

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
68 (3), pp. 43-59, 2016

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș Who Supported the Great Union

Daniel Alic

Daniel Alic
University of Reșița
E-mail: alic_daniel@yahoo.com

Abstract

Achieving the Romanian state unity from December 1, 1918 was the desire of generations in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space. As a divine-human institution, the Church supported the principle of unity and ethnic representation, especially after Christianity was spread to various nations. In this way, following the traditional Orthodox vein and the desire of the believers united by the same language and faith, the Orthodox Church was a passionate promoter of Romanians' national unity ideas. In the diocese of Caransebeș the Church leaders (bishops, archpriests and priests) campaigned actively and without exception for a united Romanian nation.

Keywords

Diocese of Caransebeș, Great Union, Church Personalities, bishop Miron Cristea, national activity, Banat.

The national unity of all Romanians made on December 1, 1918, set in motion the entire Romanian society in its various aspects for its implementation: cultural, political, economic, social and religious. Being a territory with high cultural values the population from Banat positively expressed by supporting the achievement of the national unity old ideal.

The political situation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end the First World War hastened its collapse. The Dual Monarchy appeared as a conglomerate which could have maintained with great difficulty in an era of citizen equality and freedom. This was particularly because the political-psychological regime was based on the idea of domination and assimilation of subjected nationalities, even in wartime when the national sentiment was stronger than ever. Despite all the attempts of the governments from Vienna and Budapest to rehabilitate the situation, the failures on the West and East fronts started the disintegration process of the Empire. The principle of national self-determination, used by the political leaders of Western Europe and the entire democratic press put a mark on the Romanian people too.¹

In this political context, the Executive Board of the Romanian National Party was reunited under President Teodor Mihali in Oradea at the house of Deputy Aurel Lazăr.² Here it was drafted and voted the final version of a statement that demanded the Romanians in Transylvania and Banat right of self-determination and no longer accepted to be represented as a nation by the Hungarian government. Dr. George Popovici, the archpriest of Lugoj from the Diocese of Caransebes attended this meeting.³ A subcommittee of action based in Arad was formed, consisting of: Vasile Goldiș, Iuliu Maniu, Ștefan Cicio Pop, Ioan Suciu, Alexandru Vaida Voevod, Aurel Vlad and representatives of Romanian Social Democrats.⁴ The statement was read in the Hungarian Parliament on October 18, 1918 by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod and caused a real shock to the audience.⁵ The statement was completed by Vasile Goldis' speech, who said on October 25, 1918 that only a national assembly can decide on the Romanian destiny.

On the same day, October 25, 1918, the Hungarian military council, headed by Karolyi Mihaly took over the government in Budapest and at-

¹ Sorin Marius Petrescu, *Presa străină și Unirea din 1918*, in "Studia Caransebesiensia", Editura Nereamia Napocae, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, pp. 47-49.

² Teodor Mihali invited bishop Miron Cristea at this meeting. A. Plămădeală, *Pagini dintr-o arhivă inedită. Documente literare*, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. 153.

³ Dr. Victor Lăzărescu, *Protopopul dr. George Popovici (1862-1927)*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 693.

⁴ Dr. Aurel Cosma jr., *Amintiri și mărturii de la Unirea din Alba Iulia*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 643.

⁵ Ioan Clopoșel, *Revoluția din 1918 și unirea Ardealului cu România*, Editura revistei "Societatea de Măine", Cluj, 1926, pp. 39-47.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

tempted a deal with the inhabiting minorities for the integrity of the feudal Hungary borders. This agreement was not accepted, and on October 31, 1918, Banat was declared republic.⁶ We should remember that in order to save the monarchy, the Habsburg Emperor Charles IV made a plan for federalization of various minorities in the empire, but this offer was hidden to Romanians by the Prime Minister Tisza.⁷

Following these events, on November 2, 1918 the Romanian Central National Council based in Arad was established as the higher body of Romanians political interests from Transylvania and Banat. The Romanian Central National Council issued an appeal to the Romanian nation, letting them know that the long and bloody war begun by foreign interests ended. Romanians were urged to calm and defence of their private or public estates especially that “time has come for every nation and every individual to be equally entitled and master of his fate.”⁸ The same appeal showed the following were elected in the Romanian National Council: dr. Teodor Mihali, Vasile Goldiș, dr. Alexandru Vaida Voevod, dr. Ștefan C. Pop, dr. Aurel Vlad, dr. Aurel Lazăr. Ioan Flueraș, Iosif Jumanca, Enea Grapini, Trifon Albani and Iosif Rănoi were elected members of the Social Democratic Party. The Council was the forum of Romanians from Hungary and Transylvania and it was recognized by European countries and even by the revolutionary Hungarian government. Following this call, the county prefect of Arad, dr. Varjaszy Lajos said in a Hungarian newspaper from Arad that “we should not take it personally if the Romanians continue to look without confidence at the future the new Hungary promises [...] It is only natural that a dignified people should not tolerate slavery anymore.”⁹

Dr. Ștefan Cicio Pop, President of the Romanian National Central in Arad, sent delegations in territory, which had the task to constitute local national councils in every village and county. The village elders were to be elected in these councils according to the Romanian tradition and the councils should be led by priests, teachers and Romanian intellectuals.¹⁰

⁶ Preot Gheorghe Naghi, *Preoții din Banat în evenimentele anilor 1914-1918*, in “Mitropolia Banatului”, XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 610.

⁷ Dr. Aurel Cosma jr., *Amintiri și mărturii...*, p. 643.

⁸ Arhiva Episcopiei Daciei Felix (A.E.D.F.), *Fond Protopopiatul Vârșeș*, dosar 1918, nr 305/1918.

⁹ Virginia Ardelean, *Alba Iulia – 1918. Momente de neuitat*, in “Studia Caransebesiensia”, Editura Nereamia Napocae, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 73.

¹⁰ Laurențiu Oanea, *Dr. Ștefan Cicio Pop. Un titan în luptele național-politice ale ro-*

The residents of villages and towns were urged to accept the delegates of the council, in order to establish *Local National Councils* and *Romanian National Guards*.¹¹ The role of the National Councils was to take over the administration of villages and counties instead of former Hungarian governments.¹² The National guards replaced the Hungarian gendarmerie and represented the public power of Romanian sovereignty under the authority of the National Councils. Their primary role was guarding and protecting people and public and private property.¹³

Immediately after these statements, newspaper *Drapelul* from Lugoj asked the Romanians from Banat to place under the protection and leadership of the Committee in Arad:

“The Romanian Central National Council is the only competent body for all the Romanians. The Council [...] will make all preparations for organizing the national will. The entire nation should guide following the opinion of this Council.”¹⁴

The National Central Council from Arad constituted a founded manifest of the Romanian nation in Hungary and Transylvania addressed to the world’s peoples. The manifest taken by *Foaia Diecezană*, press organ of the Diocese of Caransebes, brought to the attention of the world

“the Romanian nation’s will to form a free and independent state in order to be able to validate unlimitedly its forces for the benefit of culture and human liberty [...] On its ancestral territory the Romanian nation is ready to provide full national freedom for every nation. It will be organized in a free and independent state on grounds of democracy that will ensure all individuals within its territory equality of living conditions [...] The Romanian nation no longer wants to live in a state connection with the Hungarian nation, but it is determined to establish a free and independent state on the territory inhabited by it. Announcing the peoples of the world its will and determination the Romanian nation in Hungary and Transylvania asserts on its favour the support of the civilized world and the genius of human lib-

mânilor din Transilvania și părțile românești din Ungaria (1865-1934), Editura Gutenberg Univers, Arad, 2008, p. 133.

¹¹ L. Oanea, *Dr. Ștefan Cicio Pop...*, p. 133.

¹² L. Oanea, *Dr. Ștefan Cicio Pop...*, p. 133.

¹³ L. Oanea, *Dr. Ștefan Cicio Pop...*, p. 138.

¹⁴ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 112 din 3 noiembrie, p. 3.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

erty declaring like on a feast day, that from this hour anyway the powers of the world would decide, it is committed to perish better than to further suffer slavery and dependency.”¹⁵

The national energy of Caransebeș bishop was promptly and straightforwardly. The hierarch stood at the head of the clerics who supported the national unity of all Romanians without exception. In the circular no. 6150 from October 26 / November 8, 1918, Bishop Miron Cristea announced the faithful of Caransebeș Diocese about the establishment of the Committee of the Romanian National Party elected at the Great National Conference, called Romanian Nation Council as superior organ for the Romanian people.¹⁶ At his own initiative he decided and ordered the priests of the diocese that the Emperor of Austria, although not abdicated, should not be mentioned in liturgical service:

“The Holy tradition of our Eastern Church always paid special attention in its services to the secular authority. The more strongly the Church of the Romanian people must do this being founded on national grounds. So - and until the Holy Synod of Bishops decides the litanies in its full competence under the new state of law - I decide the following:

At the Great Litany from the beginning of the services it should be added to its rightful place – *For our high national leadership and for The Great National Assembly of the Romanian nation, let us pray to the Lord.*

At the Litany of Fervent Supplication – *Again we pray for our high national leadership and for The Great National Assembly of the Romanian nation, for the authority, victory, living, peace, health, salvation and remission of sins and for the Lord especially give them benefit and help them in all their work for the common welfare.*

At the Great Entrance, after mentioning the bishop – *May the Lord remember our high national leadership and The Great National Assembly of the Romanian nation in His kingdom.*”¹⁷

In ecclesiastic terms, this pastoral was the supreme act of rejecting the foreign domination, especially because the Orthodox Church doctrine states that the worldly rulers should be remembered at the services as an

¹⁵ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 44 din 11/24 noiembrie, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 42 din 28 octombrie, p. 1.

¹⁷ Arhiva Episcopiei Caransebeșului (A.E.C.), *Fond Bisericesc (III)*, dosar 212/1918, fără număr.

act of involving the Church in the historical time. Bishop Miron Cristea's pastoral letter was received with joy by Romanians outside the diocese too. The newspaper *Românul* from Arad published the full text of pastoral, with a brief explanation: "His Grace dr. E. Miron Cristea of Caransebes sent his clergy the following circular in the spirit of our great time. Read piously, Romanian brothers, this historic document of our Orthodox Church, which has preserved the virginal soul untouched by plagues of centuries. Your Grace, we bow!"¹⁸

In the school issues a circular order of Bishop Miron Cristea, issued on October 24, 1918, announced the rectories and teachers of Caransebes Diocese that primary schools should no longer teach in Hungarian and courses thus made available should be used for teaching religion, Romanian language and composition.¹⁹

Immediately after the manifest of the National Council of Arad, a group of Romanian intellectuals in Caransebes, including the people of the Church, met in the house of lawyer Dr. George Lăbonțiu and decided to set up a local national council. Also then it was made an appeal to the city intelligentsia, who was called to strengthen the national positions and it was decided to convene a Romanian population meeting.²⁰ In Caransebes, the founding meeting of the Romanian National Council was held on the eve of St. Demetrius, on October 25 / November 7, 1918.

The weekly magazine *Lumina* recorded the event in detail:

"The Romanians in Caransebes held a national assembly on Thursday, October 25. The great hall of the city magistrate and all the corridors were full long before the time announced for the beginning of the meeting. The gallery was decked with all Romanian ladies in the city and our proud three colour flag was fluttering [...] The arrival of our leaders is highlighted by cheers. Precisely at 6:00 pm, the presidential table was occupied by Archpriest Andrei Ghidiu, headmaster Dr. Petru Barbu, consistorial secretary Dr. Cornel Corneanu and teacher headmaster Iuliu Vuia. The Assembly proclaims Father Andrei Ghidiu as president and Iuliu Vuia as secretary."²¹

¹⁸ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 43 din 4/17 noiembrie, p.2-3.

¹⁹ *Românul*, Arad, VII, 1918, nr. 3 din 12 noiembrie, p. 2-3.

²⁰ William Marin, Ion Munteanu, Gheorghe Radulovici, *Unirea Banatului cu România*, Muzeul Banatului, Timișoara, 1968, p. 143.

²¹ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr. 43 din 14 noiembrie, p. 2.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

The Archpriest of Caransebes Andrei Ghidiu opened the meeting with a lively speech. Then another personality of Banat, the consistorial secretary, dr. Cornel Corneanu spoke and recalled the troubled past of the Romanian people. He proposed the Assembly to swear unwavering allegiance to the National Council of Romanians in Hungary and Transylvania, the only body entitled to conduct public affairs of the Romanians and to elect a National Council of Romanians in Caransebes, to be entrusted with organizing the Romanian National Guard. The Assembly received the proposals, swore allegiance to the Romanian National Council and then elected the Local National Council.²² Its members were: archpriest Andrei Ghidiu, rev. dr. Petru Barbu, dr. Petru Comeș, dr. Cornel Corneanu, Alexandru Diaconovici, Aurel Deboșan, Ion Dobromirescu, dr. Petru Florian, Ștefan Jianu, George Jumanca, Petru Lepșa, George Neamțu, Nicolae Novăcescu, Ilie Orzescu, Martin Rada, Iuliu Vuia and Dimitrie Sgaverdea.²³

In his speech teacher Iuliu Vuia paid tribute to US President - William Wilson. Then he spoke excitedly: “The slavery chain was broken. Our freedom sun has risen. After Good Friday the Resurrection of peoples had to follow. Let us be worthy people on this glorious and holy day!”²⁴. His speech ended with advices for those present about the civic behaviour from historic times and he urged people from Caransebes to maintain order, decency and honour towards every citizen, irrespective of law and language. At the end of the speech, the crowd enthusiastically sang „*Deșteaptă-te române*“.²⁵

Then dr. Cornel Corneanu followed, who gave a speech about the historical importance of the moment, in which he showed that: “the days we live now are great and historic days the Romanian nation did not have until now“.²⁶ Also Cornel Corneanu proposed the following draft resolution, which was approved by the Assembly:

“Gathered on October 25, 1918 in the National Assembly and challenged by the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Romanian National Party taken on October 12, 1918, the Ro-

²² I. D. Suciu, R. Constantinescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria Mitropoliei Banatului*, volumul II, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1980, p. 1000-1001.

²³ Ioan Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român. Contribuții documentare bănățene (1914-1919)*, București, 1983, p. 54.

²⁴ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr.42 din 7 noiembrie, p. 3.

²⁵ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr.42 din 7 noiembrie, p. 3.

²⁶ I. D. Suciu, R. Constantinescu, *Documente privitoare...*, vol. II, pp. 1000-1001.

manian citizens of Caransebes city constitute the Romanian National Council in Caransebeș.

This Council is subject in all things to the Central National Council of Romanians in Hungary and Transylvania, which is the only body called to decide the fate of the Romanian nation.

Starting today as the representative body of the Romanian citizens from Caransebes, the Romanian National Council from Caransebes assumes the defence of their rights, but they have to fully obey all the provisions taken by this Council.

Acknowledging it was established a Romanian military council in the city, the Romanian National Council from Caransebes decides the establishment of a Romanian National Guard to ensure the public safety. Until organizing the National Guard, we give full support to the municipal police to sustain the public order in city.

Bringing its formation to the attention of our land leaders, the National Council of Caransebes asks them to link to the Romanian National Council and to follow its example both in terms of their national attitude and about organizing the civilian National Guard for the protection of public order and safety of our villages.”²⁷

Then Lieutenant dr. Alexandru Morariu read the minutes by which the local Military Council constituted under the chairmanship of Captain Petru Maniu, was declared the executive body of the Romanian National Council from Caransebes, under the supreme command of the Central Romanian National Council in Arad.²⁸ At this meeting civil national guards were organized with the support of the local Military Council in order to defend public order and safety in the city and surroundings.²⁹

The crowd left the City Hall of Caransebes with three colour flags, singing „*Deșteaptă-te române*” and „*Pe-al nostru steag e scris unire*”, up in front of the Diocese of Caransebes. Bishop Miron Cristea appeared at the window of his residence and diocesan secretary, Cornel Corneanu confessed the faithful’s love. The hierarch delivered a speech that remained in people conscience as the most important moment of the events preceding the union: “Beloved Romanian nation! The Hungarian tyranny chains fell

²⁷ Gheorghe Neamțu, *Activitatea C.N.R. din Caransebeș*, Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, Caransebeș, 1927, pp. 16-17.

²⁸ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român...*, p. 57.

²⁹ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român...*, p. 57.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

off our bodies. They were broken by the blood of our brothers from the free kingdom, by our Latin sisters France and Italy, by the powerful England and by the sage Wilson [...] The Romanian nation will build its own fate and future with brothers' help from everywhere ..."³⁰ All those present were urged by the bishop to swear allegiance to the Romanian National Council, whose command had to become sacred for all Romanian citizens of Transylvania, and at the ovation of Professor Pavel Grecu, the crowd shouted "Long live great Romania!"³¹. The press considered the bishop's speech "as there was never heard from the mouth of a Romanian bishop."³²

Not only had the local newspapers written about the establishment of the Romanian National Council from Caransebeș, but also did *Drapelul* from Lugoj and *Românul* from Arad, publication which shortly before had resumed appearance. The joy of Iuliu Vuia, great publicist at all the newspapers of that time and place was very obvious when the newspaper *Românul* reappeared. He addressed the editor of the newspaper:

"To more honoured editors of «Românul» from Arad, warmly welcoming its revival with all my heart, I enclose a report about the establishment of our National Council and National Guard here. God help our cause!"³³.

In November 1918, after the establishment of the Romanian National Council from Caransebeș, Banat villages were in turmoil. Every village established national councils and organized national guards to defend citizens and their properties.

Archpriest Andrei Ghidiu as president of the Romanian National Council from Caransebeș, went to the villages of the deanery to coordinate the establishment of local councils. On October 28 / November 11 he attended the national gatherings of people in Feneș, Teregova and Domașnea. In Feneș, priest Traian Peica was elected chairman of the consisting council, vice-president was Iosif Ostoia, and secretary was Nicolae Sârbu.³⁴ In Teregova, priest Ioan Bogoevici was elected president and Petre Bărsescu was secretary. In Domașnea, the National Assembly elected notary Iosif Pepa as

³⁰ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român...*, p. 57.

³¹ C. Brătescu, *Biserica strămoșească din Banatul de sud și contribuția sa la făurirea României Mari (1867-1919)*, Editura Dalami, Caransebeș, 2007, pp. 219-220.

³² *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 118 din 3 noiembrie, p. 2.

³³ I. Munteanu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român ...*, p.106. The report appeared later in the newspaper "Românul".

³⁴ I. Munteanu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român ...*, p. 78

president.³⁵ On October 29 / November 11, Andrei Ghidiu participated at the establishment of national councils from Armeniș and Rusca Teregova.³⁶

Teacher Iuliu Vuia was delegate of the Romanian National Council in Caransebes to the establishment of national councils in several villages. For example, on October 27 / November 9 he was present in villages Buchin, Prisian and Cârpa (Valea Timișului), where he chaired the foundation of the local council together with dr. Alexandru Morariu.³⁷ On October 28 / November 10, 1918, with the same attendant, he participated as a delegate of the Romanian National Council in Caransebes at the establishment of National Council in Obreja, where president was elected priest Patrachie Rădoiu, and secretary Pavel Cipău.³⁸ On the same day November 10 in the neighbouring village Obrejei – Iazul – a similar event was held, and the local Council was established with president rev. Ioan Popovici, the same delegates of the Romanian National Council of Caransebes being present.³⁹

On October 28 / November 11, Iuliu Vuia participated together with dr. Alexandru Moraru in Borlova, at the establishment of the National Council, president being priest Elisei Dragalina. Then he was at Zervești where priest Iancu Jucos was elected president of the Romanian Council. He was also at Turnu Ruieni, where priest Mihuiț Seracin was chosen at the head of the Romanians living there. At the establishment of the local councils from Vârciorova and Bolvașnița he was present on November 12, 1918, the meetings being organized with the support of priests.⁴⁰

At Măru the local National Assembly and the National Guard were organized by priest Gheorghe Popovici and by officer Nicolae Table.⁴¹ At Jupa, the Romanian National Council was established on November 8, 1918 under the chairmanship of the confessional teacher Cornel Miclea. As head of the National Guard was called Cornel Radu, graduate of the officers' school.⁴²

³⁵ I. Munteanu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român ...*, pp. 79-82.

³⁶ I. Munteanu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român ...*, pp. 88-89, 91.

³⁷ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr. 45 din 28 noiembrie, p. 2.

³⁸ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr. 45 din 28 noiembrie, p. 2.

³⁹ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr. 45 din 28 noiembrie, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Lumina*, Caransebeș, I, 1918, nr. 43 din 14 noiembrie, p.3.

⁴¹ Ion Pârvu, Valentin Sandu, *Dr. Nicolae Table, personalitate marcantă în cultura și societatea bănățeană*, în volumul „Biserica și comunitate în Banat și Transilvania”, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara, 2007, p.10.

⁴² I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român...*, p. 57.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

In general, priests were the ones who led the popular assemblies in the villages of the diocese, where the Romanian councils were elected to replace the Hungarian government and to ensure public order and safety.⁴³ On 23 October / November 5 in the village Comorâște the meeting was held under the leadership of priest Iosif Nicolaeviciu who, in a beautiful speech, showed the importance of the moment for Romanians to become a nation. At that time there were established guards to ensure the protection of the residents.⁴⁴

At Lugoj, the political centre of Caraș-Severin County, a national meeting was held on October 21 / November 3, 1918 and was chaired by the local Greek-Catholic bishop, Valeriu Traian Frențiu.⁴⁵ Those who spoke the crowd were archpriest dr. George Popovici, Valeriu Braniște, George Dobrin, George Gârda and Victor Bârlea, each of them with speeches of union. At that time it was established the Romanian National Council of Lugoj and a Romanian battalion to maintain public order.⁴⁶ Valeriu Braniște was the one who opened the meeting and showed the importance of the moment for the future of the Romanian nation.⁴⁷

Bocșa Montană chose the Romanian National Council on October 27 / November 10, following a popular assembly. Dr. A. Oprea was elected president and archpriest Mihail Gașpar commissary of the people. Two delegates of this organization went to the neighbouring villages to organize the national councils and guards.⁴⁸

In Mehadia area, the main boosters of Romanian communities were priest Iosif Coriolan Buracu, recently returned from the war and General Nicolae Cena. On November 5/18, the Romanian National Council of Mehadia District was constituted, which recognized the Romanian National Central Council in Arad as the supreme body of all Romanians from Transylvania.⁴⁹ Initially, general Cena was elected as president then for health

⁴³ Ioan Munteanu, Vasile Mircea Zaberca, Mariana Sârbu, *Banatul și Marea Unire. 1918*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1992, pp. 53-55.

⁴⁴ Preot Ieremia B. Ghita, dr. George Nicolaeviciu, *Document inedit privind elementele premergătoare unirii din 1918*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 713.

⁴⁵ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 113 din 23 octombrie, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 113 din 23 octombrie, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 113 din 23 octombrie, p. 1.

⁴⁸ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea Statului Unitar Național Român...*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Preot prof. Niculae Șerbănescu, *Preotul Coriolan Buracu (1888-1964)*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 699.

reasons he withdrew, leaving Iosif Coriolan Buracu as president.⁵⁰ In the same area, general Nicolae Cena, great fighter for the rights of Romanians held the command of the military guards⁵¹ and organized the elections of delegates at the meeting in Alba Iulia.⁵²

The Romanian leaders in Vârșeț and its surroundings issued an appeal to all Romanians in the area, urging to be constituted Romanian national councils of 10-30 members in every locality following the radical changes happening in the country. These councils were to ensure peace, public order and safety of persons and belongings. On cases of emergency they had to take measures to ensure communal property against vandalism.⁵³ On November 4, 1918, the Romanian officers and soldiers in Vârșeț and southern Banat formed the Romanian National Military Council, which was made available to the Romanian Council from Arad, to ensure order among the Romanian population. Many Romanian leaders in Vârșeț joined this board.⁵⁴

On November 5th, 1918 the Romanian National Committee of Oravița district was formed under the chairmanship of dr. Petru Cornean, and also the Romanian National Military Council under the command of Mihai Gropșianu.⁵⁵ Priest Ștefan Cornel from Oravița, who suffered persecution and imprisonment during the war, was a leading exponent of the Romanian National Committee of Oravița district. Accompanied by brigades of the national guards and wearing a three-coloured scarf on the chest, the priest went to the villages around Oravita and helped the establishment of national councils. For his work on November 13th, 1918, he was elected deputy to the assembly in Alba Iulia. The other deputies of Oravița district were Liviu Tigăreanu, Mihail Gropșianu, Gheorghe Jianu and Gheorghe Pipelea.⁵⁶

In all areas of the diocese, the Romanian national councils were established with the support of the priests there and they swore allegiance to the Central Council of Arad.

⁵⁰ Liviu Suci, *Românii bănățeni la Marea Adunare de la Alba Iulia*, in "Studia Caransebesiensia", Editura Nereamia Napocae, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 52.

⁵¹ Liviu Groza, Mihail Rădulescu, *Grănicerii bănățeni în slujba neamului românesc*, Editura Dacia Europa Nova, Lugoj, 2002, pp. 63-64.

⁵² Prot. dr. Marcu Bănescu, *Granița bănățeană și unirea din 1918*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 601.

⁵³ A.E.D.F., *Fond protopopiatul Vârșeț*, dosar 1918, nr. 305/4 noiembrie 1918.

⁵⁴ A.E.D.F., *Fond protopopiatul Vârșeț*, dosar 1918, nr. 305/4 noiembrie 1918.

⁵⁵ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului național unitar român...*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ C. Răileanu, *Reprezentanții Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Banat la Alba Iulia*, in "Mitropolia Banatului", XXVIII, nr. 10-12, octombrie-decembrie, 1978, p. 617.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

The clergy of Caransebeș Diocese had an important role in organizing meetings that delegated the representatives of the Romanian population to Alba Iulia. Bishop Miron Cristea sent a circular to the archpriests and deanery administrators, which said that “because of the national Church everlasting merits [...] won over the centuries in the service of our ethnic being and also in recognition of the sacred ties between the faithful people and the Church leaders”, they are invited to the expected Romanian National Assembly, where they will participate with voting rights. In the same pastoral he urged the archpriests to call priests and faithful to attend the future meeting in great number.⁵⁷

The Romanian National Council of Caransebeș was convened on 10/23 November 1918 to elect delegates to the Grand National Assembly and was chaired by Archpriest Andrei Ghidiu. It was he who from 1884 was an active fighter of the Romanian national cause and he chose the following delegates: Ion Gore from Mehadia, Nicolae Ivănescu from Marga, dr. Alexandru Murariu from Caransebeș, Ilie Româș from Domașnea and dr. Ion Sârbu from Rudăria. On the same day, the elected ones received mandates signed by Archpriest Ghidiu.⁵⁸ By engaging the priests, who usually were presidents of Romanian national councils, delegates for each election centre were elected in other localities of Caransebeș Diocese too. They delegated, in turn, the five representatives of the Romanians in the Great National Assembly.⁵⁹

In the plenary session of the Diocesan Consistory from November 14, 1918, chaired by Bishop Miron Cristea it was decided the delegate from Caransebeș Diocese to the Grand National Assembly: dr. Cornel Corneanu, consistorial secretary.⁶⁰

Miron Cristea invited teachers from Theological and Pedagogical Institute to go to Alba Iulia. They convened the academic staff from both institutions to delegate representatives to the Assembly in Alba Iulia.⁶¹ The Theological Institute was represented by dr. Moise Ienciu and the Pedagogical Institute by Alexandru Buțiu.⁶²

⁵⁷ C. Brătescu, *Protopresbiterul Andrei Ghidiu (1849-1937). Între Biserică și Neam*, Editura Dalami, Caransebeș, 2006, p. 76.

⁵⁸ C. Brătescu, *Protopresbiterul Andrei Ghidiu...*, p. 75.

⁵⁹ I. Munteanu (coordonator), *Făurirea statului unitar roman...*, p. 119-160.

⁶⁰ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 45 din 18 noiembrie, p. 4.

⁶¹ Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Caraș-Severin (S.J.A.N.), *Fond Institutul Teologic Diecezan Caransebeș*, dosar 1/1918-1919, fila 1.

⁶² Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Caraș-Severin (S.J.A.N.), *Fond Institutul Teologic Diecezan Caransebeș*, dosar 1/1918-1919, fila 1.

The delegates from Banat met on 30 November in Alba Iulia at *Dacia* restaurant hall under the chairmanship of dr. Aurel Cosma. Speakers included the archpriests of Lugoj, dr. George Popovici and of Mehadia, dr. Ion Sârbu, that had ardent speeches about the past of Banat and about the Romanians' will to join the Country. All participants advocated the unconditional union with Romania.⁶³

Miron Cristea held a speech in plenum that reiterated the whole history of turmoil, struggle and aspirations of the Romanian people in a thorough synthesis. The Bishop of Caransebes speech was received with warm applause from the audience. With his characteristic wit, he addressed "the glorious Romanian nation" and concluded with the words: "I firmly hope that your unanimous voice and the voice of the whole nation through you will focus on one desire, which may be expressed in three words: To Tisa! Amen!"⁶⁴

The Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia on November 18 / December 1, 1918 decided union with Romania through the voices of over 100,000 Romanians present from Transylvania and Banat, considering that peoples have the inalienable right to decide their own fate.⁶⁵ In particular the union act emphasized "the inalienable right of the Romanian nation to the whole Banat, between Mures and Tisa rivers and the Danube."⁶⁶

Thus by the continuous national struggle and the massive presence of clergy, the Church's contribution to the Great Union was overwhelming.⁶⁷ The Church was represented by five bishops (Orthodox and Greek Catholics), 4 Episcopal Vicars, 10 delegates of the Orthodox Consistories and Greek Catholic chapters, 129 archpriests, one teacher and two students to represent the Theological and Pedagogical Institutes and many priests elected as delegates in the electoral constituencies. To these the priests were added who led groups of faithful to the big event.⁶⁸

The Great Romanian National Council was established in Alba Iulia where Banat had 44 members. From Caransebes Episcopate, the members

⁶³ I. Munteanu, V. M. Zaberca, M. Sârbu, *Banatul și Marea Unire. 1918*, pp. 71-73.

⁶⁴ I. R. Abrudeanu, *Patriarhul României Dr. Miron Cristea – Înalt regent*, Editura Napoca Star, Cluj Napoca, 2009, pp. 313-318.

⁶⁵ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 46 din 25 noiembrie, p. 1-2.

⁶⁶ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 46 din 25 noiembrie, p. 1.

⁶⁷ I. Clopoșel, *Revoluția din 1918 și unirea Ardealului cu România*, Editura revistei "Societatea de Măine", Cluj, 1926, p. 73.

⁶⁸ I. Munteanu, V. M. Zaberca, M. Sârbu, *Banatul și Marea Unire. 1918*, p. 5.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebeș...

from the clergy were the Bishop, archpriest Andrei Ghidiu, dr. Petru Barbu, Avram Corcea from Coștei, dr. Cornel Corneanu, dr. Avram Imbroane from Lugoj, Ioanichie Neagoe from Petrovaselo and dr. Ioan Roșiu from Ghilad.⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning dr. Cornel Corneanu, the diocesan secretary of Caransebes Diocese among the personalities who played an important role in the economy of the Great Union. Perhaps he was the greatest presence in Alba Iulia, after the illustrious bishop Miron Cristea.⁷⁰

The Romanians who remained at their homes celebrated the union act through national meetings and celebrations. Almost all localities of Banat held such events.⁷¹ At Mehadia and Bocșa Vasiova priests held manifestations of true solidarity with participants in Alba Iulia. They swore faith to Romania and brotherhood ties with neighbours across the Carpathians.⁷² All this happened because the historical moment was overwhelming. The Romanians' ideal for many centuries was accomplished.

Immediately after Unification Day, on Monday, December 2, 1918 in the courtroom of Alba Iulia, the members of the Great National Council

⁶⁹ I. D. Suciu, *Monografia Mitropoliei Banatului*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1977, p. 215.

⁷⁰ Cornel Corneanu's work as diocesan secretary continued until 1921 and between 1921-1924 was consistorial assessor at the same Diocese of Caransebes. During this period he was also a member of the Romanian Parliament and member of the Special Commission of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. For canonical reasons, from January 1, 1925 he abandoned the position of consistorial assessor and taught religion and Romanian language at the State High School and Church law at the Theological Academy in Caransebeș. By Royal Decree no. 2165/1927, Cornel Corneanu was appointed prefect of Severin county. Dr. Cornel Corneanu had a rich cultural activity in Caransebeș. We also remember he was membership of the Astra Committee and chairman of Caransebes Departmet. He wrote *Foaia Diecezană* between 1917-1919 and had a sustained publishing activity at magazines *Foaia Diecezană*, *Lumina* and other magazines from the country. He also wrote numerous studies that highlight the rich biography of Bishop Ioan Popasu. He supported the reinstatement of a Vladika chair in Timisoara and presented this aspect to the National Church Council in 1935. Harassed by the Communist regime in Romania for the position he held in the Chamber and other interwar structures dr. Cornel Corneanu passed away on March 19, 1960 at his home in Caransebes and he was buried in the Church cemetery St. John the Baptist. – apud Daniel Alic, *Contribuții bănățene la Marea Unire. Dr. Cornel Corneanu (1884-1960)*, in "Studia Caransebesiensia", Editura Nereamia Napocae, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 97-104.

⁷¹ Vasile Dudaș, *1 Decembrie 1918 în Banat*, in "Studii de istorie a Banatului", nr. 9, 1983, p. 105-112.

⁷² I. Munteanu, V. M. Zaberca, M. Sârbu, *Banatul și Marea Unire. 1918*, p. 74-75.

met to appoint the delegation representatives to hand the Union Act to King Ferdinand. These were: the Orthodox Bishop of Caransebeș Elie Miron Cristea, the Greek-Catholic bishop of Gherla Iuliu Hosu, Vasile Goldiș and Alexandru Vaida Voievod. They were joined by Caius Brediceanu from Lugoj and Mihail Popovici from Brașov. They went prior to Bucharest to prepare the arrival of the official delegation. Although not mentioned by testimonies of contemporaries, diocesan secretary Dr. Cornel Corneanu accompanied Miron Cristea on this mission. The Great Council delegation that included: Miron Cristea of Caransebeș, dr. Iuliu Hosszu bishop of Gherla, Vasile Goldiș and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, presented King Ferdinand of Romania the decisions of the Great National Assembly to unite with Romania.⁷³ The Unification delegation also included Dr. Caius Brediceanu, general chairman of the foreign affairs, M. Popovici, delegate of the Guiding Board to the Romanian Government and Cornel Corneanu.⁷⁴

After returning to Caransebes bishop Miron Cristea was occupied by problems of the diocese, which in addition to difficulties since the war, had to face claims of the Serb army installed in Banat. On December 13/26, 1918, Bishop Miron Cristea welcomed General Berthelot, who went through Banat on train from Orsova to Timisoara. In the villages stations to Caransebes he was expected by the faithful led by their priests, who expressed the joy of freedom. The Serbian Guards were not allowed to wear Romanian flags, only French.⁷⁵ In Caransebes and Lugoj, Berthelot was welcomed by local bishops. In Caransebeș station, after official greetings, Miron Cristea presented the sad situation of Banat occupied by Serbians.⁷⁶ Also the Romanians in Caransebes handed the General a memorandum about the integrity of Banat and full union with Romania.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia did not mean immediate incorporation of Banat at the Romanian unitary national state. The Banat union with Romania was definitively sanctioned only by the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Foaia Diecezană*, Caransebeș, XXXIII, 1918, nr. 49 din 16 decembrie, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 132 din 11/24 decembrie, p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Drapelul*, Lugoj, XVIII, 1918, nr. 134 din 18 decembrie, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, nr. 136 din 22 decembrie, p. 2.

⁷⁷ G. Neamțu, *Activitatea C.N.R. din Caransebeș*, Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, Caransebeș, 1927, p. 94.

⁷⁸ I. D. Suciș, *Unitatea poporului Român. Contribuții istorice bănățene*, Editura Facla, Timișoara, 1980, p. 150.

Church Personalities from the Diocese of Caransebes...

Through his work Bishop Elie Miron Cristea put all the qualities which he was endowed with in the service of public interest. The greatest energy was accumulated in the national struggle of the Romanians naturally ended by the Great Union of Alba Iulia. As a reward for his labours, the Bishop of Caransebes led the delegation of the Romanian Great National Council in Alba Iulia, who gave King Ferdinand I of Romania the union act in a solemn atmosphere.

As a representative institution of the Romanians in Banat the Diocese of Caransebes, supported the Romanian nationalist political leaders with great risks. Before the First World War, the priority of the diocesan administration in Caransebes was saving the confessional schools and through them, saving the Romanian spirit and culture. War brought much suffering to the Church institutions and parish communities. Requisitions promoted by the Hungarian government did not stop even when it came to the Church, the most perfect emblem of the Romanian spirit. In these conditions the national sentiment of the faithful increased, but also increased the intransigence of authorities that unscrupulous tried to suppress any national event, often at the expense of prison. In a simple equation, all these testify the Romanians' desire for freedom and self-determination. After much suffering, the day of December 1, 1918 offered this opportunity.