; Hungary itself abolished the dualist system and declared itself an independent state. On November 3, Austria signed an armistice with Italian forces. Germany signed the armistice with French forces on November 11; this date is generally considered to mark the end of the war.

Hungary did not sign the armistice until November 13 in the presence of the French general Franchet d'Espèrey, the representative of the Entente on the Eastern Front, who was supporting the Serbs in Banat. As will be seen later, the armistice was signed but fight resumed in certain areas.

In this effervescent context, the CNRC called a Grand National Assembly of Romanians in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918 (Gregorian calendar). The Assembly decided the union with Romania and elected a Grand National Council a legislative body and a Governing Council as an executive body for the regions that expressed their will to unite with Romania. Ion was a delegate to the Grand National Assembly, was elected to the Grand National Council and appointed Secretary General of the Resort of Finance in the Ruling Council (Figure 5).

On January 8, 1919, the Central Council of the Transylvanian Saxons and the National Council of the Banat Swabians met in Mediaş and approved the decisions taken in Alba Iulia; the Evangelical Community of Bucharest expressed its solidarity with the decisions of Mediaş in a Declaration drafted with the collaboration of Alexandru. The Hungarians affirmed their loyalty to Hungary at a General Assembly in Cluj, but to no avail: the demographic majority prevailed.

4.9 Peace talks and final hostilities

The abrupt end of the First World War precipitated events. At the proposal of Ion I.C. Brătianu, the King of Romania appointed Alexandru in the Romanian delegation to the peace talks. Alexandru had to leave for Paris as soon as possible. Before leaving, he followed an advice and asked for a royal audience which was immediately granted. At the audience, he came dressed in a jacket and apologized for not having ceremonial clothes, but the King exclaimed: "We are not interested in protocol now!"

Alexandru left for Paris in December 1918 with a Romanian delegation. In the negotiations were involved mostly the "Big Four" victorious powers (France, United Kingdom, U.S.A. and Italy), with other co-belligerent countries participating from time to time to express or defend their positions. For Romania, Alexandru contributed his invaluable knowledge of historical facts, statistics and the situation on the ground.

Ion received too international assignments after the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. The first one was in Budapest, in 1920, as chairman of the Romanian delegation intending to start talks for settling public and private issues with Hungary. Then, he participated in the conferences of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which went on for several years. Ion defended Romania's interests and contributed judicious solutions to the numerous contentious issues.

Although peace talks were advanced, Hungary considered that the borders set by the Entente commission were unacceptable. The government led by the liberal party resigned and the Communists under Bela Kun seized power, established a Soviet Republic and did not hesitate to start armed conflicts with their neighbours. After a few successful

operations in Serbia, they succeed in establishing a Soviet republic in Slovakia, but in Transylvania they encountered a Romanian army which, backed by the Berthelot mission sent by France, proved its superiority on the battlefield, breaking through Hungarian positions, occupying Budapest on August 4 and ousting the communist government. The Entente was actually pleased with the defeat of the revolution but asked Romania to respect the borders set during the peace talks. The Romanian army left Budapest in September 1919 and completed its withdrawal from the entire territory assigned to Hungary in February 1920: order was restored.

4.10 "Greater Romania"

The peace treaties fulfilled the Romanian national aspirations, but also those of Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes and Serbs, who could build national States in one form or another, while Hungary, as a successor state of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, experienced a tragedy, losing 71% of its territory and 63% of its population only fifty one years after having "reconstituted" the mythical St. Stephen crown.

Romania was granted:

- Bukovina from Austria (Cisleithania) by the Treaty of Saint Germain en Laye of September 10, 1919
- the whole of Dobrogea, including its southern part (the Quadrilateral), to the detriment of Bulgaria, by the Treaty of Neuilly sur Seine of November 27, 1919
- Transylvania, Banat and Partium¹¹ (up to the border drawn by the Lang Commission) from Hungary (Transleithania) by the Treaty of Trianon of June 4, 1920
- and Bessarabia (after separation from the Russian Empire) by the Treaty of Paris of October 28, 1920.

¹¹ Territory west of the Carpathians, first called "partium" in the Treaty of Speyer (1570)

With all these territories, Romania increased from 137,000 km² to 295,000 km² and its population from 7.2 million to 18 million: "Greater Romania" was born.

In 1921, the Lapedatu brothers were 45 years old. Their national dreams were realized beyond expectations, but their work - and that of their generation - was just beginning.

5. State-building

Greater Romania, as it emerged from the peace treaties, was a patchwork of territories, nationalities, customs, beliefs, as well as legal, financial, and monetary institutions. The generation of the Great Union raised to the challenge to create a unified, sustainable State in line with the principles of modernity.

The Lapedatu brothers participated directly in the exercise of the prerogatives of the institutions in Greater Romania; they took part in the legislative process and in the executive institutions as members of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate or the government, and they participated in international missions. They acted independently from each other, in different fields and even in different political parties: Alexandru in the Romanian Academy, of which he becomes president, and as minister of cults and arts in the governments of the National Liberal Party; Ion as minister of finance from the Transylvanian National Party and in the National Bank of Romania, of which he became governor, continuing after he retired from politics becoming, as we would say today, a "technocrat". But the positions they hold are in themselves of secondary importance. What matters are their deeds and the results they obtained in these functions.

They both shared the same ideals and consulted often each other often. Their contemporaries attest to both a thoughtful and balanced personality, rational fairness and a natural authority that was easy to accept as following, always and obviously, the public good.

5.1 Ion: The Agrarian Bank

In 1919, as Secretary General of the Finance Resort of the Ruling Council, Ion concentrated his efforts on establishing a banking system capable of sustaining the post-war economic boom. The Ruling Council adopted an agrarian reform law promulgated by King Ferdinand in September 1919. But land ownership in itself was not sufficient if the peasants were unable to invest. On August 11, 1919, Ion had already presented a report to the assembly of the Grand National Council, proposing the project of an agrarian bank that would grant low-interest loans (4%) to accompany the agrarian reform. The Agrarian Bank was indeed established by the Decree Law No. 4167 of September 12, 1919, issued by the Ruling Council, and began operating on January 10, 1920, after the first meeting of its Board of Directors that took place in Cluj. The Agrarian Bank was very active and operated profitably until 1932, when the liberal government cancelled it; but the bank sued the State and reached a settlement, by which it obtained compensation, could consolidate, and remained one of the most important banks in Transylvania between the two wars. The Agrarian Bank was a key element in the success of the agrarian reform in Transylvania, and set an example for the whole country.

5.2 Alexandru and Ion: University of Upper Dacia

The Ruling Council promptly took up Romanian-language education, in particular by establishing the first Romanian University in Cluj, also called the "University of Upper Dacia". Alexandru was appointed Professor of Ancient Romanian History here in 1919. The subject had an obvious political connotation, confronting theories that denied the perpetuity of Romanians (respectively, of their ancestors) in Transylvania after the retreat of the Roman legions. Together with his colleague and friend Ioan Lupaş, Alexandru founded the Institute of National History in 1920 and became its co-director. He also served as dean of the history faculty and donated the University his 10,000-volume library.

Ion was invited in 1919 to become a professor at the High Commercial Academy in Cluj (today included in the University as the

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration). Initially, he refused the appointment, considering that he was a practitioner rather than a theorist, but in 1922 he received a second invitation, which he accepted, becoming in his turn a university professor, holding of the Chair of Public Finance and Financial Legislation.

Both brothers will stop teaching in 1938, when a legislative reform required professors to be domiciled in the same locality as the University. Unfortunately, their official duties and the institutions they were involved with, such as the Romanian Academy or the National Bank of Romania, required them to be present in Bucharest.

5.3 Alexandru: Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts, Legislation on the General Regime of Religious Denominations

In 1923, Alexandru was trusted for the first time by the National Liberal Party with the portfolio of cults and arts, a ministerial post that he will occupy, with a short interruption, for the next four years, facing one of the most formidable challenges and putting his mark on the solution of one of the thorniest problems in the process of unification of the country.

The state and society in general cannot function well in the absence of a harmonious relationship with and between cults. In history, this problem has rarely found a stable, and almost never a lasting solution, continuing to cause serious disturbances even in the contemporary world. Religion is a defining element of the identity of individuals, groups and nations and is thus deeply embedded in the individual and collective psyche. Moreover, in those times religious denominations, understood as beliefs that have been given a form of organization, had multiple economic, administrative and social functions, including control of civil status (birth, marriage, death, inheritance rights, etc.); education through denominational schools; economic and financial enterprises as legal personalities; administration of property and assets; and, finally, the exercise of authority and even jurisdiction over a territory which may or may not have been contained in the State in which they were established.

Greater Romania integrated provinces with important differences in legislation and customs. The situation in the old Kingdom was more or less homogeneous (perhaps with the exception of Dobrogea, which had a high proportion of Muslims). The Romanian Orthodox Church declared autocephalous in 1864 and recognized as such by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1885, was considered practically everywhere in the Kingdom as the undisputed law of the land, with traditional powers that did not require formal regulation. However, this was by no means the case in the newer regions, where there were cults with very different traditions, subjected to different legislations, Russian, Austrian or Hungarian. No less than twelve cults (religions and their variations) have been officially identified as recognized throughout the country, plus one cult accepted in only one region; there was no mechanism to recognize other cults. Cults borders crossed the State boundaries, raising issues of sovereignty: there were religious communities whose superior authorities resided abroad and there were Romanian ecclesiastic authorities having subjects abroad, raising numerous issues regarding patrimony, finances, jurisdiction, etc. when crossing state borders. These conflicts of authority could not be allowed to persist without jeopardizing public peace.

A first stance on the relations between the State and the religious denominations in Transylvania was expressed immediately after the Alba Iulia assembly in 1919, in a document addressed to the Ruling Council by the Greek-Catholic bishops. After the centralization of the government in Bucharest, Minister Constantin Banu began consultations and took part in the Blaj Conference of June 19, 1922, during which were listed the 11 demands of the Greek-Catholic Church, the most important one being equal treatment for all denominations. Of course, the Orthodox Church had a different perspective, as it considering itself *de facto* as a State Church. Other denominations have their own expectations, such as the preservation of the "historically won rights" demanded by the representatives of the "recepta" religions in Transylvania.

A preliminary draft law was sent out for consultation on January 4, 1923; it embodied the spirit of the new Constitution in preparation that was to be promulgated on March 28, 1923. Article 22 of the Constitution stated that freedom of conscience was absolute; the State had to guarantee equal freedom and protection to all religious denominations as long as they did not contravene public order, morality or the laws of State. The regime of each religious denomination had to be specified in a special law. But there was a major difficulty: in the same article, the Constitution stated that, among the denominations to be treated equally, there were two "Romanian" denominations: the Orthodox one, which was "dominant" because it was in the majority, and the Greek-Catholic one, which had "priority".

The comments received have been incorporated in a final draft, sent for consultation on October 11, 1923. The text was far from fulfilling all desires; the Greek Catholic Church declared it unacceptable on October 16, after only five days. Under these circumstances, Alexandru was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts on October 30, 1923. He committed his all energy to finding an equitable, and therefore lasting, solution.

Alexandru took the time to get a clear picture of the situation; he met with numerous ecclesiastical personalities from all denominations and faiths, at all hierarchical levels, from priests to archbishops. In doing so, he identified two fundamental problems to be resolved: the Orthodox Church had to be given satisfaction without compromising the legal equality of all denominations; and the sovereignty of the State will have to be reconciled with papal authority over the Catholic Churches of various rites.

Alexandru started two legislative initiatives to strengthen the position of the Orthodox Church, in view of its undisputed historical merits in preserving the Romanian culture and advancing the national ideals. The autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church was headed by a primate metropolitan while neighbouring Orthodox countries had

patriarchs. Alexandru collaborates with the Holy Synod to elevate the seat of the primate of Romania, the head of the Archdiocese and Metropolitanate of Ugro-Vlahlia, to the rank of a Patriarchate. Alexandru himself presented the draft law, which was adopted by Parliament and promulgated by the King on February 23, 1925. Immediately afterwards he presents the draft law for the approval of the Statute of Organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church elaborated and adopted by the Holy Synod, which unified the functioning of the Church in all the provinces; the law was adopted by the Parliament and promulgated by the King on 4 May 1925 (Fig. MO2).

These two laws bearing Alexandru's signature opened the possibility of drafting a law establishing the general regime of religious denominations. On May 26, 1925, he published in the press a new preliminary draft. It went through some debate in Parliament and was republished in December. But it was clear that the objections could not be overcome without a solution to the problem posed by the Pope's authority.

To this end, Alexandru engaged in a collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first contacts with the Vatican in view of establishing a Concordat had been initiated in 1920 by Octavian Goga as Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts, but the drafts proposed by each side failed to reach agreement. In 1924, negotiations have been energetically resumed, and on January 15, 1926, the Holy See confirmed its acceptance of the version proposed by the Romanian government. The negotiations were concluded, the legislative process could begin.

Alexandru reworked the draft Legislation on the General Regime of Religious Denominations. The new version was sent to the Senate and was debated in its special committee in February and March 1926. Numerous amendments and improvements have been included in the version prepared for a general debate in plenary. But at the end of March the government was changed. The draft was shelved pending the rescheduling of debates.

Vasile Goldiș, Alexandru's successor, did not move forward the draft legislation, but signed the Concordat with the Vatican on May 10, 1927 (promulgated by the King on June 12, 1929). Romania was the first State without a Catholic majority to find a way to accept on its territory a hierarchy subordinated to the Holy See without compromising its own sovereignty.

At the beginning of June 1927, the government changed again, and Alexandru was reinstated as minister (Figure 6). The draft legislation was revised, completed and updated, and it was taken up by Parliament under favourable conditions, since the Orthodox Church was now organized according to its own wishes, and the relations of the State with the Vatican were clarified by the Concordat. And yet three weeks of stormy parliamentary debate followed (Figure 7), with incendiary speeches, fulminating articles in the press of all orientations, calls for public assemblies, demonstrations or processions to support the views expressed by the various denominations. Alexandru, in his role as responsible minister, presented explanatory statements, made a speech in the middle of the debate for clarification, and another one at the end to draw conclusions. He strongly affirmed the royal right of the State to lay down rules, and the secular vocation of State power, by virtue of which all organized faiths must be placed on an equal footing, while terms such as "dominant" or "priority" were belonging exclusively in the spiritual domain. At the end of the debate, participants felt that no other law had been debated more than this one. Alexandru ensured a wise and calm moderation throughout the debates and expressed his firm conviction that this law will represent a great step forward in consolidating Romania, that was now unified at the cost of so many sacrifices.

The law passed almost unanimously. It was promulgated and published in "Monitorul Oficial" on April 22, 1928. Despite some criticism from those who were unable to impose their point of view in full, the law defined a framework which made possible, for the decades to come, relations based on perfect normality among religions and between

religions and the State. The law remained practically unchanged until the communists came to power and replaced it in 1948.

5.4 Alexandru: National Theatres Law and cultural policies

It is almost unbelievable that at the same time Alexandru found the time and energy to draft, in close collaboration with playwrights and artists, a law for the organization and functioning of national theatres. It aims to support original repertoire and improve funding conditions. The King promulgated it on March 21, 1926.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts contributed financially to numerous projects. Alexandru took time to be personally present - for example - at the reopening of the National Theatre in Timișoara, restored after a fire; at the laying of the cornerstone at the Orthodox cathedral in Târgu Mureș; at the unveiling of busts of Romanian cultural personalities such as that of Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea in Oradea - all these are milestones for the affirmation of Romanian culture that in no way diminish the cultural values of other nationalities. The examples cited here are from Transylvania, but Alexandru's work covered all regions of the country, carrying out a coherent policy of promoting culture on a national scale. These efforts were a natural continuation of his work at the Historical Monuments Commission, where he will be appointed chairman.

5.5 Ion: Finance Minister, Convention with Germany and monetary stabilization

During this time, Ion distinguished himself in the Chamber of Deputies through his constructive criticism of the draft financial legislations proposed by the Liberal government. In particular, his in-depth knowledge of the terms of the peace treaties concluded after the World War, and his participation in the conferences of successor states enabled him to recognize inconsistencies and contradictions with international obligations already assumed by Romania. In this context, as

a representative of the parliamentary opposition, he took a critical stance on the draft legislation proposed in 1925 by Finance Minister Vintilă Brătianu and announced a detailed intervention for the following day. But the liberals obstructed and prevented him from speaking; nonetheless, the minister asked his teams to work all night and amend the text, recognizing the correctness of the criticism. Ion was surprised a short while later, when the minister asked him to kindly postpone another speech, because he wanted to listen to it but was prevented from attending the meeting where it was on the agenda. Ion replied, "What an honour, Minister!" and postponed his speech. In 1926, Ion was appointed himself Minister of Finance in the Averescu government, succeeding Vintilă Brătianu, who switched to the opposition, declaring that at least a competent replacement had been found!

Ion was appointed minister at the last minute and did not have time to change his attire for the swearing in ceremony. Like his brother ten years earlier, he appeared before the King in street clothes. The photograph of the new government on the palace staircase, when exiting the ceremony, shows him standing behind the others, in profile and with the collar of his overcoat turned up to hide the fact that he was not in tuxedo adorned with decorations like his colleagues (Figure 8)!

One of the most urgent tasks facing Ion in his new position was to stabilize the Romanian currency, which at the beginning of his mandate had fallen to its lowest rate on the Zurich stock exchange. Stabilization required considerable foreign borrowing to guarantee convertibility. Prudent explorations had identified the willingness of the London-based Schroeder Bank to head an Anglo-American consortium able to provide a loan, conditional upon a favourable opinion on the country's economic and financial situation issued by British auditors. Romania accepted the conditions; the British experts arrived in secret and were hosted in the palace of Prince Barbu Stirbey, the only one aware of their presence apart from General Alexandru Averescu as Prime Minister and Ion as Finance Minister. The experts analysed in-depth Romania's general budget and

the other documents made available to them, had difficulties to orient themselves in what seemed to them a veritable "chaos", and felt lost in a "labyrinth". Ion decided to get personally involved and explained to them the state of the country's finances using his own method. After a week, the experts sent a first positive report to London. For two months, Ion met them secretly every day in the office of the director general of the Reșița Plants and Domains. The experts draw up a favourable final report. Before leaving they have been received by the Prime Minister, expressed their thanks for the excellent support they have received throughout their stay, and declare that it will be absolutely necessary for Ion to make a visit to London to meet the decision-makers before the loan will be granted. But in March 1927, the Prime Minister asked Ion to broaden the powers of Undersecretary of State Mihail Manoilescu and to join the People's Party. Ion preferred to resign.

At this point in time, Ion faced a duelling challenge. Ion made certain statements in an interview for a newspaper considered as personal offenses by General Florescu, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, who challenged him to a duel. Ion called his witnesses. General Averescu, who was on the best of terms with Ion despite his resignation, summoned him, explained him that he should have ignored the challenge. Ion replied: "Yes, General, if I had been General Averescu - but as I am only Ion Lapedatu, this would have left a stain on my honour I could not tolerate, to be told that I was challenged to a duel and behaved like a coward". Averescu summoned the witnesses, explained to them that General Florescu had no right to provoke, and the incident was settled.

Shortly after the departure of the British experts, the head of the Schroeder House announced his visit to Bucharest. With the Prime Minister's agreement, he also met Ion in private at Prince Stirbey's palace in Buftea; the meeting was also attended by the director general of Reșița. Ion told him about recent developments in the country's financial situation: 1926 has been an exceptionally good year for agricultural

production, resulting in a very favourable trade balance. The visitor reconfirmed the positive results of the appraisals and reiterated the invitation extended to Ion to visit them in London, with a view to finalizing the loan. Ion was of the opinion that the trip was not necessary, especially after he retired as minister; moreover, he had to go to Vienna for surgery. But he was nonetheless delegated by the new government, and in November he went to London, met the head of the Schroeder House, several senior ministry officials, and Montagu Norman, president of the Bank of England. He was given to understand that despite the experts' favourable report, any loan will be conditional on the prior settlement of the Romanian debt contracted with Germany before the war. At the same moment, a scandal was triggered by the arrest of Mihail Manoilescu at the Romanian border, having in his possession subversive documents regarding the return to Romania of Prince Carol, the former heir who had renounced the throne. Romania appeared politically unstable, and all meetings set up with Ion have been immediately cancelled. The possibility of a loan receded, and Ion returned to Bucharest.

However, the Averescu government had anticipated the importance of the debt to Germany and had given Ion plenipotentiary powers to begin negotiations and even to conclude an agreement with Germany as early as 1927, during his convalescence in Vienna and before his trip to London. Ion went to Berlin to explore the German position. He met with Julius Kurtius (Minister of Economy) and Gustav Stressemann (Prime Minister), engaged in detailed discussions with financial experts and found that Germany was adamant that Romania should continue to honour its debt obligations, while Romania wanted to stop payments and include the debt obligations in the war reparation package. Ion strongly supported the Romanian point of view and earned a reputation as a difficult but respectable negotiator. He realized that it was not possible to reach a quick agreement and returned to Bucharest, devoting himself to his function as director and then administrator of the National Bank of Romania.

But things did not stop there. In the summer of 1928, the issue of monetary stabilization was at the top of the agenda. On 27 July, several laws have been passed empowering the National Bank of Romania to contract loans to finance its activities, and to buy convertible currencies without limit, while the government was authorized to contract a foreign loan, the first tranche of which had to be used to achieve monetary stabilization.

Vintilă Brătianu, the new prime minister and finance minister, began negotiations with several countries; among them France, who sent experts to investigate the situation. The Prime Minister invited Ion to an intimate lunch with the French experts, at which he unexpectedly declared that Mr. Lapedatu will go to Berlin in the near future to settle the dispute with Germany. Ion was surprised, but understood that France, like England before, was asking for preliminary settlement of the disputes between Romania and Germany, and he was just entrusted with this mission.

Ion accompanied Jean Bolger, director of the Bank of France and member of the French delegation, on a mountain excursion in the vicinity of Sovata, before leaving for Berlin together with two other delegates. The negotiations were complicated. Germany was keen to settle the differences and gain Romania as a market for its industrial products but considered that it was in a strong position and made higher demands than in the previous exchanges. On September 19, the Romanian delegation met with Vintilă Brătianu to define an acceptable framework for settling the disputes, but a few days later Germany responded reducing its offer. The negotiations seem to have reached an impasse. Ion took the initiative and, together with his German counterpart, drew up a draft agreement with terms that they both considered fair. On October 19, Ion, accompanied by Nicolae Petrescu Comnen, a member of the Romanian delegation and the Romanian minister in Berlin, presented this draft to the Romanian prime minister, who found it acceptable, asking only for a few minor changes in wording that have then been accepted by Germany. The crisis was overcome as the terms of the agreement were accepted by both parties.

Vintilă Brătianu, whose position as prime minister was dependent upon succeeding the monetary stabilization, considered that the only remaining roadblock has been eliminated, and offered his demission, expecting to be entrusted by the Regency with the formation of a new government to complete the job. But on November 9, the Regency accepted unexpectedly his demission. Ion signed the Convention with Germany on November 10, the same day on which the new government led by Iuliu Maniu was sworn in. The Convention was ratified by the Romanian Parliament on 31 December 1928, in the presence of Gerhard von Mutius, the German ambassador, and Hans Kirchholtes, embassy counsellor. This was the first ever economic treaty between Romania and Germany, replacing the Treaty of Versailles as basis of the relations between the two countries. (Fig. MO3)

For Romania, the conclusion of the Convention with Germany opened the possibility to obtain the loan needed for monetary stabilization; that happened in the following three months. Romania was now in the position to put in order its finances, enjoying in the following decade a period of relative prosperity, despite the awful world financial crisis.

As a last action related to this subject, Ion was delegated in 1929 to negotiate an agreement with the national bank of the Netherlands, for a potential loan in convertible foreign currency that could be enacted in the future in a crisis situation. Ion quickly and successfully accomplished his mission. On this occasion, he could see the deserted and desolate city of Amsterdam, severely impacted by the world crisis. In comparison, Romania was only mildly affected.

5.6 Ion: The energy resources

After the war, Romania needed to quickly and coherently structure the key sectors of its economy, especially the main industrial branches, among which energy, steel and transport. Several theories had been put forward regarding the best strategy to adopt: remain an "eminently agrarian country"; or develop the country "by ourselves"; or implement "open doors" policies to stimulate international investments.

Successive governments emphasized one or another approach, depending on the way they perceived the strategic needs, on the attention given to particular sectors of the economy, and on the ideology propagated by the party in power.

In the energy sector, Romania was well known for its oil reserves, but the country also had coal deposits as well as methane gas deposits in Transylvania. On June 11, 1919, the finance committee of the Ruling Council, led by Ion as its Secretary General, planned to set up a permanent geological commission in Transylvania to manage the natural gas deposits, promote explorations and propose a territorial organization taking into account the subsoil resources.

By 1915, in Transylvania, methane gas was exploited by the "Ungarische Erdgas A.G." (U.E.G.) or "Magyar Földgás R.T.", a company set up on the basis of an agreement between the Ministry of Finance in Budapest and Deutsche Bank of Berlin; the Bank provided a substantial part of the core capital heading a consortium of investors. U.E.G. owned the rights over the subsoil and managed one of the country's main sources of energy. At the end of the World War, the Ruling Council of Transylvania followed the recommendation of its Resort of Finance and accepted the proposal put forward by Constantin I. Motăș to place the company under judicial sequestration in order to evaluate its assets. The Alba Iulia Tribunal ordered the movable and immovable property of U.E.G. to be placed under forced administration and appointed C.I. Motăș as sequestration administrator.

U.E.G. was in a difficult situation: its revenues barely cover 20% of costs. U.E.G. requests to lift the sequestration so that its financial backer could approve appropriations needed to continue operations, but the Ruling Council rejected the request because the Resort of Finance considered the public control inescapable, given the paramount importance of energy resources for the progress and economic security of the State; moreover, the waiver of the right of control would call into question Romania's willingness to apply the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, creating a dangerous precedent.

The Treaty of Versailles authorized the victorious states to liquidate the enemy capital invested in their territory, except if owned by entities taken over by that state following territorial changes. This exception applied to Hungarian enterprises in the provinces united with Romania. But U.E.G. was 80% controlled by German capital, so that the Court of Alba Iulia appointed Ion in 1925 in a newly created Board of Directors chartered to liquidate U.E.G. The U.E.G. Board of Directors in Budapest started a legal battle against liquidation; Romania won in the national courts, but lost the case on July 17, 1927, when the Romanian-Hungarian Mixed Arbitration Tribunal in Paris decided that companies registered in Hungary will not be liquidated regardless of the composition of their capital. U.E.G. continued functioning under sequestration.

Romania decided now to take control of the methane gas exploitation in Transylvania using the statutory repurchase right of the State, that had passed from Hungary to Romania. To this effect, the joint company "Societatea Națională de Gaz Metan" – SONAMETAN, established in 1925 to manage the fields not included in the U.E.G. grant, was now empowered and given the necessary means to buy back all U.E.G. shares held by private and public shareholders in Hungary and Germany. The task was to be fulfilled by Ion, who was elected president of the Board of Directors of SONAMETAN. (Figure 9).

The buyback took place in three phases:

- Ion went to Budapest and quickly reached an agreement on the purchase of the shares and holdings of Hungarian private entities at a price not exceeding the limits imposed by the Romanian Ministry of Finance. However, the Hungarian side demanded that Hungarian shareholders shall preserve the right to approve in advance the agenda of all general assemblies, in order to protect them during the seven-year period until the purchase price was to be paid in full. Ion considered this level of control excessive and unacceptable and proposed a contractual commitment not to change the structure of the company during the payments period. His proposal was accepted, and the purchase was concluded by a Convention signed on October 27, 1927.

- The Romanian Ministry intended initially to include the U.E.G. shares held by German entities in the war reparations, but Germany objected. The Convention from November 10, 1928 (negotiated by Ion) provided for a payment of 75 million gold marks by Germany, while Romania accepted to exempt from liquidation the German capital still active. Consequently, the only possibility was to buy back German-owned shares. In 1928, Ion assisted by C.I. Motăș entered negotiations with Kurt Weigelt, the director of Deutsche Bank. Ion and Kurt Weigelt knew each other, having met at the conference of the Successor States in Prague. They quickly came to an agreement regarding the price to be paid in seven years; it was lower than the price paid in Hungary.

- The last negotiation took place with the Hungarian State, which accepted the U.E.G.'s deregistration in Budapest and the transfer of its headquarters to Romania only if the last shares in its possession will also be repurchased. Ion obtained a new price reduction, and the purchase Convention was signed in December 1931.

In this moment, the assets of U.E.G. were entirely in the possession of SONAMETAN and there was nothing preventing the transformation of U.E.G. into "Societatea Română de Gaz Metan", S.R.G., headquartered in Bucharest. Thus ended, after 12 years, the process initiated in 1919 with the seizure of the U.E.G. properties. Ion who led the whole process remained Chairman of the Board of Directors until the communists seized power.

5.7 Ion: The Gojdu Foundation and banking missions

In 1930, Ion accepted a last international mission as chairman of the Romanian commission charged with settling the dispute over the Gojdu Foundation, whose property remained in Hungary. As a student, Ion had a scholarship from the Foundation; later, he was its financial controller and a member of the Board of Trustees.

Long and difficult negotiations with the Hungarian counterpart have been concluded with a Convention signed by both governments in 1936. The Romanian Parliament ratified it without delay, but the

Hungarian Parliament postponed ratification several times, until the outbreak of the Second World War stopped the process. The dispute remained open to this day.

Ion continued to receive international assignments, although not from the Government but from the National Bank of Romania. He participated in the meetings of the money-issuing banks of the Little Entente, the alliance of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania for regional security confronting Hungarian revisionism and irredentism. Little Entente existed until the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Hitler's Germany in 1938.

Since 1934, Ion participated in the banking meetings of the Balkan Entente including Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Romania, aimed at regional security and collaboration in the face of escalating revisionism and fascism and opposing Bulgarian territorial claims.

The National Bank of Romania, represented by Governor Mitiță Constantinescu and Administrator Ion Lapedatu, received in Bucharest in 1936 a visit from Willem Beyen, Governor of the Bank of Regulations in Basel, which managed Germany's war debts. During his stay, Ion guided him. The NBR became a member of the Bank of Regulations (it retains this status to this day). On leaving his post, Willem Beyen became Foreign Minister of the Netherlands and was among the proponents of the European Economic Community, popularly known as the "Common Market". His bust is on display in Bucharest's Herăstrău Park within the group of 12 personalities who promoted the European project (Figure 10).

5.8 Alexandru: President of the Romanian Academy, President of the Senate

In 1935, the Romanian Academy updated its Statutes and procedures. Elections were to be held for various positions, and Alexandru was elected President for a three-year term. In this position he succeeded, among other things, to obtain funding for the construction of a new library building which is still in use today. At the end of his term of office, Alexandru was elected, and then re-elected to the position of Secretary, which he held until 1948, when the communist regime

replaced the Romanian Academy with the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic and purged its ranks.

Between 1933-1937, Alexandru was repeatedly appointed Minister of State or Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts. He became a senator by right in 1936, and in the same year was elected President of the Senate. Alexandru drafted laws to appoint metropolitans to the new regions, regulated the salaries of representatives of religious denominations, etc. In 1936 Alexandru suffered a heart attack. He survived, but reduced his involvement in the executive institutions, while remaining politically active, especially in the legislative field.

5.9 Last years of peace

In 1936, Professor Ioan Lupaş, himself a leading figure of the Great Union generation and a close friend of the Lapedatu brothers, organized in Braşov a series of festivities to celebrate their 60th birthday. The resonance was extraordinary: representatives of the municipality, national institutions, high clergy, financial organizations and cultural institutions came together to honour the two personalities. To mark the event, a 1000-page commemorative volume has been published. The two brothers had every reason to look back with satisfaction at their achievements and with confidence and hope to the future. Ion was particularly moved by an article published in the magazine of the Hungarian tourism association "Encián", which described him as a recognized tourist, known to the whole tourist world in the Braşov region, who takes part in excursions with everyone, regardless of nationality, rank and social class, speaking to everyone in their own language and having kind words for everyone. Ion replied with a letter of thanks in Hungarian, published in a later issue of the magazine.

By the end of the thirties, Ion believed that Romania was a prosperous and respected country, making progress on all levels. 1938 marks the country's economic peak. Industrial development was booming. The currency was strong and covered in gold at a higher level than required. Culture was flourishing.

This enormous building effort of some two decades cannot be attributed to any one person or even a small group. It was the work of an entire generation. The evolution of the country was based on many contributions like those brought by the Lapedatu brothers. There were, of course, prominent personalities such as King Ferdinand and Queen Marie, prime ministers such as the Brătianu brothers or Maniu, but also industrialists, financiers, scientists, artists, local and national politicians, public and private sector entrepreneurs, more or less famous, who have driven the progress, each in their own field - and last but not least the countless anonymous people who have worked hard and whose efforts have resulted in a better country providing better life conditions for its citizens.

In this context, the life, actions and contributions of the Lapedatu brothers are exemplary of what was good, progressive, serious and successful in Romania between the wars: a period that has become mythical, whose history has yet to be written.

And which will unfortunately end in catastrophe.

6. In the whirlpool of history

In the late thirties, the whole world entered a period of great unrest. The Lapedatu brothers witnessed rising forces threatening the order they had worked so hard to build. In Rome, in 1922, at the first conference of the successor states, Ion witnessed daily worker demonstrations, demanding the resignation of the Giolitti government, and saw the authorities dispersing them with water cannons and cavalry barrages. He also witnessed one of the first fascist demonstrations when Mussolini's made a visit in Rome. Ion described the event as being almost ridiculous: barely 200-300 demonstrators accompanied Mussolini from the railroad station to the centre of the city, resembling the sympathy demonstrations of the students of Bucharest for their favourite orators taking them from the University to the hill of the Metropolis. But the extremist movements kept growing and flourishing, even in Romania. In 1933, Alexandru was Minister of State in the I.G. Duca government, when

the Journal of the Council of Ministers published on December 9 outlawed the political group "Iron Guard", initially called the "Legion of Michael the Archangel". Alexandru co-signed the decision, as did his colleagues in the government (Fig. MO4) and the decision caused the assassination of the prime minister in Sinaia railway station on December 29. Unfortunately, neither the courageous gesture of the government nor the determined opposition of other personalities and politicians could prevent the progression of this movement. Eventually, it will come to power, even if only for a short time.

During his presidency of the Romanian Academy, Alexandru blocked the candidacy of Field Marshal Ion Antonescu, elected in 1935 by the scientific section to fill a vacancy. The King received Alexandru in audience, as was customary before the Academy's plenary sessions, and asked him whether there were other generals who deserved the title of Academician before Antonescu, such as the well-known Prezan or Averescu. Alexandru, who shared King's viewpoint, postponed all elections of new members for one year, on the pretext that there were other vacancies waiting for candidates to be nominated. Surprisingly, Nicolae Iorga accepted the postponement but strongly demanded that Antonescu's candidacy be put right away to a vote in plenary, precisely in order to have it rejected. Iorga justified his vehemence to a small group of close friends: "When he seizes power with his legionaries, he will not do anything to you, but he will shoot me". Unfortunately, his concerns will prove more than justified: when the National Legionary State was in power, with Marshal Antonescu as "Leader", Iorga was assassinated on November 27, 1940.

On August 23, 1939, Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, including a secret annex redrawing several state borders. Hitler started the war on September 1, invading Poland from west while the Soviet Union invaded from east. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union sent an ultimatum to Bucharest, then occupied Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, de facto annulling the Treaty of Paris (which it never recognized). Hungary also asked for a revision of the borders established by the Trianon Treaty; the Second Vienna Arbitration from 1940 granted Hungary northern Transylvania. More than 200,000

Romanian were forced to abandon their homes in dramatic conditions and became refugees, while the Romanian University of Cluj moved hastily to Sibiu. The work of the Great Union generation seemed to be demolished after only twenty years.

In the first year of war Romania maintained its neutrality, after which it engaged on Germany side hoping to regain Bessarabia. On June 22, 1941, at the outbreak of Operation Barbarossa, Marshal Antonescu, alone in power after getting rid of the Legionaries, addressed the Romanian troops: "My soldiers, I order you: Cross the Prut¹² ! ... Free our brothers from the red yoke of Bolshevism." The offensive was victorious in the first phase, but then the Red Army took the initiative and in 1944 it reached Romania's eastern border.

Ion was during these events Deputy Governor of the National Bank of Romania. He acted to safeguard the country's treasury. In meetings and through written notes, he asked the Antonescu government to assume its responsibility and to take the necessary political decisions (sheltering the treasury in the country? transfer it abroad? if yes, where?) so that the Bank could assume its responsibility and implement the decisions. In the end, the treasury was sheltered in caves near the Tismana monastery. Alexandru, as the head of the Historic Monument Commission, approved the secret works at the Monastery for hiding the treasury, pretexting repairs after a fire. This solution weathered the dangers of the last years of the war and the Soviet occupation better than sending it abroad: the treasury sent to Russia in the previous war - partly accompanied by Alexandru – has never been fully returned to Romania, remaining a subject of dispute to this day.

Ion had been forcibly retired from his position as deputy governor and member of the National Bank's Administration Council at the end of April 1944 when Marshal Antonescu issued a decree limiting the maximum age of administrators to 65. He left Bucharest for Sibiu, spending a lot of time in the Păltiniș resort in the vicinity.

¹² The Prut was the border between Bessarabia occupied by the USSR and the rest of Moldavia that remained in Romania.

The Soviet troops entered Romanian territory in the summer of 1944. Marshal Antonescu refused to consider an armistice, so King Mihai I decided to dare a coup d'état: Antonescu was arrested, and, on August 23, 1944, the King announced himself on the radio, at ten o'clock in the evening, the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of talks in view of an armistice. Ion, still in Sibiu, hearing the King's announcement, immediately left his residence to join Prof. Dr. Alexandru Pop, a relative of his son-in-law and a refugee from Cluj, to toast a glass of champagne with his family members to celebrate peace.

The change of government had an immediate impact on Ion. He was invited to the Minister of Finance, who informed him that Antonescu's decree has been abolished and he was to be nominated as Governor of the National Bank of Romania. Ion was hesitant, being aware that in such a volatile situation this was an ephemeral position with limited possibilities to influence the events, but the heads of the two historical parties, the Liberal Party and the National Peasants' Party, encouraged him to accept the nomination.

Ion engaged energetically in stabilizing the currency. The National Bank started withdrawing from circulation the "war" banknotes printed in the Soviet Union for use by the Red Army. Romanian units joined the Red Army and took part in the liberation of northern Transylvania; immediately afterwards, the National Bank began withdrawing Hungarian currency from circulation in the liberated areas, replacing it with the Romanian leu.

But a Moscow-controlled government was installed on March 6, 1945, with Dr. Petru Groza as prime minister. On March 10, Stalin published his decision to put northern Transylvania under Romanian administration. The peace negotiations at the end of the war established that Romania was losing Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union and the Quadrilateral to Bulgaria, but the western border was practically restored: Romania kept Transylvania, Partium and the Banat of Timișoara.

On the other hand, the establishment of the communist regime brought enormous suffering throughout the country. The Lapedatu brothers have not been spared.

Petru Groza knew Ion very well: they had studied together in Budapest and had both been ministers in the Averescu government. But Groza, only a few days after the installation of his government, asked Ion to resign as Governor of the National Bank. However, Constantin Tătăranu, the succeeding governor who appreciated his competence, appointed him immediately as vice-governor. One of Ion's last acts in this position was to open the alpine refuge built by the National Bank's at Diham, where he delivered the inauguration speech.

On 1 January 1948, the National Bank of Romania ceased existing as an autonomous institution, becoming a department of the Ministry of Finance; all its management has been purged, including Ion. The same year, Alexandru and Ion were purged from the Romanian Academy, along with most members. On the pretext that they had income from property, their pensions as university professors were cut. Ion's pension as governor of the National Bank was also cut. Their properties were nationalized. Towards the end of their lives, they were left with no means of subsistence and ended up in the care of their families. The rooms in Ion's apartment have been assigned to other people; he had to move in a room in his daughter's apartment.

Alexandru and Ion anticipated that all things that happened in their time will be erased from the history books and decided to write memoirs. On November 28, 1948, Ion wrote a letter to Pica, his daughter: *My dear Pica, Behold, now, at the end of my life, I can see that my work of almost 50 years in the public life of Transylvania and the whole of Romania has come to nothing. For what has become of the institutions that I have served during these long years? What has become of "Albina" for the development and consolidation of which I laboured for almost 30 years. "Albina" has been disbanded. What has become of "Prima Ardeleană" which I, so to speak, single-handedly brought to life and which I managed as director and administrator for 40 years, achieving a development that I did not think possible even in my most optimistic days.*

It, too, has gone. What happened to "Solidarity"? I was almost single-handedly responsible for the initiative to start it and for its organization. I was its secretary general for 30 years. I made its statutes, regulations, the organization of expert auditors and all the necessary work during that time. It fell into disuse... What has become of the "Journalists Foundation"?... Nothing is known of it any more... I had saved for you from the treasures of my life as much as would have sufficed for a modest and sober existence. But even this patrimony is almost completely lost. I can leave you nothing for the hard days ahead. I am very sorry that fate has been so cruel to you and to me. I leave you the following notes as a memento, which, when you read them, will always allow you to find the memory of a life shattered. Keep them as long as you can for yourself and your descendants."

They are brought to desperation, but even that is not enough for the communists in power. The entire elite is step by step physically eliminated under various reasons or pretexts. The homes of the Lapedatu brothers have been searched, but nothing incriminating was found. On May 5/6, 1950, the notorious "night of the dignitaries" took place. Alexandru was arrested. The next day, his maid came to Ion to tell him through tears that "Mr. Minister" told her, before going out the door with the men who took him away: "Lino, tomorrow morning take this book to Mr. Ion, it belongs to them". That is how he informed his family that he had been arrested. On August 30, Alexandru died in Sighet Prison, a notorious place of suffering and torture, during a deworming with the doors and windows closed: he was suffering from asthma and his heart was weakened by a heart attack. He could not survive.

Ion was not arrested, being immobilized in bed with a serious injury sustained in a bus accident after a descent from Paltiniş. He died in his sickbed a few months later, on March 24, 1951.

The generation of the Great Union was practically wiped out and its work seemed annihilated.

7. Recover

Romania remained under communist rule for over forty years. Communist propaganda dominated the writing of history. Parents did not tell their children anything about their grandparents being persecuted by the communists, fearing that unintentional childish indiscretions could jeopardize their freedom and perhaps even their lives.

But it is almost impossible to understand Romania without referring to the actions of the Great Union generation that defined and structured it. Over time, some historians have begun to study the period and, taking advantage of some rare moments of thaw, have even published selected fragments of writings from the period, including some by the Lapedatu brothers

- First, a selection from the works of the patriotic poet and writer Ioan Al. Lapedatu, the father of the twins, who died much too young, has been edited in 1976 by Dumitru Vatamaniuc and published in the collection "Restitutions" coordinated by Mircea Zăciu at Dacia Publishing House in Cluj
- Then, in the eighties, the historian Ioan Opreș's published studies on Alexandru, more visible in public life thanks to his involvement in culture, and edited, prefaced and annotated Alexandru's memoirs
- Finally, after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Ioan Opreș edited, prefaced and annotated Ion's memoirs and memoirs, as well as his last notes found in the Securitate archives.

Gradually, the interest in the Lapedatu brothers grew, also thanks to the initiatives of their descendants. Mrs. Mica Macavei, born Lapedatu, daughter of Alexandru, donated one of the family houses in Cluj to the European College Foundation, and founded the "Alexandru Lapedatu Cultural Association".

The brothers Lapedatu also received recognition from public institutions. The teachers' reading room at the Babeș-Bolyai University Library in Cluj-Napoca was named after Alexandru Lapedatu. In Săcele, a street was named Alexandru Lapedatu. On June 17, 2014, the Romanian

Senate, on its 150th anniversary celebration, observed a minute of silence for its three presidents who lost their lives as victims of totalitarianism, including Alexandru I. Lapedatu (Figure 11). The Lapedatu brothers were mentioned in the exhibition "Great Personalities of the Great Union" at the Romanian Cultural Center of New York in the United States, December 1-31, 2015. The University of Cluj-Napoca together with the National Bank of Romania branch in Cluj-Napoca organized two editions of the "Ion I. Lapedatu Symposium on banking history and civilization" in 2013 and 2014, and in 2016, the third edition was organized by the National Bank of Romania together with the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. The National Bank of Romania branch in Cluj-Napoca named its conference hall "Ion I. Lapedatu" and organized in 2018 an exhibition on the Romanian currency also featuring him. Alexandru Lapedatu was featured in the exhibition "Romania during the reign of Carol II" organized by the Romanian Academy in 2019.

The descendants of the two brothers and their families have founded the "Lapedatu Foundation" to continue the family traditions. One of the first projects was to establish its presence on the Internet (www.lapedatu.com) and Facebook (Fundatia Lapedatu).

Thanks to the warm help of Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan through the Civic Academy Foundation, the memoirs of the Lapedatu brothers and writings devoted to their life and work have launched the Virtual Library on the site of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and Resistance, at Sighetul Marmăției (Figure 12). Lapedatu Foundation supports the St. Joseph's House in Odorheiu Secuiesc which shelters children from disadvantaged families; grants scholarships to students at the National Colleges "Andrei Saguna" in Braşov, and for a few years, granted scholarships at the National College "St. Sava" in Bucharest; supports publications and sponsors events commemorating the Lapedatu brothers and their generation.

Interest in the lives and contributions of the Lapedatu brothers continued to grow. The 140th anniversary has attracted unexpected attention. It was marked by a whole series of actions:

- the numismatic issue of the National Bank of Romania commemorating three governors including Ion I. Lapedatu in April 2016 (Figure 13)
- Commemorative Session of the Romanian Academy on September 12, 2016; papers presented by Acad. Aurel-Ioan Pop, Rector of the Babeş - Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and Acad. Mugur Isărescu, Governor of the National Bank of Romania, were also published on the Internet (Figure 14)
- the commemoration of the Lapedatu brothers at the Civic Academy Foundation on September 14, 2016 (Figure 15)
- the exhibition curated by Prof. Univ. Ioan Opreş at the Museum of Urban Civilization of Braşov (Figure 16). At the opening on September 30, 2016, chaired by Dr. Ligia Fulga, director of the museum, has been launched the album "The Lapedatu Twins. History and finances" (Figure 17). The exhibition will also travel to other cultural centers in Transylvania
- the conference "Personalities of Saguna College in the Romanian elite: brothers Alexandru and Ion Lapedatu" held by Prof. Univ. Ioan Opreş on November 18, 2016 (Figure 18)
- commemorative article on Ion I. Lapedatu signed by Acad. Mugur Isărescu published in the December 2016 issue of Magazin Istoric.

This text, which is a more elaborated and updated version of the lecture presented in Paris, La Maison Roumaine, on October 8, 2016, is part of the same series (Figure 19).

Since 2019, Lapedatu Foundation sponsors the international "Lapedatu Fellowship" programme at the New Europe College in Bucharest. In the same year, the monument "Lapedatu Brothers" has been unveiled in Braşov. It is the work of the sculptor Ioan Bolborea and has been erected at the initiative of the Lapedatu Foundation under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, the National Bank of Romania and the Braşov Municipality. (Fig. 20)

The Lapedatu brothers are once again destined to personify essential currents of national life in Romania: now, the recovery of a

historical period of central importance in the country's development. The process by which, in a short period of about twenty years between the two World Wars, a country and a modern State have been assembled from the 'shards' of the collapsed empires will remain the subject of in-depth study for the years to come. The work of the Great Union generation enabled Romania to progress rapidly, reaching its economic, social and political peak in 1938. Progress was brutally halted by the royal dictatorship, the military dictatorship, the world war, and half a century of communism.

Today, Romania is in the process of reinventing itself within the European Union, in a much more favourable context. It has to address old challenges still unresolved, but also to raise to the new challenges of an increasingly globalized world. The history of the Great Union generation offers a reference and a source of inspiration.

8. Annexes

8.1 Alexandru Lapedatu: Biographical note

Romanian historian, geographer, university professor, politician and statesman.

- Born on September 14, 1876, in Cernatul Săcelelor, near Braşov. Twin brother of Ion Lapedatu
- Degree in History and Geography from the University of Bucharest
- Secretary of the Historical Monuments Commission (1904-1919) and of the Romanian Historical Commission (1911-1919); then President of the Historical Monuments Commission
- Member of the delegation that accompanied the second shipment of Romania's treasury to Moscow in July 1917
- Activist for the union of Transylvania with Romania. In 1918, in Odessa, co-founder and vice-president of the National Committee of Romanian Refugees from Austro-Hungary, then president

- Member of the Romanian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) and the Genoa Conference for the economic and financial reconstruction of Europe (1922)
- Professor at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Cluj (1919-1938), making significant contributions to the ancient history of Romanians
- With Ioan Lupaș, co-founder and co-director of the Institute of National History in Cluj (1920-1938)
- Director General of the State Archives (1923)
- Member of the National Liberal Party. Member of the Front of National Revival when King Carol II dissolved of all parties
- Deputy and Senator in several Parliaments. Senator by right since March 1936, President of the Senate (November 16, 1936 - March 20, 1937)
- Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts: October 30, 1923 - March 27, 1926, in the government Ion I.C. Brătianu; June 4 - June 20, 1927, in the government Barbu A. Știrbey; June 22, 1927 - November 3, 1928, in the government Ion I.C. Brătianu; June 9 - October 1, 1934, in the government Gheorghe Tătărescu; October 2, 1934 - August 29, 1936, in the government Gheorghe Tătărescu. Author of the Law elevating the Romanian Orthodox Church to the rank of patriarchate; of the Law on the general regime of cults; on the Law on the organization and functioning of national theatres, etc.
- Minister of State: November 14, 1933 - December 29, 1933, in the government Ion Gh. Duca, co-signatory of the decree outlawing the far-right organization "Iron Guard"; 30 December 1933 - 3 January 1934 in the government Constantin Angelescu; January 5 - June 9, 1934, in the government Gheorghe Tătărescu
- Minister Secretary of State: August 29, 1936 - November 14, 1937, in Gov. Gheorghe Tătărescu
- Corresponding member (May 26, 1910), full member (since November 10, 1918), secretary general (May 30, 1939 - June 7, 1948),

vice-president (May 31, 1934 - May 31, 1935; June 3, 1938 - May 30, 1940) and president (May 31, 1935 - June 3, 1938) of the Romanian Academy. Expelled on June 9, 1948, and reinstated *postmortem* as a full member, on July 3, 1990

- Arrested on May 4/5, 1950, and incarcerated in the Sighet Prison. Died in prison on August 30, 1950.

8.2 Ion Lapedatu: Biographical note

Romanian banker, financier, university professor, politician and statesman.

- Born on September 14, 1876, in Cernatul Săcelelor, near Braşov. Twin brother of Alexandru Lapedatu
- Degree in Economics from the University of Budapest
- Director of the Ardeleana Bank in Orăştie in 1906, initiator and in 1911 general director of the General Insurance Bank
- Member of the Board of Directors of Albina Bank, Prima Ardeleană Bank, Romanian Natural Gas Company, etc.
- Creator and secretary of "Solidaritatea", the association of Romanian banks in Transylvania
- Delegate to the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, voting for the union of Transylvania and other regions with Romania. Member of the Grand National Council and Secretary General of the Resort of Finance in the Governing Council of Transylvania, Banat and the Romanian counties of Hungary
- Initiator and rapporteur of the Law establishing the Agrarian Bank in Cluj to accompany the agrarian reform of 1920
- Adviser in the Senate, administrator in the Archdiocesan Consistory of Sibiu (1912-1921) and, from 1921, member of the Metropolitan Consistory of Transylvania
- Member of the Romanian delegation to the International Conference in Brussels (1920). President of the Commission for the liquidation of public and private financial affairs between Romania and Hungary, later Financial and Economic Mission to Budapest (1920-1921),

member of the Economic and Financial Committee in the Romanian-Hungarian Conference in Bucharest (1923-1924)

- Delegate to the Conferences of the Successor States of Austro-Hungary (1921 - 1924)
- Full Professor of the Department of Public and Private Finance at the Academy of Higher Commercial Studies and Industry in Cluj, today included in the Babeş - Bolyai University as the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (1922 - 1938)
- Member of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania till 1927, then no political affiliation
- MP and senator in several legislatures
- Minister of Finance in the government Averescu (March 30, 1926 - March 19, 1927)
- Author and, on November 10, 1928, signatory of the first Economic Convention between Romania and Germany, which settled disputes and enabled Romania to obtain the loans necessary for monetary stabilization and other economic objectives
- Honorary member of the Romanian Academy (1936). Expelled on June 9, 1948, reinstated *postmortem* on July 3, 1990
- Director of the National Bank of Romania in 1928, administrator in 1929, Deputy Governor and Governor (September 30 brie 1944 - March 14, 1945)
- Died in Bucharest on March 24, 1951.

FIGURES



Fig. 1. Ion Lapedatu (second from left) with his family in Glâmboaca



Fig. 2. Birth house of the Lapedatu brothers in Cernatu, Săcele, near Braşov



Fig. 3. Students, members of the Cultural League: Vasile Pârvan, Ioan Scurtu, Ilarie Chendi, Mihail Sadoveanu, Alexandru Lapedatu and St. O. Iosif



Fig. 4. Administration Council of the General Insurance Bank (Ion I. Lapedatu seated, second from right)



Fig. 5. Ion Lapedatu - Secretary General of the Financial Resort of the Governing Council



Fig. 6. Barbu Stirbey Government on June 22, 1927. Alexandru Lapedatu (third from right) is recalled as Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts

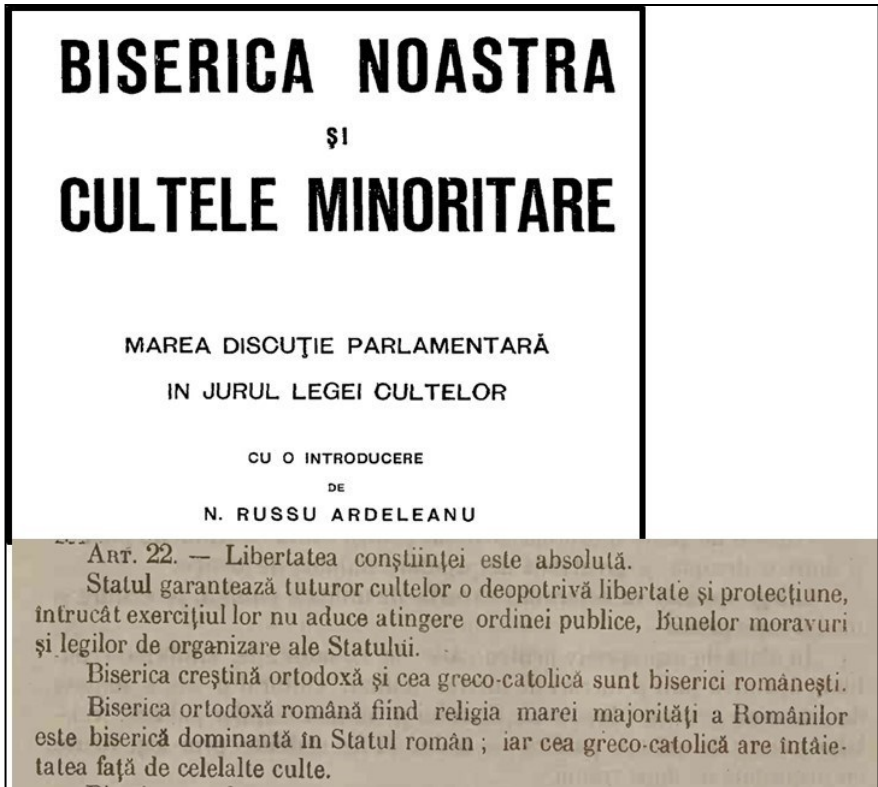


Fig. 7. Article 22 of the 1923 Constitution and the cover of the volume containing the great parliamentary debate on the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations



Fig. 8. Averescu Government on March 30, 1926. Ion Lapedatu (sixth from right) is Minister of Finance



Fig. 9. Administration Council of Romanian Natural Gas Company (Ion I. Lapedatu is first from left)



Fig. 10. Willem Beyen's arrival in Bucharest in 1936 (Ion I. Lapedatu first from left) and his bust in Herăstrău Park



Fig. 11 The Romanian Senate celebrated its 150th anniversary by observing a minute's silence for its presidents who fell victim to totalitarianism, including Alexandru Lapedatu

Fig. 12. Publications by and about the Lapedatu brothers in the Virtual Library of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and Resistance, Civic Academy Foundation



Fig. 13. Numismatic issue of the National Bank of Romania commemorating three governors including Ion Lapedatu (April 2016)



Fig. 14. Commemorative session of the Romanian Academy of September 12, 2016 dedicated to the Lapedatu brothers



Fig. 15. Remembrance of the Lapedatu brothers at the Memorial to Victims of Communism and Resistance on September 14, 2016. Speakers: Ana Blandiana, Romulus Rusan, Tudor Dunca, Andreas Wild, Delia Oprea



Fig. 16. Exhibition "Brașov personalities in the Romanian elite. The brothers Alexandru and Ion Lapedatu on their 140th anniversary", Museum of Urban Civilization of Brașov, 30 September 2016



Fig. 17. The album "The Lapedatu Twins. History and Finances", Oscar Print, Bucharest, 2016 (ISBN 978-973-668-435-7)



Fig. 18. Lecture by Prof. univ. Ioan Oprea, the leader of the historical research related to the Lapedatu brothers, in the auditorium of the National College "Andrei Șaguna" on November 18, 2016



Fig. 19. Lapedatu Foundation Conference,
La Maison Roumaine, Paris, October 8, 2016.



Fig. 20. The Lapedatu Brothers monument in Braşov, by Ioan Bolborea, realized at the initiative of the Lapedatu Fopundation under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, the National Bank of Romania and Braşov Municipality

EXCERPTS FROM THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL

No. 40	UN EXEMPLAR: 50 BANI	Sambătă, 28 Mai 1913 7 Iunie
REGATUL ROMÂNIEI		
MONITORUL OFICIAL		
<p>PREȚUL ABONAMENTULUI: În țară: 85 lei anual; 25 lei pe 6 luni; 15 lei pe trei luni. Pentru adrețările județene și comune urbane, 40 lei anual. Pentru comune rurale, 30 lei anual. Abonamentele încep la 1 Aprilie și la 1 Iulie, 1 Octombrie și 1 Ianuarie în țară și încep dintr-un an financiar în țară. În străinătate: lei 60 anual.</p>		<p>PREȚUL ANUNȚURILOR PARTICULARE: Lei 5 până la maximum 40 linii; în cazuri mai multe linii, 10 bani de fiecare linie. Pentru abonamente la anunțuri se fac condiții speciale. Costul unui exemplar <i>Monitorul Oficial</i> este 50 bani. Costul unui exemplar <i>Dinastiei Române</i> este 20 bani.</p>
DIRECȚIA GENERALĂ A MONITORULUI OFICIAL ȘI IMPRIMERIEI STATULUI: BUCUREȘTI, BULEVARDUL ELISABETA		
25 Mai 1913	MONITORUL OFICIAL	1797

Fig. MO1. The Law promulgated by Carol I in 1913 recognized Alexandru Lapedatu from Transylvania as a Romanian citizen

<p style="text-align: center;">București, 5 Mai</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MINISTERUL JUSTIȚIEI</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FERDINAND I.</p> <p>Prin grația lui Dumnezeu și voinea națională, Rege al României. <i>La top de față și voturi, alinate:</i> Corpurile legislative au votat și adoptat, iar Noi sancționăm cu urmărirea:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LEGE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRINTELE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ORGANIZAREA BISERICII ORTODOXE ROMÂNE</p> <p>Art. 1. — Biserica ortodoxă română, fiind religia marelui majorității a Românilor, este biserica Episcopiei Râmnicului-Noul Severin, Episcoposul Buzănești.</p> <p>Ministerul cultelor și al religiilor: A. Lapedatu. No. 1401. Ministerul justiției: G. G. Mărăceanu.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STATUT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRINTELE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ORGANIZAREA BISERICII ORTODOXE ROMÂNE</p> <p>Organele cărmuirii centrale: a) săgi de arină; asociația parohială de</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">București, 29 Februarie</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MINISTERUL DE JUSTIȚIE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FERDINAND I.</p> <p>Prin grația lui Dumnezeu și voinea națională, Rege al României. <i>La top de față și voturi, alinate:</i> Corpurile legislative au votat și adoptat, iar Noi sancționăm cu urmărirea:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LEGE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRINTELE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ridicarea Scaunului Arhiepiscopal și Mitropolitului al Ungro-Vlahiei, ca Primat al României, la rangul de Scaun Patriarhal</p> <p>Art. 1. — Scaunul Arhiepiscopal și Mitropolitului al Ungro-Vlahiei se ridică, ca Primat al României, la rangul de Scaun Patriarhal. Art. 2. — Arhiepiscopul Arhiepiscopiei și Mitropolitul Ungro-Vlahiei, înalt Prea Sfințitul D. D. Dr. Miron Cristea, devine, în calitate sa de Primat al României, Patriarh al Bisericii ortodoxe române. după legea de organizare a acestei Biserici, va alege pe Arhiepiscopul și Mitropolitul Ungro-Vlahiei și din membrii de religie ortodoxă și Corpurile legislative. Un regulament special, întocmit de Ministerul Cultelor, de acord cu Sf. Sinod și aprobat de consiliul de ministere, va determina modul după care se va săvârși actuala alegere. Condormarea așteptării o face la propunerea Sf. Sinod și a guvernului. Mandatului ca Regula, care va da apoi investitura, potrivit datelor înalte pentru cașia Bisericii ortodoxe române. Art. 3. — Nu vor putea fi aleși în demnitatea de Patriarh al Bisericii ortodoxe române decât Mitropolitul și Episcopul în funcție sau așteptării Bisericii.</p> <p>Dați în București, la 29 Februarie 1925. (L. S. S.)</p> <p>Ministerul cultelor și al religiilor: A. Lapedatu. No. 699. Ministerul justiției: G. G. Mărăceanu.</p>
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Fig. MO2. Laws on the organization of the Orthodox Church and the establishment of the Patriarchate signed by Alexandru Lapedatu

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