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“By the Country and within the Country”

The Union of Native Jews and its Struggle for Emancipation in Romania before the First World War

Abstract

Romania was the last European country to offer equal rights to its Jews, as it granted them citizenship only after the First World War. In 1909/1910, a handful of Romanian Jewish leaders founded the Union of Native Jews (Uniunea Evreilor Pământeni), which aimed to unify all Romanian Jews in their fight against antisemitism and for emancipation. The Union understood itself as a true political organisation, which sought to achieve its political goals “by the country and within the country”. Obviously, this statement came as a reaction to the main nationalist narrative, which suspected Romanian Jews of either instigating or at least providing the pretext for the Great Powers to interfere in Romania’s domestic affairs. However, it also reflected the Union’s conviction that fighting for equal rights was above all in the interest of Romanian Jews and had to be achieved first and foremost out of their own volition and through their own efforts. This article focusses on the Union’s history prior to the First World War and analyses the Union’s policies towards the Jewish population, the Romanian state, and towards Western Jewish organisations.

Romania was the last European country to offer equal rights to its Jews, as it granted them citizenship only after the First World War in 1918/1919. However, the so-called ‘Jewish question’ had preoccupied Jewish leaders as well as ruling elites both in Romania and Western Europe ever since 1866, when Romania’s first constitution stated that only Christians could become Romanian citizens. The question of Jewish emancipation was fiercely disputed and regularly renegotiated in the aftermath of wars, such as the Russo-Turkish War in 1877, better known as the War of Independence in Romania, the Second Balkan War in 1913 and, finally, the First World War. In 1878, the debate over emancipation was not voluntarily conducted by the Romanian government, but demanded by the Great Powers, who made the granting of civil rights to the Jewish population a condition for the recognition of Romania’s independence. After heated debates, the Romanian parliament changed the article of the constitution which made citizenship conditional on Christianity, but stated that the naturalisation of foreigners, irrespective of their religion, would be carried out individually. This procedure was highly restrictive. Only those who were considered valuable to the country were entitled to apply for citizenship and applications had to be submitted to the government and voted upon individually by both chambers of parliament with a two-thirds majority.¹ Under these circumstances, only 371 Jews successfully underwent the naturalisation process and

¹ Constantin Iordachi, Citizenship and National Identity in Romania. A Historical Overview, in: Regio. Minorities, Politics, Society 13 (2002), 12.

achieved Romanian citizenship by 1912.² Thus, according to the 1912 census, 4,668 out of 241,088 Jews living in Romania held Romanian citizenship, the bulk having been naturalised collectively after the War of Independence either as participants of the war or as inhabitants of the newly annexed Dobrudja region.³ In addition, 7,987 Jews with foreign citizenship resided in Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ One's legal status was decisive, as it determined if one could own land, choose one's place of residence, or practice certain professions. The possibilities of those without citizenship were restrained by more than 200 laws issued by the Romanian government through the years, which privileged Romanian citizens over 'foreigners'.⁵ Although almost all Jews were excluded from public service, public schools, and certain occupations and professions, they still had to pay taxes and were liable for military service.⁶ This discriminatory legislation had its origins in widespread antisemitic beliefs. It was in the context of the debates surrounding Jewish emancipation in 1878 that Romanian politicians and intellectuals increasingly portrayed Jews as a threat to the country's national independence and identity. Espoused by some of the most prestigious political and cultural personalities in the country, antisemitism became an integral part of public discourse in Romania towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ Because of this unfortunate combination of legal discrimination and widespread antisemitic discourse, "prewar Romania had a well-deserved reputation for being, along with Russia, the most anti-Semitic country in Europe", as Ezra Mendelsohn pointed out.⁸

The precarious situation of Romanian Jewry mobilised various Western Jewish organisations, which repeatedly protested against these discriminatory practices and tried to prevail on their governments to intervene on behalf of Romanian Jewish rights.⁹ Yet it was not only Western Jewish organisations who campaigned for a political change. In 1909/1910, a handful of Romanian Jewish leaders founded the Union of Native Jews (Uniunea Evreilor Pământeni). The Union was initially established as a pressure group to protect the interests of Romanian Jews, thus following the example set by Western Jewish organisations such as the Centralverein deutscher

2 For an annual statistic of individually naturalised Jews, see: Carol Iancu, *Lupta internațională pentru emanciparea evreilor din România, Documente și mărturii* [The International Struggle for the Emancipation of the Jews in Romania], Vol. I: 1913–1919, translated by Țicu Goldstein, Bucharest 2004, doc. 17, 86–87.

3 Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România. *Centrul pentru Studiul Istoriei Evreilor din România* [Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania. The Centre for the Study of the History of the Jews in Romania] (ed.), *Evreii din România în Războiul de Reîntregire a Țării, 1916–1919* [The Jews in Romania during the War That United Romania, 1916–1919], compiled by Lya Benjamin/Dumitru Hincu, Bucharest 1996, 19; Mariana Hausleitner, *Intervention und Gleichstellung. Rumäniens Juden und die Großmächte*, in: *Yearbook of the Simon Dubnow Institute* 1 (2002), 507.

4 Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România, *Evreii din România*, 19.

5 Carol Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor din România (1913–1919). De la inegalitatea civică la drepturile de minoritate. Originalitatea unei lupte începând cu războaiele balcanice și până la Conferința de Pace de la Paris* [The Emancipation of the Jews in Romania (1913–1919). From Civic Inequality to Minority Rights. The Originality of a Struggle from the Balkan Wars to the Paris Peace Conference], Bucharest 1998, 37.

6 On the conscription of Jews in Romania, see: Dietmar Müller, *Erwünschte Soldaten – unerwünschte Staatsbürger. Juden und das rumänische Militär (1866–1942)*, in: *Yearbook of the Simon Dubnow Institute* 12 (2013), 195–219.

7 On antisemitic discourse among Romanian political and cultural elites, see: Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și 'problema evreiască'. Eșeu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30* [Nationalist Ideology and the 'Jewish Problem'. An Essay on the Forms of Intellectual Antisemitism in Romania in the 1930s], Bucharest 1995 (originally published in English under the title: *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Oxford/New York 1991); Dietmar Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf. Juden und Muslime als Alteritätspartner im rumänischen und serbischen Nationscode. Ethnonationale Staatsbürgerschaftskonzepte 1878–1941*, Wiesbaden 2005; William O. Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism. Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania*, Philadelphia 1991.

8 Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, Bloomington 1983, 174.

9 Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 42–45.

Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens in Germany.¹⁰ However, the Union soon diverged from its Western European counterparts. When it became known in 1912 that the Liberal Party planned to revise the constitution once in government, fuelling expectations that a change of the article concerning naturalisation might also come under deliberation, Jewish leaders made every effort to transform the Union from an elite pressure group to a mass organisation uniting all Romanian Jews in their fight for equal rights. Despite the Union's liberal bourgeois concept of emancipation, various Jewish factions gathered under its flag. Liberals, socialists, and Zionists alike agreed to suspend their ideological differences for the time being and to fight in unity for civil and political rights. As a consequence, the Union claimed to have attracted up to 12,000 members within a few years,¹¹ making it not only the most influential Romanian Jewish organisation before the First World War, but also one of the biggest political movements in the country at that time.

However, very little is known about the Union's role in the struggle for equal rights. When dealing with the emancipation of Romanian Jews, most scholars have focussed either on Romanian antisemitic discourse and its repercussions on the Romanian concept of citizenship¹² or on the role played by Western Jewish organisations and the Great Powers in this process.¹³ Only a handful have included the perspective of Romanian Jewry and even fewer have specifically examined the role of

10 The fact that the Union established legal aid offices explicitly following the example of Jewish organisations in Germany and Austria indicates that Romanian Jews looked upon Western Jewish organisations as models for their own political aspirations. For the Union's references to Germany and Austria, see: *Reprezentanța Evreilor Pământenii* [The Representation of Native Jews], *Raportul Comitetului Central pe 1910* [Annual Report of the Central Committee for 1910], Bucharest 1910, 8. For a history of the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, see: Avraham Barkai, "Wehr Dich!" *Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (C. V.) 1893–1938, Munich 2002.

11 *Uniunea Evreilor Pământenii* [Union of Native Jews], *Opt ani de activitate* [Eight Years of Activity], Bucharest 1918.

12 Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*; Andrei Oișteanu, *Imagina evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context est-central European* [The Image of the Jew in Romanian Culture. A Study of Imagology in the Central-East European Context], Bucharest 2004; Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism*; Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf*; Silvia Marton, *La construction politique de la nation. La nation dans les débats du Parlement de la Roumanie (1866–1871)* [The Political Construction of the Nation. The Nation in Romanian Parliamentary Debates (1866–1871)], Iași 2009; Constantin Iordachi, *The Unyielding Boundaries of Citizenship. The Emancipation of 'Non-Citizens' in Romania, 1866–1918*, in: *European Review of History – Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 8 (2001) 2, 157–186; Raul Cârstocea, *Uneasy Twins? The Entangled Histories of Jewish Emancipation and Anti-Semitism in Romania and Hungary, 1866–1913*, in: *Slovo* 21 (2009) 2, 64–85.

13 Carol Iancu, *The Struggle for the Emancipation of Romanian Jewry and Its International Ramifications*, in: Carol Iancu/Liviu Rotman (ed.), *The History of the Jews in Romania, Vol. II: The Nineteenth Century*, Tel Aviv 2005, 97–127; Carol Iancu, *Adolphe-Isaac Crémieux, Gerson von Bleichroeder and the Jewish Politics of 'Shtadlanut' in the 19th Century*, in: *Studia Judaica* 15 (2007), 67–81; Hausleitner, *Intervention und Gleichstellung*; David Jünger, *Am Scheitelpunkt der Emanzipation. Die Juden Europas und der Berliner Kongress 1878*, in: Arndt Engelhardt et al. (ed.), *Ein Panorama der Moderne. Jüdische Geschichte in Schlüsselbegriffen*, Göttingen 2016, 17–38; Nathan Michael Gelber, *Jüdische Probleme beim Berliner Kongress 1878*, in: Robert Weltsch (ed.), *Deutsches Judentum, Aufstieg und Krise. Gestalten, Ideen, Werke. Vierzehn Monographien*, Stuttgart 1963, 216–252; Nathan Michael Gelber, *The Problem of the Rumanian Jews at the Bucharest Peace Conference. 1918*, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (1950) 3, 223–246; Theodor Armon, *Luigi Luzzati's Intervention in Favor of the Jews of Romania in 1914*, in: *Shvut. Jewish Problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe* 16 (1993), 247–256; Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe: the Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf. 1914–1919*, Oxford 2009; Björn Siegel, *The Vienna Jewish Alliance (Israelitische Allianz zu Wien) and Its Attempt to Modernise Central Europe*, in: Tullia Cattalan/Marco Dogo (ed.), *The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe from the 19th Century to the Great Depression. Combining Viewpoints on a Controversial Story*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016, 205–226; Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 1969, 238–250.

the Union of Native Jews.¹⁴ Therefore, this article attempts to look at the history of emancipation from a Romanian Jewish perspective.

The Union sought to achieve its political goals “in the sense of justice and higher interests of the nation by the country and within the country”, as the Union stated in an address to the Romanian prime minister in 1911.¹⁵ Obviously, this statement came as a reaction to the main nationalist narrative, which suspected Romanian Jews of either instigating or at least providing the pretext for the Great Powers to interfere in Romania’s domestic affairs. However, it also reflected the Union’s conviction that fighting for equal rights was above all in the interest of Romanian Jewry and had to be achieved first and foremost out of its own volition and by its own efforts. Therefore, the Union acted not only against the prejudices of the Romanian political elite, but also against those of Western Jewish organisations, which are well illustrated by an article published in a German Jewish journal in 1918, which stated that “we have always been under the impression that Romanian Jews are a dull, passive mass, a horde of oppressed slaves, who never took any action to free themselves, but instead slothfully waited for their Western European brothers, who were supposed to think, speak, and act for them”.¹⁶ Therefore, the establishment of a Romanian Jewish political organisation was perceived by its founding fathers as an act of empowerment, enabling Romanian Jews to represent their interests in a self-determined way, acting on their own authority. However, despite the fact that the overall aim of the Union was to level out differences, these differences – between the various Jewish factions in Romania, between ardent Romanian nationalists and activists of the Union and between Romanian and Western Jews – became all the more visible during the Union’s campaigns prior to the First World War, as this article will argue.

A Time of New Departure

The Union of Native Jews was founded on 27 December 1909/8 January 1910¹⁷ by Adolphe Stern, who at that time was also president of the B’nai B’rith lodges of Romania. Stern, a Bucharest lawyer and activist in Jewish affairs, started his career in 1870 as secretary to Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, the first consul of the United States to Romania. As an advocate on behalf of Romanian Jews, Peixotto was also the one to encourage the establishment of B’nai B’rith lodges in Romania. Following the example of the American fraternal organisation initially founded in 1843 in New York City, its Romanian branch was intended to both organise and shape a cadre of

14 Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 42-82, 151-160; Carol Iancu, *Les Juifs en Roumanie 1866–1919. De l’exclusion à l’émancipation* [The Jews in Romania 1866–1919. From Exclusion to Emancipation], Aix-en-Provence 1978, 265-268; Carol Iancu, *Problema emancipării evreilor români în contextul realizării Marii Uniri* [The Issue of the Emancipation of the Romanian Jews in the Context of the Realisation of the Great Union], in: *Analele Științifice ale Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași. Istorie* [Scientific Annals of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași – History], LXIV (2018), 469-489; Harry Kuller, *Opt studii despre istoria evreilor din România* [Eight Studies on the History of the Jews in Romania], Bucharest 1997, 267-283; Emanuela Costantini, *Neither Foreigners, Nor Citizens. Romanian Jews’ Long Road to Citizenship*, in: Cattalan/Dogo (ed.), *The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe*, 2-22; Adi Horațiu Schwarz, *Acțiuni ale Uniunii Evreilor Pământeni pentru emancipare*, in: *documente interne românești* (1913), [Actions by the Union of Native Jews for Emancipation in Light of Romanian Sources], in: *Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Istorie* 14 [Annals of the University of Craiova. History Series 14], 16 (2009) 2, 229-234.

15 *Jahresbericht des Zentral-Komitees des Verbandes der einheimischen Juden (Uniunea Evreilor Pamanteni) erstattet der Generalversammlung des Verbandes am 7. Januar 1912, Berlin, undated*, 8.

16 S. Schiffer, *Rumänien und seine Juden XIII.*, in: *Ost und West* 7 (1918), 223-244, here 243.

17 Romania only adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1919, therefore the first date refers to the Julian calendar, the second to the Gregorian calendar.

Jewish leaders.¹⁸ In 1909 however, Adolphe Stern ascertained that the lodge as an elite organisation was not the best suited to carry out the political fight. “I understood”, he wrote in his diary, “that we need a change of methods, a new strategy. That we have to act vigorously and openly, with tooth and nail. And that these actions are not to be carried out by groups, but have to be conducted by an organisation of the masses.”¹⁹

By emphasising the need for a “mass organisation”, Stern followed lessons learned from the past. In 1878/1879, when emancipation was being discussed by the Romanian government, Jewish leaders disagreed over the question of whether to accept the individual naturalisation of 3,000 Jewish men offered by the Romanian government as a compromise solution or to persist in their demand for collective emancipation. In the end, the Action Committee, an assembly of Jewish notables delegated by the communities, opened negotiations with the government and agreed to the compromise, much to the dismay of those championing collective rights, who accused the former of having betrayed the Jewish cause and obstructed emancipation. This conflict eventually contributed to the “non-solution of the problem”²⁰ and left the Jewish community deeply divided.²¹ As a consequence, various Jewish individuals, groups, and associations representing different interest groups with different agendas campaigned for legal equality over the course of the following years. One such group was the General Association of Native Israelites (*Asociațiunea Generală a Israelitilor Pământeni*), founded in 1890 to represent Jewish men who had completed their military service.²² Despite the fact that some of these groups organised meetings attended by several hundred people, they ultimately failed to permanently mobilise the Jewish population behind their goals.

However, things were soon to change. In 1907, a major peasant revolt shook Romania and challenged the political status quo.²³ Up to that point, the political landscape had been dominated by two big parties that had succeeded each other in power since 1881: the Conservative Party (*Partidul Conservator*), representing mainly the interests of large landowners, and the National Liberal Party (*Partidul Național Liberal*), representing mainly the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. As Romania had a restrictive census voting system, which made political rights dependent on earnings and income, the right to vote was enjoyed by no more than 1.3 per cent of the population.²⁴ Although peasants made up 80 per cent of the country’s population, they were massively underrepresented at the polls. In addition, most of them did not own enough land or no land at all to provide for their needs and were either obliged to hire themselves out to work on the latifundium of a local landlord or to

18 On Peixotto’s mission to Romania, see: Iancu, *Les Juifs en Roumanie 1866–1919*, 106–118; Lloyd P. Gartner, *Roumania, America, and World Jewry. Consul Peixotto in Bucharest, 1870–1876*, in: *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 58 (1968) 1, 24–117.

19 Adolphe Stern, *Din viața unui evreu român [From the Life of a Romanian Jew]*, ed. Țicu Goldstein, Vol. II, Bucharest 2001, 216 (all subsequent translations by the author).

20 Iancu, *Les Juifs en Roumanie 1866–1919*, 169.

21 *Ibid.*, 169–170; Sanieł Marcus, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Rumänien*, in: *Die Judenfrage in Rumänien. Eine Actensammlung vorgelegt dem Brüsseler Congress ‘pro Armenia’ vom 17. und 18. Juli 1902*, Vienna 1902, 51–97; Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. I, 201–207; Victor Eskenazy (ed.), *Moses Gaster, Memorii, (fragmente), corespondență [Memoirs, (Fragments), Correspondence]*, Bucharest 1998, 63.

22 Müller, *Erwünschte Soldaten – unerwünschte Staatsbürger*, 202.

23 On the 1907 Peasant Uprising, see: Philip Gabriel Eidelberg, *The Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt of 1907*, Leiden 1974.

24 *Academia Română. Secția de Științe Istorice și Arheologie [Romanian Academy. Department of History and Archeology]* (ed.), *Istoria românilor. De la independența la Marea Unire (1878–1918) [The History of Romanians. From Independence to the Great Union (1878–1918)]*, Vol. VII, 2, compiled by Gheorghe Platon, Bucharest 2003, 77.

lease extra land in order to supplement their inadequate holdings.²⁵ In 1907, peasant dissatisfaction turned into violent unrest. Contemporaries cast Jewish leaseholders as the main culprits for the conditions of Romanian peasantry.²⁶ However, anti-semitic discourse could not deflect from the fact that fundamental reforms were inevitable. In an effort to appease the peasantry and secure power, both parties promised agrarian reforms, the National Liberal Party even adding franchise reform to its platform in 1911.²⁷ However, the political establishment was not only challenged by the needs of a changing society, but also by newly established political parties, such as the Conservative Democratic Party (Partidul Conservator-Democrat), set up by Take Ionescu as a splinter group of the Conservative Party in 1908, the Nationalist Democratic Party (Partidul Naționalist-Democrat), founded in 1910 by Nicolae Iorga and Alexandru C. Cuza on an overtly antisemitic platform, demanding the exclusion of all Jews from Romanian society, who were blamed for the poverty of the Romanian peasants, and the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat Român), which was re-established in 1910 and campaigned for better working conditions, universal suffrage for men and women, and – as the sole Romanian party – for the emancipation of Romanian Jews.²⁸

To be sure, almost all these parties expressed their support for a broadened franchise and a redistribution of land. However, the right to vote and the right to own land remained reserved for Romanian citizens only. Consequently, seen from a Jewish perspective, the question of citizenship took on a new significance and emancipation became imperative. It was under these circumstances that Adolphe Stern called for “vigorous actions” and the establishment of a Jewish “mass organisation”.²⁹

Organising the “Jewish Masses”

Despite its aspirations, the Union did not start off as a Jewish mass movement, but rather as an organisation of notables acting on behalf of the “general interests of native Jews” and protecting their rights against further infringement by the government.³⁰ The Union was founded as an immediate reaction to a new draft law intended to ‘encourage’ the national industry by reducing the total number of ‘foreign’

25 Eidelberg, *Peasant Revolt*, 24-46.

26 Irina Marin, *The Causes of Peasant Violence and Antisemitism. The Triple Frontier between Austria-Hungary, Tsarist Russia, and Romania, 1880–1914*, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation 5 (2018) 1, 125-134; Irina Marin, *Raubwirtschaft and Colonisation. The Jewish Question and Land Tenure in Romania in 1907*, in: Raul Cârstocea/Éva Kovács (ed.), *Modern Antisemitisms in the Peripheries. Europe and its Colonies 1880–1945*, Vienna 2018, 427-445.

27 For the party program of the National Liberal Party (1911) and the Conservative Party (1913), see: Iulian Oncescu, *Texte și documente privind istoria modernă a românilor (1774–1918)* [Texts and Documents Concerning the Modern History of Romanians (1774–1918)], Târgoviște 2011, 602-604, 605-607.

28 For an overview of Romanian political parties before the First World War, see: Academia Română, *Istoria românilor*, 149-164; for the party program of the Conservative Democratic Party (1908) and the Nationalist Democratic Party (1910), see: Oncescu, *Texte și documente*, 596-602; for the party program of the Social Democratic Party, see: Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social-Politice de pe lângă C.C. al P.C.R. (ed.), *Documente din istoria mișcării muncitorești din România. 1910–1915* [Documents from the History of the Labour Movement in Romania. 1910–1915], Bucharest 1968, doc. 1, 11-42; for a history of the Social Democratic Party, see: Mariana Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage in der rumänischen Arbeiterbewegung vor 1924*, Berlin 1988; for a history of the Nationalist Democratic Party, see: Horia Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească* [A. C. Cuza's Antisemitism in Romanian Politics], Bucharest 2012, 35-63.

29 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. II, 216.

30 The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem (CAHJP), RM/323, *Uniunea Evreilor Pământeni. Reprezentanta Uniunii* [The Union of Native Jews. The Representation of the Union], *Statutul Uniunii Evreilor-Pământeni votat de Adunarea Generală din 23 Ianuarie 1911* [The Statute of the Union of Native Jews Voted by the General Assembly on 23 January 1911], Art. 2.

employees to 25 percent of all staff.³¹ As this law would have hit thousands of Jewish workers, the Union's leaders decided to take action by petitioning the legislature and fighting prejudices. The first action along this line was the elaboration of a memorandum documenting the situation of the Jewish population, which listed over 150 laws, regulations, and administrative measures that affected them as non-citizens and refuted nationalist and antisemitic arguments with statistical and historical data.³² The memorandum was published in several thousand copies, distributed throughout the country and submitted by special delegations of the Union to the king, the liberal prime-minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, the presidents of both chambers of parliament, and the leaders of the two opposition parties, namely to Petre P. Carp, leader of the Conservative Party, and Take Ionescu, leader of the Conservative Democratic Party.³³

The memorandum was mainly the work of the central committee of the Union, which already had plans for further actions like publishing a newspaper and additional brochures and organising public debates. However, for their action plan they needed to attract financial and personnel support. In order to both increase the number of members and financial resources and to expand its reach and influence throughout the country, the Union's leaders decided to establish local sections in a number of cities with a significant Jewish population by co-opting leading local Jewish personalities. However, the first attempts to organise the Jewish population failed, as only two of these sections survived their first year of existence. After this initial lack of success, the central committee started over again in 1911, but this time with a more systematic approach. With a newly adopted statute, the Union was put on a broader and more democratic basis, transforming it into a membership-based organisation.³⁴ In addition, special delegates were sent across the country to actively recruit local staff and canvass for new members. As a result of this intensified effort, the Union succeeded in (re-)establishing local sections in nearly every major Jewish population centre.³⁵

By the end of 1912, however, the activities of the Union gained new momentum. In the autumn of that year, the First Balkan War broke out. Although Romania did not participate in the conflict, there was a high possibility that the country might become involved in action. Since the Romanian army largely relied on the country's peasantry, signs increased that the National Liberal Party, at that time in opposition, would indeed push for social reforms when in power again.³⁶ The prospect of a constitutional amendment fuelled the Jewish leaders' expectations, as it was seen as a golden opportunity to renegotiate emancipation. Accordingly, the Union had to be put on a new basis. "If ever there has been a moment in time when the Jewish population needed a political organisation, then it is now", the central committee wrote to

31 Hans Kelsen, *Industrieförderung in Rumänien* (1912), in: Matthias Jestaedt (ed.), *Hans Kelsen, Werke*, Vol. III: *Veröffentlichte Schriften 1911–1917*, Tübingen 2010, 65–72.

32 CAHJP, RM/055, *Petiția Evreilor Pământeni adresată Corpurilor Legiuitoare* [Petition of Native Jews to the Legislative Bodies], 1910, unpaginated; *Legi, regulamente și măsuri administrative îndreptate împotriva străinilor și aplicate Evreilor pământeni* [Laws, Regulations, and Measures Against Foreigners Applied Against Jews], 1910, unpaginated; *Cuvântul Evreilor-Pământeni* [The Word of the Native Jews], 1910, unpaginated.

33 *Raportul Comitetului Central pe 1910*, 4.

34 *Uniunea Evreilor Pământeni. Reprezentanța Uniunii* [The Union of Native Jews. The Representation of the Union], *Raportul Comitetului Central asupra activității sale în anul 1912* [Annual Report of the Central Committee on its Activities in 1912], Bucharest 1912, 12.

35 *Jahresbericht erstattet am 7. Januar 1912*, 13.

36 *Anastase Iordache, Viata politică în România. 1910–1914* [Political Life in Romania. 1910–1914], Bucharest 1971, 140.

its local branches in November 1912.³⁷ In April 1913 it officially proclaimed “the political emancipation, meaning the mass naturalisation, of native Jews”³⁸ as its new mission. Accordingly, its primary task was now to organise and lead a Jewish political movement. The Union insisted that Jews had to speak with one voice if they wished to be heard. Therefore, the enrolment of all Jews into the organisation was considered to be imperative. In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the Union’s leaders decided to strengthen and professionalise the organisation once more. As of 1913, every local section had to name a permanent delegation, composed of two or three members, “which will work unceasingly, handling day by day the tasks at hand, the correspondence with the central council as well as with the members, etc.” and to appoint a paid full-time secretary.³⁹ Moreover, special and specially trained propaganda commissions were established, their assignment being “to convince all native Jews of their localities to enrol in the Union, not just as paying members, but as enlightened and conscious people”, “stepped for the fight we have to carry out”, and willing to stay within the movement until the “final victory”.⁴⁰ These commissions took over the task of distributing brochures, organising information events, and canvassing from door to door in every corner of the country, so as to mobilise the local Jewish population to join the Union.

Although the Union managed to establish 51 local sections by the end of 1912, rising to 80 by the end of 1914,⁴¹ the central committee constantly complained about local sections which were either inactive or did poorly in recruiting new members. The “Jewish masses” turned out to be reluctant and especially hard to recruit in the region of Moldova, where most of the Jewish population lived. In 1911, the central committee complained that “there are entire areas, especially in Moldova, where Jews do not react to anything anymore, where apathy and the lack of confidence in the ability to succeed is so pervasive that all our efforts to set them in motion and win them over were in vain”.⁴² Of course, this narrative mainly served to sooth the egos of the Union’s founding fathers. It was easier to blame the “apathetic masses” for this initial failure than to admit that the political goals promoted by the Union were actually met with scepticism and even open resistance. The Union did not only champion for emancipation but also for a certain understanding of Jewish identity. By using Romanian as its language of choice and by referring to the idea of “native Jews” in its title it placed itself in the tradition of assimilation. The concept of “native Jews” (“evrei pământeni” or “evrei români”) emerged in the 1870s in Jewish historiography as a reaction to the allegation made by the anti-emancipationist camp, which claimed that the Jews living in Romania were either foreign subjects or recent immigrants and therefore not entitled to citizenship.⁴³ Jewish historians in turn tried to proof the contrary. They argued that the Jews living in Romania deserved equal

37 Arhiva Centrului Pentru Studiul Istoriei Evreilor din Romania [Archive of the Centre for the Study of the History of Romanian Jews] (ACSIER), I 340, file 16RS, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, 1/14 November 1912.

38 ACSIER, I 340, file 48RS, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, 10/23 April 1913.

39 ACSIER, I 340, file 124, Report regarding the question of organisation, elaborated by Saniel Labin in preparation for the congress of the Union of Native Jews held on 25/26 December 1912.

40 ACSIER, I 340, file 52-52RS, all quotations from the circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees on instructions for the members of the propaganda commissions, 18/31 May 1913.

41 Opt ani de activitate.

42 Jahresbericht erstattet am 7. Januar 1912, 15.

43 Lucian-Zeev Herşovici, The Role of Historiography in the Emancipation of Romanian Jewry Before World War I, in: Shvut 16 (1993), 201-218.

rights because they had lived on Romanian territory since time immemorial, spoke Romanian, and “could no longer be placed side by side with the Polish or Russian Jew”.⁴⁴ Following this reading, assimilation was promoted as a necessary condition to political emancipation. This position, however, did not remain unchallenged. The question of assimilation split the pro-emancipationist group. Some Jewish intellectuals argued that integration could also be achieved by preserving the features of Jewish identity, which according to them were especially represented by the Yiddish language, as this was the only language known by the majority of the Jews in Romania.⁴⁵ However, there were other factions within Romanian Jewry that not only rejected assimilation but also had an ambivalent attitude towards emancipation. Whereas orthodox Jews feared that the integration of individuals as citizens into the nation state would fracture their adherence to the religious community,⁴⁶ the admittedly small Zionist movement declined assimilation and emancipation as solutions to the ‘Jewish question’ and opted for the creation of a strong national Jewish identity and eventual resettlement in Palestine instead. Socialist Jews, on the other hand, sought for a revolutionary solution to the ‘Jewish question’ as they were convinced that in a classless society religious and ethnic differences would be overcome anyhow. Therefore, the Union had to recruit local leaders representing all factions in order to succeed. These local leaders in turn had to get creative if they wanted to persuade their communities of the necessity of joining the Union. Therefore, the strategies used by every local section differed from town to town and depended on the social, political, or religious leanings of its local leaders. Dr. L. Rabinovici for instance, rabbi and leader of the Union’s local branch in Dorohoi, a city in north-eastern Romania, began by organising meetings and inviting public speakers, but eventually failed to enthuse the local Jews with the Union’s ideas. He therefore decided to make use of his position as a rabbi to reach out to them:

“On the last day of repentance [Yom Kippur], I visited virtually all synagogues and with warm words I warned my brethren [...] that they let an unforgivable sin persist, which consists in the disinterest towards a movement which has the most beautiful and sacred goal and which aspires to ensure a prosperous and dignified future for our children. The next day, almost the entire population of Dorohoi participated in the general assembly, the elderly assuring me that they had never seen such an impressive meeting before.”⁴⁷

The local section of Iași followed a different strategy. Iași, also a city in northeastern Romania, near the Russian border and at that time the country’s second most populous city after Bucharest, was not only the stronghold of Romanian antisemitism but also the cradle of the Romanian socialist movement, to which a significant minority within the Jewish community was attracted.⁴⁸ Some of them saw no contradiction in also joining the Union, as they considered that Jews and the working class were the “victims of the same evil, namely the regime of privileges installed by

44 Moses Schwarzfeld, *Ochire asupra istoriei evreilor in România din cele mai vechi timpuri până la jumătatea veacului al XIX.* [A Look at the History of the Jews in Romania from the Oldest Times until the Nineteenth Century], in: *Anuar pentru Israeliti* [Annual for Israelites], X (1887/88), 19-72, here 38.

45 Augusta Costiuc Radosav, “Tsi vos toyg a yudish blat?” Of what Use Is a Yiddish Newspaper? Yiddish as a Language of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Romania, in: *Studia Judaica*, 22 (2017), 21-49.

46 Costantini, *Neither Foreigners*, 8.

47 *Uniunea Evreilor-Pământeni, Procesul-verbal al congresului extraordinar ținut la București in zilele de 3 și 4 Noembrie 1913* [Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting Held in Bucharest on 3 and 4 November 1913], Bucharest 1914, 41.

48 Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage*, 100-106.

our oligarchy”, and therefore had a mutual enemy.⁴⁹ One of them was the socialist journalist Jean Hefter. In line with his beliefs, he chose a different approach to win over the Jewish audience. At the extraordinary congress of the Union in 1913, he criticised the Union for isolating the Jewish cause from other social issues afflicting the population. “You cannot win over the masses with abstract and vague ideas such as demanding rights”, he explained to the public.⁵⁰ Instead, their immediate interests needed to be addressed. According to Hefter, “we succeeded in attracting the masses to the Union”⁵¹ only after directly addressing Jewish workers by explaining to them how the new Law on the Organisation of Crafts⁵² – which was issued as an attempt to reduce conflicts of interest between workers and owners by creating joint guilds – not only undermined their interests as workers, but also infringed upon their rights as Jews, as only Romanian citizens were allowed to become members of the guilds’ governing boards.

The local branch in the Moldovan city of Huși found yet another way to recruit new members. If rabbi Rabinovici turned to his community and the socialist journalist Hefter to Jewish workers, the members of the Huși section tried to use their business relations in order to force the local population into the Union. In January 1913, they decided that “members of the Union of Native Jews will maintain business relations only with those Jews who are members of the Union. An exception from this obligation will, of course, be made for Christians.”⁵³ Although this decision was not implemented by the local section itself, some of its members led by example:

“Dr. Carp follows this principle in his daily life and thanks to his tenacity (Mr. Carp left the shops of all those not enlisted in the Union, not without explaining to them the reason for his behaviour) many tradesmen, employees, and craftsmen were indirectly forced to become members of the Union in order not to lose their clientele.”⁵⁴

As these examples show, the Union indeed managed to attract members of different political orientations and eventually united within its ranks secular as well as religious Jews and socialist activists as well as ardent Zionists. However, the more influential the Union became, the more it polarised the Jewish population. By 1912, when the Social Democratic Party and the Union fought together against the Law on the Organisation of Crafts, the Jewish socialist movement was already divided over the question of whether to join the Union or the Social Democratic Party, the only Romanian party also calling for the full political emancipation of the Jewish population.⁵⁵ The gulf between the two factions deepened prior to and especially after the Second Balkan War. Whereas socialists opposed Romania’s involvement in the war, the Union greeted it enthusiastically as a chance to once again prove the Jewish pop-

49 Rob.: Prin luptă [Through Fighting], in: *Adevărul*, 11 November 1913, 1.

50 Procesul-verbal al congresului extraordinar, 42.

51 Ibid.

52 *Legea pentru organizarea meseriilor, creditului și asigurărilor muncitorești*. Promulgată prin Decretul Regal No. 375 din 25 ianuarie 1912 și publicată în *Monitorul Oficial* No. 236 din 27 Ianuarie 1912 [Law on the Organisation of Crafts, Credit, and Labour Insurance. Promulgated by Royal Decree No. 375 on 25 January 1912 and Published in the Official Gazette No. 236 on 27 January 1912], Bucharest 1912. The law was strongly opposed by both the Union of Native Jews and the Social Democratic Party. On the latter, see: *Documente din istoria mișcării muncitorești*, doc. 94, 355-357 and doc. 117, 425-433.

53 ACSIER, I 340, file 165, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, 13/26 May 1915.

54 Ibid.

55 Protocol of the meeting of the Iași local committee, 5 February 1912, quoted in: *Uniunea*. *Buletinul Uniunii Evreilor Pământeni* [The Union. Bulletin of the Union of Native Jews] – Iași, 1 (February/March 1912) 2, 6-7.

ulation's patriotic loyalty to the country.⁵⁶ Consequently, the Jewish socialists started to attack the Union as "bourgeois, oligarchs, cowards, etc."⁵⁷

Despite its assimilationist agenda, the Union also managed to attract Zionists to its ranks. Moreover, some of the Zionist movement's most active members ranked among the founding fathers of the Union and consequently most Romanian Zionists joined the Union, too. They even postponed their congresses in order not to disturb the Union's political activities.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, the Zionist press felt the need to explain and justify the marriage of these conflicting currents: "The considerable development the Union of Native Jews tends to take and the considerable participation of Zionists in its activities prompts the question: Is the idea of the Union of Native Jews compatible with the Zionist idea and are they not mutually exclusive?", the newspaper *Curierul Israelit* (The Israelite Courier) asked in one of its articles in March 1913. It concluded that "if we do not identify the final goal of the Union to be assimilation in a misinterpreted sense of the word or the complete denial of our past and of every ideal, then we find that there is no incompatibility between being both a Zionist and a member of the Union."⁵⁹ However, when the Union's campaign to put emancipation onto the agenda of the newly elected constituent assembly in 1914 failed because the activities of the assembly were suspended due to the outbreak of the First World War, Romanian Zionists became increasingly impatient. Thus the Zionist newspaper *Spre Răsărit* (To the East) called for a reorganisation of the Zionist movement in August 1915 and insisted that its future leaders should under no circumstances be enrolled in any other organisation: "Lay it on the line: either Zionist or Unionist."⁶⁰ The Zionist journalist Achille M. Finkelstein, who initially argued in favour of the compatibility of the two streams,⁶¹ voiced his dissatisfaction with the Union even more bluntly: "Every Jew has the obligation to break with the so called Union of Native Jews, which is the vanguard of those groups [of renegades] who bring shame to the Jewish nation."⁶²

Despite these conflicts, the Union continued growing: In 1912, as mentioned above, it numbered 51 and in 1914 as many as 80 local branches. Even though the number of members lagged behind the targeted number of 25,000-30,000, the number thought necessary to finance the Union's political activities, the Union managed to garner altogether about 10,000-12,000 enlisted members.⁶³ As always, these figures have to be treated with caution and might not be the best indicator for the Union's political influence. However, by comparison, all trade unions together claimed to have had 14,000 members in 1912.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Union's petitions were published in every major Romanian newspaper and its goals were supported

56 Hausleitner, *Intervention und Gleichstellung*, 515-516.

57 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 38.

58 Isac Leon, *Punctul nostru de vedere față de UEP* [Our Point of View on the UEP], in: Hatikvah, 19 June 1916, quoted in: *Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România. Centrul pentru Studiul Istoriei Evreilor din România* [Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania. The Centre for the Study of the History of the Jews in Romania] (ed.), *Idealul sionist în presa evreiască din România. 1881-1920* [The Zionist Ideal in the Jewish Press of Romania. 1881-1920], compiled by Lya Benjamin/Gabriela Vasiliu, Bucharest 2001, 359.

59 Isac Avram, *Sioniștii în Uniune* [The Zionists Within the Union], in: *Curierul Israelit* [The Israelite Courier], March 17, 1913, quoted in: *Idealul Sionist*, 324.

60 *Reorganizarea Mișcării Sioniste din România* [The Reorganisation of the Zionist Movement of Romania], *Spre Răsărit* [To the East] 9 (July/August 1915), 10, quoted in: *Idealul Sionist*, 339.

61 Achille M. Finkelstein, *Nevoia unei culturi naționale* [The Need for a National Culture], in: *Bar Kochba* 2 (June 1914) 3, quoted in: *Idealul Sionist*, 332.

62 Achille M. F. Finkelstein, *O datorie de conștiință* [A Duty of Conscience], in: *Bar Kochba* 2 (October 1915) 8, quoted in: *Idealul Sionist*, 341.

63 *Opt ani de activitate*.

64 Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage*, 215-216.

by the two left-oriented newspapers *Adevărul* and *Dimineața*, which had the widest circulation in Romania at that time. Therefore, the Union might not only have had more members than probably any political party in the country, as the secretary of the Union, Saniel Labin proudly stated at the extraordinary congress of the Union in November 1913,⁶⁵ it was also one of the country's biggest political movements, which managed to mobilise supporters and opponents of Jewish emancipation alike.

Enlightening Romanian Public Opinion

In line with the principles of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Union's founders were guided by the belief that antisemitism could be combatted through education and enlightenment of both Jews and Romanians. Therefore, its political activism did not only target the Jewish population, but also Romanian public opinion and the political class. After the peasant revolt in 1907 and the foundation of the Nationalist Democratic Party, antisemitism steadily gained ground in Romania. The Union assumed that the reason for this alarming increase of antisemitism was the fact that there had never been attempts to conduct counter-propaganda on behalf of Jewish interests in the past.⁶⁶ Accordingly, they regarded it as one of their most important tasks to enlighten the public on the 'Jewish question' and later "to organise an extensive political action in favour of the idea of the emancipation of Romanian Jews".⁶⁷ In this respect, the official newspaper of the Union – called *Înfrățirea* (The Fraternisation) – became the most important propaganda medium. The newspaper, which was first published in February 1913, reached over 10,000 readers, a quarter of them being non-Jewish.⁶⁸ The Union tried hard to reach all those who had a say on the national and local level and were in the position to exert influence on behalf of the Union's cause. They therefore sent their newspaper and brochures to former and actual members of the parliament, the local administration, to mayors, teachers, and priests in both towns and villages.⁶⁹ In its articles, the newspaper attempted to acquaint its readers with the life of various Romanian Jewish communities, to stress the benefits of Jewish writers, scientists, and intellectuals for Romanian society, and to fight antisemitic prejudices.⁷⁰ Apparently, the newspaper did indeed reach a non-Jewish audience. Thus, for instance, the local committee of Oltenița, a town in southeastern Romania, informed the central committee proudly that not only Jewish readers enjoyed the Union's newspaper, but also Romanian readers complained when the newspaper did not arrive on time. Moreover, the newspaper had stimulated conversations about the Jewish cause between the Union's local members and the Romanian readers of the newspaper.⁷¹ Consequently, the Union made plans to expand the newspapers' coverage in order to reach even more Romanian readers, especially in rural areas, which were dominated by the antisemitic press. However,

65 Procesul-verbal al congresului extraordinar, 39.

66 Jahresbericht erstattet am 7. Januar 1912, 5.

67 Opt ani de activitate.

68 Ibid.

69 ACSIER, I 340, file 33, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, February 15/28, 1913; Ibid., file 38-38RS, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, probably from August 1913.

70 Kuller, Opt studii, 271-274.

71 Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), P. 6/ 12.1, file 80, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, 13/26 June 1914.

this plan had to be given up due to financial concerns and the outbreak of the First World War.⁷²

The most important target group of the Union's propaganda was the Romanian political class. Via memoranda and petitions, sent to individual delegates, the legislative bodies, or the Romanian king, they repeatedly pointed to the situation of the Jews living in Romania and tried to raise awareness of the problems resulting from their legal status. Moreover, they repeatedly called on members of the government whenever a new law infringed upon their rights, such as the aforementioned Law for the Encouragement of the National Industry. The Union's protest against the latter was a huge success: After a change in the law, Jews were for the first time put on equal footing with Romanians. Although this legal interpretation was limited to this particular law, the Union celebrated it as partial success on the way to emancipation.⁷³

Regarding its strategies, the Union emphasised "that we want to achieve the fraternisation of Romanians and Jews by legal and loyal means, conducting open propaganda throughout the country, both written and oral".⁷⁴ However, after the Second Balkan War this approach slightly changed as the dispute over emancipation became gradually more violent. As Adolphe Stern put it in his memoirs: The policy of "bowed heads" led nowhere, so "we took off our gloves".⁷⁵

Battling for Citizenship from Within – The Union's Campaign after the Second Balkan War

Romania entered the Second Balkan War in July 1913. Compared to the First World War, this campaign, which lasted only two weeks, was merely a military march through Bulgaria. Romania did not count any combat casualties. Its worst enemy was an epidemic of cholera, which cut down 6,000 men.⁷⁶ When it became clear that Romania would enter the war, the Union greeted the war enthusiastically and called upon its members to join the armed forces. The day that Romania mobilised its army, the Union's central committee announced to its members that "historical and decisive moments for the Jewish question are about to come. Our question will be discussed in its entirety as soon as the war is over. [...] The time for sacrifices has come!"⁷⁷

Indeed, about 20,000 Jewish men took part in the campaign, a considerable part of them voluntarily.⁷⁸ The war seemed like the perfect opportunity to prove the Jewish population's loyalty to the Romanian state and to overcome hatred and prejudice. Jews all over Romania hoped that a victory in war would improve their situation. These hopes were nourished by leading Romanian politicians, intellectuals, and journalists, who in the initial enthusiasm of success seemed impressed by the patriotism of the Jews and advocated for citizenship for Jewish soldiers.⁷⁹ Yet the high hopes of Romanian Jewry were soon to be dashed. When the National Liberal Party, which came to power again in January 1914, announced its program of reforms,

72 Opt ani de activitate.

73 Kuller, *Opt studii*, 269; Schwarz, *Acțiuni ale Uniunii Evreilor Pământeni*, 231, 233.

74 Jahresbericht erstattet am 7. Januar 1912, 8.

75 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 51.

76 Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913. Prelude to the First World War*, London 2000, 117–118.

77 ACSIER, I 340, file 68-68RS, Circular letter of the central committee of the Union of Native Jews to the local committees, 21 June/4 July 1913.

78 Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 60; Müller, *Erwünschte Soldaten – unerwünschte Staatsbürger*, 205.

79 Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 64–67; Iancu, *The Struggle for the Emancipation*, 144.

emancipation was not mentioned at all.⁸⁰ This drawback highly politicised the Jewish population, which felt betrayed. Consequently, the Union centred all its activities on the constituent assembly, which was expected to start work in June 1914. They published thousands of brochures and posters protesting against their exclusion from constitutional reform. However, not only the Union intensified its political fight – so did the opponents of Jewish emancipation. The most influential group and the Union’s fiercest opponent was the Cultural League. Founded in 1890 by renowned cultural personalities, the League for the Cultural Unity of all Romanians (Liga pentru Unitatea Culturală a tuturor Românilor) was initially a cultural association which sought to prepare the way for the political union of all the Romanians living in contiguous territories. The nationalism of the League blended with violent anti-semitism.⁸¹ To oppose the emancipation of the Jewish population for them was a question of national self-defence. According to them, every “true Romanian has the obligation to oppose by all available means, even violent ones, the naturalisation of the Jews”.⁸² Their campaign against emancipation was the most violent antisemitic campaign since the peasant revolt, as the League did not only instigate townsmen and villagers all over the country, but even called for pogroms.⁸³

When the Union announced in November 1913 that they would hold an extraordinary congress in order to claim their rights, the League threatened to storm the meeting. Empowered by their war experience, the Jewish participants prepared to confront the League and to defend themselves. Therefore, Adolphe Stern, the president of the congress, considered it

“a historical moment in the evolution of our movement. [...] The Jews forcefully and full-throatedly claimed their civil rights and proclaimed to fight for them without fear or hesitation. They are even determined to defend themselves against any aggression. Amongst the delegates there were also some of those mobilised in Bulgaria determined to confront the hooligans who would dare to disrupt the meeting.”⁸⁴

Inspired with new self-confidence, the Union responded to the threats launched by the League by publishing an open letter stating that they would not be intimidated in their fight. “Whatever happens, we will not disarm. Certainly, no one wants to push the Jewish population to the utmost, because oppressed minorities who are refused their fundamental right of assembly are forced to defend themselves by any means.”⁸⁵ In response to this warning, Romanian newspapers spoke of a “Jewish revolution”.⁸⁶

This warning was by no means empty rhetoric. In the run-up to one of the League’s meetings, the Jewish population in the Jewish quarters of Bucharest started to set up

80 Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 152.

81 Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf*, 160-161.

82 Uniunea Evreilor Pământeni. *Reprezentanța Uniunii* [The Union of Native Jews. The Representation of the Union], *Raportul Comitetului Central asupra activității sale în anii 1913 și 1914* [Annual Report of the Central Committee on its Activities in 1913 and 1914], Bucharest 1914.

83 On the League’s campaign against the Union of Native Jews, see: Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 76-77, 155; Müller, *Erwünschte Soldaten – unerwünschte Staatsbürger*, 205-207; Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage*, 240-241; *Kopenhagener Bureau der Zionistischen Organisationen* (ed.), Simon Bernstein, *Die Judenpolitik der rumänischen Regierung*, Copenhagen 1918, 120-123; *Raportul asupra activității în anii 1913 și 1914; Opt ani de activitate*.

84 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 46; on the minutes of the congress, see: *Procesul-verbal al congresului extraordinar*.

85 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 50.

86 *Ibid.*, 51; During the congress of the League, Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică, one of the League’s leaders, also referred to the political movement initiated by the Union as a “revolution”. See: Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică, *Ovreeii Pământeni și Subpământeni. Discurs ținut în ziua de 10 Noembrie 1913, la întrunirea ‘Ligei Culturale’ din sala ‘Dacia’* [Native and Abysmal Jews. Speech given at the Meeting of the ‘Cultural League’ Held at the Dacia Hall on 10 November 1913], Bucharest 1913, 10.

armed self-defence forces. “Tomorrow there will be a meeting of the League in Bucharest”, Stern noted in his diary. “The Jews in the Jewish quarters are arming. Let the hooligans come. They will be welcomed as they never would have expected from these always so patient Yids.”⁸⁷ Fortunately, the conflict did not escalate into pogroms, but it did lead to a politicisation of the Jewish population, to a popularisation of the Union and its claims, as well as to a polarisation of Romanian public opinion. While the members of the League and the Union were both virtually and literally fighting over emancipation on the streets of Bucharest, Adolphe Stern backed up the activities of the Union with help from abroad.

Battling for Citizenship from Abroad – Adolphe Stern’s Diplomatic Mission

As the Union’s self-imposed task was to continually intervene against discriminatory legislation, Adolphe Stern regularly called on the king, the prime minister, and relevant ministries. Despite the fact that some of his interventions were crowned with success, he felt increasingly disappointed by the lukewarm reactions of the Romanian governing class. After yet another fruitless intervention, he noted in his diary:

“We are constantly pressured to work exclusively ‘within the country and by the country’, and the Union of Native Jews adopted this motto in good faith. But how to respect it, if all those who are at the helm, even the best-intentioned, cannot do a little bit of justice, not to mention attacking the core of the problem?”⁸⁸

After the outbreak of the First Balkan War, Stern pinned his hopes to a European peace congress, which would inevitably also deal with the question of minority rights and thus tackle the rights of Romanian Jews. He therefore decided to seize the moment and ask for help from abroad.

“I am leaving on a diplomatic mission!”⁸⁹ he enthusiastically wrote in his diary in January 1913 and, as a matter of fact, he would spend the following year travelling between London, Paris, and Berlin, trying to win the support of Western Jewish organisations and political leaders and convincing them to prevail upon the Romanian government to emancipate its Jewish population.

Stern paid his first visits to Lucien Wolf, secretary of the Conjoint Jewish Committee, in London and to Narcisse Leven, president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, in Paris. Here he learned that both had already petitioned their governments on the occasion of the London Peace Conference, asking them to make the emancipation of Romania’s Jews a condition for Romania’s territorial expansion. As Stern expected that both organisations would – and indeed did – continue their campaign in favour of Romanian Jews, he volunteered to provide them with information about the situation of the Romanian Jews and the political developments in Romania.⁹⁰ However, Stern had his own ideas of how to effectively organise support from abroad:

⁸⁷ Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 48.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁰ Adolphe Stern to Claude Montefiori, 4 April 1913 and to Narcisse Leven, 7 May 1913, quoted in: Iancu, *Lupta internațională*, Vol. I, doc. 10 and 11, 77-82; on the intervention of the Conjoint Jewish Committee and of the Alliance Israélite Universelle on the occasion of the First Balkan War, see: Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 54-55; on Lucien Wolf’s campaign on behalf of Romanian Jews after the Second Balkan War, see: Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 19.

“The method of the past, publishing a couple of articles every decade, has to be changed. The sporadic and disorganised protest has to be replaced by a veritable, carefully thought out and ongoing guerrilla fight.”⁹¹ As a means to coordinate and stabilise activity abroad, in May 1913 he proposed to “our friends in Rome, Paris, and London” the creation of an International Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom.⁹² Stern’s closest ally to this effect was to become the Italian statesman Luigi Luzzati. They first met in February 1913, when Stern successfully convinced Luzzati to support the cause of Romanian Jews. Subsequently, Luzzati published a couple of much-noticed articles. Especially his “Plea to European Diplomacy to Save the Freedom of Religion” instantly became famous as Luzzati herein urged Europe to finally attend to the situation of Romanian Jews, whom he referred to as “Europe’s last slaves”.⁹³ Furthermore, Luzzati intervened directly with the Romanian government, writing two letters to the Romanian prime minister, Ion I. C. Brătianu.⁹⁴ Luzzati’s articles and interventions were based on information provided by Adolphe Stern, who deliberately kept to the side lines and declined any responsibility for the “agitation from abroad”, as he was well aware that his involvement, if discovered, would have jeopardised the Union’s goal to achieve emancipation “by the country and within the country”.⁹⁵

The idea of establishing an International Committee followed the same line of reasoning: It would have offered Stern and the Union a framework to operate from abroad without themselves coming into picture. At Luzzati’s request, the Committee was to be composed of important, mainly non-Jewish personalities.⁹⁶ As he was willing to support the Committee only if a sufficient number of others would also be willing to cooperate, both elaborated an appeal which was to be bindingly signed by its future members and then officially published.⁹⁷ In order to collect enough signatures, Stern travelled throughout Europe, visiting prominent politicians and intellectuals. Furthermore, he met with representatives of every major Jewish organisation in Paris, London, and Berlin, who assured him of their support. With combined efforts, Stern and Luzzati managed by July 1914 to collect the signatures of French writer Anatole France, French philosopher Théodule Ribot, Italian statesman marquis Emilio Visconti-Venosta, French politician Georges Clemenceau, former French prime minister Alexandre Ribot, president of the Human Rights League Ferdinand Buisson, American statesman Franklin D. Roosevelt, and American industrialist Andrew Carnegie, and to obtain a letter of support from Lord Balfour.⁹⁸ However, Stern was already making plans for further actions. He planned to initiate

91 CAHJP, RM/167, undated and unsigned letter, probably written by Adolphe Stern to Jewish organisations in Germany, June or July 1914.

92 The initiative for the committee is usually ascribed to Luigi Luzzati. See: Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 73. However, judging from Stern’s memoirs, Stern was the one to propose the creation of such a committee to Luzzati. See: Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 28.

93 For a Romanian translation of the article, see: Iancu, *Lupta internațională*, Vol. I, doc. 6, 67-70.

94 On Luigi Luzzati’s campaign, see: Luigi Luzzati, *God in Freedom*, New York 1930; Armon, *Luigi Luzzati’s Intervention*; Cristiana Facchini, *Luigi Luzzati and the Oriental Front. Jewish Agency and the Politics of Religious Tolerance*, in: Cattalan/Dogo (ed.), *The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe*, 227-245; Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor*, 56-62, 72-81; Bernstein, *Judenpolitik*, 90-105; Dumitru Ivănescu, *Die Emanzipation einer Minderheit. Die Geschichte der rumänischen Juden vom Ende des 19. bis zum Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Flavius Solomon/Alexander Rubel/Alexandru Zub (ed.), *Südosteuropa im 20. Jahrhundert. Ethnostrukturen, Identitäten, Konflikte*, Iași 2004, 76-78.

95 Adolphe Stern to Luigi Luzzati, 4 April 1913, quoted in: Iancu, *Lupta internațională*, Vol. I, doc. 9, 73-77.

96 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 28.

97 CAHJP, RM/372, undated and unsigned letter, probably written by Adolphe Stern to Jewish organisations in Germany, probably February 1914.

98 Stern, *Din viața*, Vol. III, 31-83.

a memorandum, written by various European and American members of parliament and addressed to the members of the Romanian parliament on the occasion of the first gathering of the constituent assembly, as well as a press campaign from abroad on behalf of Romanian Jewry. "What we want is publicity [...]. To keep the question on the political agenda by all available means is of utmost importance for us", Stern informed the German Jewish organisations in summer 1914.⁹⁹

If Luzzati allowed Stern to gain a foothold in international Jewish diplomacy, the International Committee was supposed to offer Stern the framework to implement his vision of a sustainable campaign in favour of Romanian Jews. It was a means to coordinate the various initiatives taken by western Jewish organisations and an attempt to entrench the Union – even if invisible as such – as an equal player in international Jewish diplomacy. However, Stern soon had to realise that bringing all organisations together was not an easy task, as they followed their own agenda rather than the Union's. As the First World War already started to cast its shadow, the Germans were unwilling to cooperate with their French counterparts if the Committee was to be based in Paris and vice versa.

When the First World War did break out in August 1914, an international cooperation between Jewish organisations and governments became impossible and all of Stern's ambitious plans had to be given up. Despite all efforts, the appeal was ultimately never published and the foundation of the International Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom was suspended. Not only the actions from abroad came to an end, the campaign "within the country" was also interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War, as the Romanian government decided to postpone constitutional revision for the time being.

Conclusions

In the end, the Union failed to achieve its goal "by the country and within the country", as emancipation was first decreed in 1918 under the German occupation and out of geopolitical considerations.¹⁰⁰ At least the Union was not alone in this failure as neither universal suffrage nor agrarian reform was implemented in Romania before the end of the First World War. What the Union could claim as its accomplishment was the fact that it had managed to gather all the different Jewish factions under its flag. However, the party truce all the rivalling factions agreed to for the duration of their common fight turned out to be a fragile one. Although assimilationists, Zionists, and socialists agreed upon the necessity of emancipation, they disagreed over the question of to what end and consequently under whose lead it should be pursued. While assimilationists hoped for a full integration into Romanian society after emancipation, both Zionists and socialists regarded emancipation only as a necessary intermediate step – Zionists towards the creation of a Jewish national consciousness and socialists towards a classless society. Thus, the fight for emancipation was paralleled by a fight for the power to define what Jewish identity was. The more

⁹⁹ CAHJP, RM/167, undated and unsigned letter, probably written by Adolphe Stern to Jewish organisations in Germany, June or July 1914.

¹⁰⁰ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others. The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938*, New York 2004, 94–96; Elisabeth Weber, *Befreier statt Barbaren. Rumänien, die Mittelmächte, die Entente und die Gleichstellung der rumänischen Juden während des Ersten Weltkriegs*, in: Cârstocea/Kovács (ed.), *Modern Antisemitisms in the Peripheries*, 351–369; Ivănescu, *Die Emanzipation einer Minderheit*, 79–80.

influential the Union became, the more Zionist and socialists questioned the leading role assimilationists intended for themselves within the Union. Then again, on a bigger scale, the Union questioned the leading role which Western Jewish organisations had claimed for themselves in the process of emancipation up until then – and which they were not prepared to give up, as the Union's failed attempt to establish itself as an equal negotiation partner to the West sufficiently illustrates. The fight for emancipation was therefore not only a fight for rights. Eventually it became a means to renegotiate power structures – on a communal, national, and global level.

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