

## FIGHTERS FOR THE CAUSE OF ROMANIAN NATIONAL UNITY: 150 YEARS FROM THE BIRTH OF MIRON CRISTEA, THE FIRST PATRIARCH OF GREATER ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** This year was proclaimed by the Romanian Patriarchy as the Year of the Great Union's Founders. As the Romanian Patriarchy showed, as a sign of symbolic recognition, one of these personalities that brought their contribution to the Great Union of all Romanians was the Patriarch Miron Cristea. In our paper we'll present the role that Miron Cristea (as Bishop of Caransebes, and later on, as First Metropolitan Bishop of Ungro-Vlahia) had in preparing and in realising the historical and unique event of Great Union, during 1918. Miron Cristea adopted a clear, firm, national attitude, as high priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania historical province, by initiating and giving impetus to different types of regional projects and objectives materialising the 1918 Great Union of all Romanians.

**Keywords:** *Miron Cristea, Patriarch of Great Romania, 1918 Great Union, Romanian Orthodox Church*

### 1. Introduction

Born on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1868, as the first boy of Domnița and George Cristea, a family of peasants "from the parts of Toplița, county Mureș-Turda, from the country of Hungary" (at that time)<sup>1</sup>, the future bishop was baptized "Elie" in honour of the feast of St. Prophet Elijah (July 20). All his life and his work as a high hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church and as a high official of the Romanian state, Miron Cristea proudly assumed his peasant origin.

Later on, after entering the ranks of the Romanian Orthodox Church ministers on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1895, he was appointed secretary of the Archdiocese Consistory in Sibiu, by Metropolitan Miron Romanul. After taking his vows (on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1902) under the name of Miron (in honour of Metropolitan Miron Romanul), he was later promoted to hypodeacon and then to the archdeacon. In 1902, the Eparchial Synod of the Archdiocese of Sibiu elected him as an Assessor of the Consistorial Congregation for life.<sup>2</sup> On November 21<sup>st</sup> 1909, Miron Cristea

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<sup>1</sup> Ilie Șandru, Valentin Borda, *Un nume pentru istorie. Patriarhul Miron Cristea*, Casa de Editură Petru Maior, Târgu-Mureș, 1998, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

is elected by the Synod in the dignity of Bishop of Caransebeș, an old Orthodox episcopate, restored in 1865 by Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna. On this occasion, Nicolae Iorga wrote about him in the *Romanian People* newspaper: "A very famous personality of the new elected in Sibiu. A young man who likes being around young people, a lively spirit, willing to talk with other lively spirits, a handsome and elegant cleric, well received in broad circles, a pleasant orator and a diligent writer"<sup>3</sup>. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1910, Miron Cristea was ordained bishop at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Sibiu, the event transforming into a true national and Orthodox feast<sup>4</sup>. He pastored in this holy dignity until 1919, when he was elected in the dignity of Metropolitan Primate of Romania. He became the first Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in 1925<sup>5</sup>.

In the meeting of the Chamber of April 17<sup>th</sup> 1923, when the Metropolis of Ungro-Vlahia was elected to the Patriarchate, Miron Cristea said: "As for myself, I thank the all-merciful God that from the simple peasant son he baptized a simple shepherd who has grazed his huge flocks on the mountains of Moldavia, not far from my native village, Toplița Romana, I rose to the highest church level to which an earthly man could become"<sup>6</sup>.

## **2. Miron Cristea, Promoter of the Nationalist Doctrine and Exponent of the Golden Generation of the Greater Romania Builders**

According to the definitions given by the dictionaries of political thought, nationalism (derived from lat. *Natio*-people) *is not to be confused with populism and does not have the pejorative connotations* attached by the supporters of the globalism of this political concept. Nationalism is defined, in its first sense, as "a manifestation of the national character of a people, outlined by the feeling of belonging to a nation and of the awareness of common national interests"<sup>7</sup>. The doctrine considers that, in this sense, nationalism "continues to play a positive historical role in the formation of nations, the liberation of peoples from the foreign oppression or the preservation of national identity"<sup>8</sup>.

A second meaning of this concept refers to "*the community of national interests of a people*"; its national and cultural identity tends to express itself and gain recognition through its own, independent, sovereign and equal political

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Priest professor dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, Bucharest, 2006, p. 395.

<sup>6</sup> Ilie Șandru, Valentin Bordea, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Sergiu Tamaș, *Dicționar politic. Instituțiile democrației și cultura civică*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1993, pp. 178-179.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, pp. 178-179.

constructions in relation to other national communities"<sup>9</sup>. Nationalism has a political aspect characterized by "*the struggle for a national state to assert the national dignity and the creative values of a people*"<sup>10</sup>.

Historically, nationalism emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the formation of the first nations, and continued to manifest itself in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the formation process of the new nations resulting from the collapse of post-World War I empires (the Austro-Hungarian empire) and the collapse of colonial systems after World War II (Africa, Asia)<sup>11</sup>.

For other authors, nationalism designates "*a mental state (a feeling) but also a doctrine, characterized by: the idea that belonging to a nation is a good and desirable thing; nations are the most important cultural and political collectives; political power resides in and drifts from the nation; loyalty to the nation overwhelms any other loyalty; the activity of the state - economic, cultural, social etc. - must be subordinated to national principles*" (Smith 1971, 1973, 2002)<sup>12</sup>. According to Walker Connor, nationalism is based on the assumption that "*the fundamental differentiations within the human race are multiple vertical cleavages that divide people into ethnographic groups,*" unlike Marxism which, on the contrary, proceeds from the belief that the essential differentiations are *horizontal differences* between classes that *transcend national groups*" (Connor, 1984)<sup>13</sup>.

In international relations, *realists recognize* the strength and influence of national and nationalism, which have been an influential cause of national construction, power creation, especially at military level<sup>14</sup>.

Nationalism was also defined as "*a sense of national consciousness that raises a nation in relation to others*", *a concept linked to the evolution and rise of the nation-state*<sup>15</sup>.

Given the above-mentioned meanings of nationalism, as a political concept, but also as a political doctrine, we can say that the ideal of achieving Greater Romania, of the unitary national state, free and reunited within its natural boundaries would not have been possible without a *whole generation* of people who loved the Romanian nation believed in national values, in Romanian traditions and in the right of the Romanian people to live freely and dignified in

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Coord. Aristide Cioabă, Constantin Nica, *Doctrine politice în România secolului XX*, vol. II, Academia Română, ISPRI, Ed. Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale, Bucharest, 2004, p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*, p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Marie-Claude Smouts, Dario Battistella, Pascal Vennesson, *Dictionnaire des relations internationales. Approches, concepts, doctrines*, Dalloz, Paris, 2006, p. 365.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Griffiths, *Encyclopedia of international relations and global politics*, Routledge, London and NY, 2005, p. 559.

the borders of a reunified national state. The Golden Generation, which devoted its whole life, activity, including money to the realization of the Great Union, *acted within a very clear stream of political thinking, strongly assumed, known as nationalism*, as I explained it in its meanings from above. **Far from being shameful or labelled as extremism or as political misconduct, not only was nationalism openly assumed by the intellectual elites of the Old Kingdom, the army, the royal dynasty, the Romanians living in the Diaspora, and those in the Romanian provinces oppressed by the Austro-Hungarian empire, but it also constituted the basic belief in which it became possible a common and priority political objective of a whole generation of Romanian fighters: the unification of all Romanians into a unitary national state.**

The Golden Generation of the Great Union can fit *into an era of effervescence of the nationalist tendency not only in the Romanian nation, but also in other nations across Europe*, who struggle to get out of oppression of empires that do not recognize them to self-existence, in distinct states.

*The international conjuncture of 1918 it was one marked by the affirmation, not only of the political doctrine of nationalism (which led to the liberation of oppressed nations from the yoke of oppressive empires), but also of the formation of unitary national states throughout Europe.*

We can characterize this 19<sup>th</sup> century historical conjuncture as *an affirmation of a Westphalian type European order, which was eventually encouraged, supported by US President W. Wilson and then assumed as an official policy by the USA, becoming open support to the post-imperial Westphalian order and the right of European peoples to form free and sovereign national states.*

Invoking in his articles the ideal of national unity, of the right to self-determination of the Romanian people, Nicolae Iorga said in 1916, referring to the national goal of supporting the unification of all Romanians as a fulfilment of a dream for centuries: "there's been arrived a time we've been waiting for over two centuries, for which we have lived our entire national life, for which we have worked and wrote, we fought and thought. The time has come for us to ask the world ... the right to live for ourselves, the right not to give to anyone, as slaves, the fruit of our toils" (*The Romanian People* newspaper, August 21<sup>st</sup> 1916)<sup>16</sup>. Together with Nicolae Iorga and other figures of the Golden Generation who prepared and carried out the Great Union in 1918, Miron Cristea tirelessly pleaded for the necessity of realizing this national ideal, joining the nationalistic cause, the objective of creating a single unitary sovereign Romanian state. On March 6<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> 1919, at Sibiu, on the occasion of the meeting of Orthodox priests at a Congress under the presidency of Bishop Miron Cristea, the personality of the historian

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<sup>16</sup> See in: Petre Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga*, col. *Personalități ale Marii Uniri*, Ed. Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 2016, p. 157.

Nicolae Iorga and his role as a fighter for the national cause is evoked: "Meet in the Congress in Sibiu, the priesthood, the Orthodox Church of the Transylvanian Romanian Metropolitan Church, in this moment of the celebration of the soul, with deep emotion and vivid appreciation, remembers the tireless fighter and creator with the pinnacle of our national aspirations, who gave his voice on great pages of history of tumultuous and sorrows of so many generations of servants of the Romanian altar"<sup>17</sup>.

The Great Union of 1918, as the doctrine emphasizes, represented "the energetic act of the Romanian nation, prepared by the entire historical evolution of the Romanian people, of its long struggle for existence, for the defence of its own being and for the right to live in the borders of one and the same state"<sup>18</sup>.

### ***3. The Role of Miron Cristea as Bishop of Caransebes and Later on, as Metropolitan Primate of Ungro-Wallachia in the preparation and realization of the historic and unique event of the Great Union of 1918 and in the unification of BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)***

Miron Cristea adopted a clear, firm, national attitude, as a high hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, by initiating and impelling the various regional and objective projects that materialized the Great Union of all Romanians from 1918.

From the earliest moments of his activity as Bishop of Caransebeș (being installed in the Episcopal seat on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1910), Miron Cristea emphasized in his inaugural speech his profound attachment to the ancestral traditions, for the Orthodox Church and the Romanian language as elements of the national identity of the centuries of the Romanian people, which every priest has the duty to serve, to protect and to spread among the faithful: "...and as our ancestral faith grew together in our church with the Romanian language, this culture, preached by the church, only Romanian nationality may be. The true culture of a people can only be mediated in their own language"<sup>19</sup>. The hierarch took a firm attitude against the Magyarization policy of confessional Romanian schools in the Banat diocese, supporting Romanian education in denominational schools that were outside the sphere of competence of the Hungarian Government. Miron Cristea, through repeated appeals to the civil society and the Romanian government, gathered millions of crowns to support these schools, raised other schools in more than 60 communes, making it possible to pay the salaries of Romanian teachers in these territories<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Idem, p. 226.

<sup>18</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Unitatea, caracteristică fundamentală a evoluției istorice a poporului român*, în antologia *O viață în slujba istoriei. Ioan Scurtu la 75 de ani*, Ed. Ștefadina, București, 2015, p. 547.

<sup>19</sup> Ilie Șandru, Valentin Bordea, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, p. 96.

Miron Cristea struggled to preserve the Romanian national culture, not only the Romanian language and the confessional education in Romanian, looking at them as elements of national dignity and unity of a nation: "*in the broader layers of the people only that way the culture can enlarge, if its teachings are dressed in the clothes of our beautiful Romanian language. Only such a culture, taught in our own language, can be done in our blood, it can be assimilated to our Romanian being and nature*", he thought, in the Council addressed to all the protopoppies, priests and teachers, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1912<sup>21</sup>.

**As Bishop of Caransebes, Miron Cristea is proposed and elected by the Romanian Academy on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1919, as honorary member** (in the letter of notification by the Academy to the Bishop, it is stated that "*The Romanian Academy, appreciating the work done by the Your Holiness in raising the nation's culture and maintaining the national sentiment, has proclaimed its honorary member*"<sup>22</sup>). In his turn, Miron Cristea states that this choice was based on the ecclesiastical, social and cultural activity he carried out "*during the struggles for our existence*", as he confesses in his letter of thanks addressed to the Romanian Academy, himself. Miron Cristea states in his letter of reply that he has contributed "*to the awakening and strengthening of the national consciousness and to the propagation and strengthening of the Romanian culture by all possible means*"<sup>23</sup>.

Miron Cristea prepared and participated in the political act of the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania (Great Union from Alba Iulia, since December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918), as Bishop of Caransebes. As a member of the delegation who went to the Câmpia Turzii to take part in the Great Union, he spoke alongside other leading politicians, the enthusiastic crowd gathered there<sup>24</sup> (composed of more than 100,000 delegates from all over Transylvania, elected on the basis of member mandates of the Synod<sup>25</sup>). They explained the content of the resolution of the Great Union, of Transylvania with Romania, adopted by the Great National Assembly in Alba-Iulia, to the crowds who cheered with indescribable enthusiasm, as the testimonies of the time shows<sup>26</sup>. In the speech at the Great Assembly in Alba Iulia on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, in front of the delegates from all Transylvania, Miron Cristea emphasized that the union with Romania "*must be*

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<sup>21</sup> Idem, pp. 96-97.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Antonie Plămădeală, *Elie Miron Cristea. Corespondență*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Române, Sibiu, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Academia Română, Secția de Științe Istorice și Arheologice, coord. Gheorghe Platon, *Istoria Românilor. De la Independență la Marea Unire (1878-1918)*, vol. VII, tom II, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 2003, pp. 521-524.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, pp. 517-518.

<sup>26</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Unitatea, caracteristică fundamentală a evoluției istorice a poporului român*, în antologia *O viață în slujba istoriei. Ioan Scurtu la 75 de ani*, Ed. Ștefadina, București, 2015, p. 544.

*our only natural tendency, only the supreme ideal of every people inhabiting a territory compact must be its national and political unity*"<sup>27</sup>.

Later, on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1918, a delegation made up of Miron Cristea, Iuliu Hossu, Vasile Goldiș, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod, brought the Union Act (the voted resolution at Alba-Iulia) in Bucharest, to be handed over to King Ferdinand.<sup>28</sup> The delegation was met in Bucharest by the Romanian government and by a crowd who warmly welcomed the Transylvanian Romanian representatives<sup>29</sup>.

It is also worth noting the activity in favour of the Banat cause, as Bishop of Caransebes, culminating in the famous speech of Miron Cristea, on the occasion of the opening of the first elected Parliament of Greater Romania on December 5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> 1919 when, as a senator of law, he supported native allegiance, nature of Banat in Romania, based on the arguments of national, historical, social, economic and religious, military and territorial unity, in order to determine the politicians of the time to adopt a firm diplomatic line at the Peace Conference through which the membership of Banat would be decided, from the Danube to Mureș, to Romania<sup>30</sup>.

From his speech as Bishop of Caransebeș in the Senate of Romania, meeting of December 18<sup>th</sup> 1919 and published in the Official Gazette, the attitude of firm and militant support of the future Patriarch of Romania for the cause of the completion of the national unity of the Romanians appears, for the reunification of the country with its territories – "the cradle of Romanian spirit" – such as Banat, the pleading for the recognition of the Christian spiritual unity of the Romanians appears, concluded by the unanimous adoption by the Senate of the Political Declaration proposed by Miron Cristea regarding the Banat: "*The question of our frontiers ... Interests me closely. Banat, gentlemen, is a corner of a country that is not only Romanian, but it is the cradle of our Romanian cradle (...) The Banat - which from the ethnic point of view is the cradle of the Romanian people - appears in all respects as a whole indivisible (...). From ancient times, Romanians are the only inhabitants of Banat*"<sup>31</sup>. The Declaration also stipulates that the

<sup>27</sup> Reproduced from volume *Cuvântări ținute de Înalt Prea Sfinția Sa D. D. Dr. Miron Cristea, II*, București, 1923, p. 3-8, in the work of priest profesor dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 2006, pp. 398-399.

<sup>28</sup> Coord. Gheorghe Platon, *Istoria Românilor*, *op.cit.*, pp. 524-525.

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *op. cit.*, pp. 545-546.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Ioan Lăcătușu, prof. Vasile Stancu, *Episcopul Miron Cristea- apărător al unității Banatului (1918-1920)*, in *Credință și Mărturisire*, Ed. Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2010, p. 434.

<sup>31</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Stancu, *Episcopul Caransebeșului Miron Cristea - apărător al unității Banatului (1918-1920)*, în Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Stancu, *Contribuții documentare privind istoria românilor transilvăneni, colecția Centenarul Marii Uniri (1918-2018)*, Ed. Eurocarpatica, Sfântu Gheorghe, 2016, pp. 214-220.

Romanian Senate will, in no way recognize the failure of Romania's indisputable right to join Banat to the motherland"<sup>32</sup>.

As **Metropolitan Primate of Greater Romania**, Miron Cristea dedicated his activity to promoting among the believers the love of country and nation; has strengthened religiosity and morality among them; on a political level, it was a factor of unification and reconciliation of decision-makers, in order to ensure the success of the national idea. The hierarch supported the clergy and preoccupied in turn to activate the national dimension, the resonance with the tribulations of the people, the deep interaction between the church and society; he was a builder of Romanian schools in Transylvania; increased the wealth of the church, foundations and other institutions in its diocese; was appreciated not only by the faithful crowd for his work and personality, in the service of the ideal of consolidation of national unity as well as of the political elite<sup>33</sup>.

In 1919, Sibiu, at the meeting of the Transylvanian Orthodox priesthood Congress, where issues related to the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) as a result of the unification of all Romanians, as a Bishop of Caransebeș, Miron Cristea held a speech in which he pleaded for the principle of the church autonomy, seen as "*forming the foundation of the organization in the Orthodox Church*", stating "*the need to win and secure moral support and help from the Romanian state on behalf of the Church*"<sup>34</sup>. In the conception of the Bishop of Caransebeș, there is an intrinsic link between tradition, national identity and deep spiritual, between the Church and the Romanian nation, forming **a unity of nation, language and faith**: "in the frames of new Romania there is no national institution to which the new Romanian state have more duties than the Romanian Orthodox Church has from us, which, until now, was the most disregarded"<sup>35</sup>. As Miron Cristea emphasized at this meeting of the Orthodox Romanian clergy, including the Old Kingdom, Bessarabia and Bucovina, "*...now that the Romanian Orthodox Church became the church of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the new Romania, when it became the dominant church of the Romanian state ..., will follow us to raise it by the harmonious co-operation and evangelical spirit of the clergy with all the leaders and the factors of the country ...*"<sup>36</sup>.

Within the framework of the second major objective of strengthening the national unity of the Romanians, namely **the unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church**, convened on the initiative of the President of the Holy Synod, His Eminence Pimen, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, on June 24-25,

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<sup>32</sup> Idem, p. 220.

<sup>33</sup> Ilie Șandru, Valentin Borda, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>34</sup> Idem, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.



1920, a meeting at the Sinaia Monastery, where they participated as delegates, representatives of the priesthood and faithful in all the Romanian provinces. They all agreed that the time had come to achieve the unification of the churches from the provinces reunited to their motherland, with the Romanian Orthodox Church from the Old Kingdom<sup>37</sup>. During this meeting, Miron Cristea pleaded for the application of the principle of ecclesiastical autonomy, of the unique basis organization of the BOR of the Kingdom of Romania and was approved by all the participants, these principles being later applied by himself, from the dignities of Metropolitan-Primate and Patriarch.

The doctrine considers that the significance of the election of Miron Cristea as Metropolitan-Primate of Ungro-Wallachia on December 18/31, 1919, by the Great Electoral College, with 435 favourable votes out of the total of 447 votes, it was, in fact, a consecration of the political union between Transylvania and Romania, because Miron Cristea had become a significant personality of the Romanian national struggle for political unity and state reunification. In the speech given on this occasion, in his dedication to the new church dignity, Miron Cristea, full of emotion, confessed: "... *to make me worthy to be, after many centuries, the first Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, bearing this title not as a historical name, but with a title of law and fact, thus reviving not only the old spiritual ties of the motherland with the Romanians in Ardeal (Transylvania), Banat and the Hungarian parts, but completing the unity of the Eastern Orthodox Church with the Romanians everywhere* "; "... *I see in this election not much sympathy towards the chosen one, but the great love that the ancestral church shows to that divine and national institution, which a profound universal thinker like Eminescu called her mother of the Romanian people*"<sup>38</sup>.

As Metropolitan Primate, Miron Cristea was concerned to undertake a profound reform, a reorganization of the Orthodox Church, proposing in 1920 the convening of a new Ecumenical Council. On June 29, 1920, he addressed the Patriarchs of Orthodox Eastern Churches a letter announcing them of his investiture as Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia and President of the Holy Synod and proposing future cooperation between Eastern churches through the organization of joint meetings and synods ecumenical to strengthen the status of the Eastern Church<sup>39</sup>. **His position to support the move of the Patriarchate's seat to Constantinople was followed by a victory in this respect, which strengthened the Church of the East** and, in particular, the Greek Church<sup>40</sup>.

In the sense of the actions undertaken by Miron Cristea to achieve the unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church, there are actions such as:

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.133-134.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

organizing the session of the Holy Synod of December 30<sup>th</sup>1919, where the union of all dioceses in the country was voted; Pastoral in 1920, where he emphasized the necessity of a unique Orthodox autocephalous church in the boundaries of United Romania; moreover, Miron Cristea emphasized at the session of May 1920 of the Church Higher Consistory that "*going against the unification of the BOR would go against the church and that would at the same time be an enemy of the Romanian state, of the whole Romanism, and a defamatory of memory hundreds of national martyrs who have sacrificed themselves in legendary heroic acts for the dissolution of the brethren and the completion of the nation*"<sup>41</sup>. Miron Cristea organized a large church congress in September 1920 for the adoption of a law project for the unitary organization of the BOR, the documents being finalized only in 1925 and presented to the Parliament, which voted for them.

In October 1920, Iassi, at the meeting of the Congress of Priests, Miron Cristea stressed again the need to respect the principle of ecclesial autonomy, thus understanding that "*the church itself through its organs should lead and arrange its internal affairs, without the intermingling of all sorts of interests and without breaking, where necessary, the connection with the other factors, with its state and organs*"<sup>42</sup>. Another major idea held by the high hierarch was the raising and the recognition of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the importance of the "national church of the Romanian state". In the new constitution of Romania, in March 1923, following the efforts made by Miron Cristea, **the relations between the Romanian state and the BOR were established**. Thus, in art. 22 clearly stated that "*the Romanian Orthodox Church, being the religion of the great majority of the Romanians, is the dominant church of the Romanian state. In all the Kingdom of Greater Romania, the Orthodox Christian Church will have a unitary organization with the participation of all its constituent elements, clergy and people of the church*"<sup>43</sup>.

On the occasion of the meeting of the church constitution (organ composed of clergy and people of the church), in Iasi, on October 14<sup>th</sup>1920, Miron Cristea proposed the reformation of the church administrative apparatus in the Metropolitan Church of Bucharest with a scheme of functions inspired by the Ministry of Culture; considered as priority goals to be achieved, building the Church of Salvation of the Nation; supported the commencement of the construction of an appropriate metropolitan residence; the establishment of the Bible Institute; giving scholarships to theologians; creating a school of church singers; the establishment of new theological seminaries; supporting Byzantine painting; the establishment of a church museum and new bishops; the establishment of the Metropolitan Library; urgent measures for the restoration of

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 136.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 137-138.

historical monuments; printing shop for church books; organization of church congresses; improving the material situation of priests by providing appropriate payment; increasing the number of deaneries and other proposals<sup>44</sup>. These actions again highlight the organizational merits of Miron Cristea and his full involvement not only in the life of the church organization but also in the life of society, in supporting cultural, spiritual, charity projects, supporting the hero cult, as well as in political life.

A prime concern of Metropolitan Primate was the reorganization of the Romanian Orthodox Church throughout the country. He has established the old episcopal chairs, the diocese of Cluj and that of Great Oradea. Miron Cristea founded the Episcopate of the White Citadel and that of the Hotin, on the Bessarabian territory. In Muntenia, he founded a new episcopate in Constanta<sup>45</sup>.

Subsequently, the Archdiocese of Chisinau was elected to the rank of Metropolitan of Bessarabia (with its membership of the Archdiocese of Chisinau and the Episcopate of the White-Citadel), and the Episcopate of Hotin under the rule of the Orthodox Church (May 5<sup>th</sup>1925) which was raised to the rank of Patriarchate<sup>46</sup>.

Also, after the Great Union of 1918, there were intense concerns of the Romanian hierarchs, especially Miron Cristea, to re-establish the Episcopate of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, which was abolished by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, at the time of the oppression of Transylvania as a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Romanian Reunified Parliament approved in 1921 the law project proposed by Octavian Goga as Minister of Cults, by which it was foreseen the re-establishment of this episcopate, based in Cluj<sup>47</sup>.

Based on a report drawn up in 1921, by Military Priest Constantine Nazarie, Miron Cristea initiated the establishment of the First Military Episcopate of Greater Romania. From his capacity as Metropolitan Primate he claimed in the Romanian Parliament to vote for a law project in this respect, a fact accomplished in July 1921 (titled "Law on the Organization of the Military Clergy") and completed with a Regulation of the clergy active military, approved by royal decree in 1925. The residence of the new military diocese decided to be in Alba Iulia in the royal palace near the Cathedral of Coronation<sup>48</sup>.

Also during 1920-1925 (as he worked from the Metropolitan-Primate dignity), Miron Cristea paid special attention to the project of establishing an Orthodox Bible Institute, approved by the Holy Synod since July 1920, an

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<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

institution thought to have one a major role in the religious education of the Romanians, but also a religious culture institution, at the same time.

Miron Cristea was the one who resumed with the help given to Christian rulers of the Oriental Warrior and Martyr, the bones of the martyr for the right faith, Constantin Brâncoveanu, ruler of Wallachia (1688-1714), in the ceremony of May 21<sup>st</sup> 1920, on the day of the holy kings Constantin and Elena.

Also during this period, Miron Cristea was concerned with the establishment of the Seminary in Craiova (November 1922) and the Theological Seminary of the Orphans of War, Câmpulung (November 21<sup>st</sup> 1922).

### *Instead of conclusions*

In a gesture of recognition of the efforts and sacrifices of the Golden Generation that carried out the Great Union of 1918, the Romanian Orthodox Church arranged for 2018 to be dedicated to the Builders of the Great Union, among which Patriarch Miron Cristea, who, as Bishop of Caransebeș, read on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 the resolution of the unification of Transylvania with Romania and, as a member of the delegation of the Transylvanian Romanians, handed the act of the Union to the King in Bucharest.

As the chief hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Miron Cristea militated, from the dignities of the Bishop of Caransebeș, the Metropolitan Primate of Romania and the Patriarch of Romania (since 1925), *for the cause of the Romanian spirit*, seen as an instrument to fulfil the goal of an entire generation, the unification of all Romanians within the boundaries of a reunified, unitary, sovereign national state and free from foreign oppression.

*Unity of nation, language and belief, regarded as dominant traits of the Romanian spirit*<sup>49</sup>. They constituted the dimensions on which they were cemented and the goal of the political unity of all Romanians in a single, sovereign, national state was achieved. As a BOR hierarch, Miron Cristea militated and obtained the autonomy of the Romanian Orthodox Church (obtaining in 1925 the right of the BOR to have its own patriarch and not to depend on anybody), which should be regarded as an affirmation of the Romanians' desire to be free and independent, including in the organization of their church<sup>50</sup>. The affirmation of the unity of language and nation constituted, moreover, one of the directions for which the Romanian clergy have been fighting ever since the earliest times<sup>51</sup>, efforts which

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<sup>49</sup> Antonie Plămădeală, *Clerici ortodocși, ctitori de limbă și cultură românească, în antologia Biserica în misiune. Patriarhia română la ceas aniversar. 120 de ani de autocefalie (1886-2005), 80 de ani de patriarhat (1925-2005)*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2005, pp. 662-665.

<sup>50</sup> Idem, p. 662-665.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 663.

they found their way of accomplishment with the completion of the unitary Romanian state in 1918, including through the activity of the generation of clergy and hierarchs headed by Miron Cristea.

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**Anexe**



1. *Picture of Miron Cristea, as Patriarch of Great Romania, exhibited in the Palace of Patriarchy, Bucharest*



2. Another picture, showing Miron Cristea, as Patriarch of Great Romania, exposed in the Palace of Patriarchy, Bucharest



3. *Picture showing the solemn moment of enthronizing Miron Cristea as the Patriarch of Great Romania, in 1925. Picture exposed within the Palace of Patriarchy, Bucharest.*





4. An old photo, exhibited in the Palace of Patriarchy, representing the Patriarch Miron Cristea, recently elected, in 1925, as the First Patriarch of Great Romania