

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – IV Issue - II (March – April) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



The Development of Higher Education and Elite Formation in the Romanian Space: From the Romanian Principalities to Greater Romania

Phd. Candidate, Horia Mihai Raut Babuta

Doctoral School of International Relations and Security Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

| **Received:** 04.03.2026 | **Accepted:** 05.03.2026 | **Published:** 12.03.2026

***Corresponding author:** Phd. Candidate, Horia Mihai Raut Babuta

Abstract

This article examines the historical relationship between the development of higher education and the formation of elites in the Romanian space from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The study aims to analyze the emergence of the modern university system in the Romanian Principalities and its subsequent expansion within Greater Romania, with particular attention to the universities of Iași, Bucharest, Cluj, and Cernăuți. Methodologically, the article adopts a historical-analytical approach based on official documents, archival sources, and specialized literature in order to investigate the institutional, political, and cultural dimensions of university development.

The analysis shows that universities functioned not only as centers of instruction, but also as mechanisms of social selection, professional legitimization, cultural authority, and national integration. Special attention is given to the transformation of Cluj and Cernăuți from former imperial institutions into Romanian universities after the First World War, as well as to the effects of interwar reforms, political radicalization, and territorial disruption on university life. The study concludes that higher education played a fundamental role in the formation of modern elites in the Romanian space and that the evolution of universities must be understood within the broader processes of modernization, state-building, and identity formation.

Keywords: elite formation, higher education, Romanian space, university history, universities.

1. Introduction

The university, as an institution of advanced education in modern societies and as a structure of fundamental importance in the development of Western civilization, has played throughout history an essential role in the formation of social, political, and cultural elites. Beyond its didactic function and its role in the transmission

of knowledge, as well as in the cultivation of scientific inquiry, the university has traditionally represented a space of selection, consecration, and legitimization for privileged categories specific to meritocratic societies, thus contributing decisively to the articulation of an intellectual and professional framework that

supported the construction and functioning of power structures in the modern state.

The university institution, born in the medieval West, rapidly established itself in Central and South-Eastern Europe, adapting to the political and cultural specificities of each region while preserving a series of common structural features: relative autonomy, the cultivation of the Latin tradition, and organization around a canonical curriculum centered on philosophy, law, theology, and medicine¹.

In the modern era, especially beginning with the nineteenth century, the university became a privileged actor in the process of modernization of European societies, particularly through the dissemination of new ideas, the training of administrative personnel, and the production of symbolic capital necessary for the consolidation of nation-states. The university model commonly described as Humboldtian, namely the one structured around the principle of the unity of research and teaching, profoundly influenced the development of higher education in the German-speaking world and, by extension, throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, universities became not only environments of instruction, but also centers of professionalization and of the construction of an official culture meant to legitimize dominant political projects, especially in the direction of industrialization.

In this context, academic mobility, *peregrinatio academica*, already present in the Middle Ages, underwent considerable development in the modern era, alongside the consolidation of international institutional networks, scholarship systems, and a transnational cultural consciousness. Students originating from the peripheral or semi-peripheral regions of Europe, including the Romanian space, increasingly turned toward the great university centers of the Habsburg Empire, Germany, or France, in search of advanced education, academic prestige, and, not least, a form of symbolic capital that could be transferred into the society of origin.²

Before the crystallization of its own state university system, the Romanian space naturally benefited from the proximity and prestige of academic centers such as Vienna, Prague, and other German universities. Young people from Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina, or the old Principalities attended, beginning in the eighteenth century, institutions of higher learning within the Habsburg Monarchy either as scholarship holders or at their own expense, attracted by the high quality of professional training and by the opportunities for social advancement offered by a doctoral or licentiate degree obtained in such an environment.

This tradition of education abroad, resumed and intensified during the interwar period, formed part of a broader context of the professionalization of Romanian elites, in which a degree obtained in Vienna or Berlin conferred not only technical competence but also considerable symbolic prestige. In this sense, the university became a site of identity and ideological formation, where young Romanians came into direct contact with new intellectual currents such as positivism, liberalism, nationalism, or even socialism, as

well as with alternative models of political and social thought. In many cases, the encounter between the results of Viennese education and indigenous realities gave rise to influential careers in administration, culture, diplomacy, or in the sphere of higher education, some of which are also examined in the pages of this study.

2. Methodology

This article employs a historical-analytical methodology to investigate the connection between higher education and elite development in Romania from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The paper posits that the university should be regarded not merely as an educational institution, but also as a mechanism for social selection, professional legitimization, and symbolic power within the larger contexts of modernization and state creation. The work methodologically integrates insights from institutional history, intellectual history, and the social history of elites. This study examines the evolution of universities in Romania in the context of significant political and historical changes, encompassing the modernization of the Romanian Principalities, the establishment of the modern Romanian state, the incorporation of Transylvania and Bukovina post-World War I, and the institutional upheavals resulting from territorial conflicts and authoritarian regimes during the late interwar and wartime periods. The analysis relies on three primary groups of sources. The first comprises governmental and legislative papers related to the organization of higher education. The second encompasses archival sources, enabling the reconstruction of administrative choices, institutional reform, and the adaptation of institutions to evolving political situations. The third category encompasses specialized literature focused on the history of universities, elite creation, academic mobility, and the extensive intellectual and political developments in Central and Eastern Europe. Significant emphasis is placed on the interplay between academic institutions, governmental policies, and the development of intellectual and professional elites. The comparative analysis of Iași, Bucharest, Cluj, and Cernăuți reveals both shared structural dynamics and significant regional disparities within the Romanian university system. The article seeks to elucidate the growth of higher education while interpreting it within the context of a broader historical framework, whereby education, status, political authority, and cultural legitimacy are intricately linked.

3. The Emergence of Higher Education in the Romanian Principalities

The indigenous structure for the formation of elites, namely the modern university academic system in the Romanian space, emerged together with the implementation of the Law of Public Instruction, published in the *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 272, on 5 December 1864.³ The beginnings of a form of higher education in the Romanian space, however, were connected to princely initiatives dating from the early eighteenth century. In Bucharest and Iași, the two political capitals of the Romanian Principalities,

¹ See S. J. Lowrie John Daly, *The medieval university, 1200–1400* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961); Janin Hunt, *The university in medieval life, 1179–1499* (London: McFarland, 2008).

² Pierre Bourdieu, *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1989), 123–149.

³ C. Lascăr and I. Bibiri, *Colecțiunea legilor, regulamentelor, programelor și diferitelor decizii și dispozițiuni generale ale acestui departament, 1864–1901* (Bucharest: Ministry of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs, State Printing House, 1901), 9–34.

the so-called “Academies” were founded and functioned, at times intermittently.⁴

These institutions, placed under the supervision of the Orthodox Church, offered courses within a rather encyclopedic framework, combining humanistic disciplines and the exact sciences, without pursuing a clearly defined professional purpose, but rather reflecting the rationalist spirit of the age. Instruction was conducted predominantly in Greek, Latin, or French. Nevertheless, early efforts to consolidate the status of Romanian as a language of teaching and intellectual communication were also present.⁵

Although modest in terms of curricula and teaching staff, these academies played a significant role in the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas and in encouraging interest in the modern sciences. Their editorial activity, carried out through translations, compilations, and editions of works circulating in the period, contributed to the diversification of the cultural offer and to the formation of an administrative elite with cultural concerns.⁶ This elite, however, remained limited in weight within the institutional structures of the two Romanian Principalities and was to a considerable extent foreign in both ethnic and educational background. This also explains why the Academy of Bucharest in particular exercised a certain attraction for young people coming from the wider Balkan space, demonstrating a capacity for regional cultural influence.

An important moment in this evolution was the reform undertaken in Iași during the 1830s–1850s. At the initiative of Prince Mihail Sturdza, the Academia Mihăileană was reorganized into two cycles, gymnasial and higher, gradually acquiring a profile closer to university education. Through the School Settlement of January 1851, the institution was organized on modern foundations, with faculties of philosophy and juridical sciences, as well as plans for future faculties of medicine and theology. The same document also sanctioned the use of Romanian as the language of instruction, a decision of major symbolic importance for the development of Romanian higher education.⁷

In Bucharest, similar initiatives were implemented in the same year, 1851, although with less institutional coherence. These efforts nevertheless resulted in the creation of higher schools intended to train personnel for the national educational system. At the same time, the princely academies remained relatively rigid institutions, oriented more toward general instruction than toward

research and scientific production. Unlike Western universities, where modern principles of specialization and intellectual autonomy were already taking shape, the Romanian “academies” imposed a uniform course of study for all pupils and did not encourage the diversification of studies or the cultivation of critical thinking.⁸

Within this process, Iași distinguished itself through sustained initiatives supported both by princely authority and by cultural and political personalities involved in broader projects of social and spiritual reform. Even so, the chronological difference between these developments and the similar efforts in Bucharest does not have decisive historical value, since disputes over precedence between the two cultural centers ultimately prove sterile. The Union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859 had consequences for the political roles of these two metropolises: Bucharest became the administrative capital, whereas Iași was symbolically invested with the role of “cultural capital,” a status further strengthened by the founding of the first modern Romanian university. On 26 October 1860, through the decree signed by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the University of Iași was founded with four faculties: philosophy, law, theology, and medicine. The founding act stipulated, among other things, the national character of the institution, the status of professors as high-ranking state officials, and the requirement that all those entering public office should hold appropriate diplomas.⁹ These provisions underlined a clear intention to modernize and professionalize elites through higher education.

At the same time, the establishment of the university at Iași was also perceived as a form of compensation for the loss of its role as political capital. Over the following decades, the University of Iași contributed to the training of a significant part of the Romanian intelligentsia, even though, from the perspective of the teaching staff, it was often regarded as an intermediate stage on the path toward academic consecration in Bucharest. In the new political capital, the process of institutionalizing higher education took concrete form only in 1863, with the establishment of the “Higher School of Letters,” intended to prepare gymnasium teachers in literature, languages, philosophy, history, and geography. Around the same time, a “Higher School of Sciences” was also created. Through Princely Decree no. 765 of 4 July 1864, these institutions, together with the school of juridical studies, were united within the new University of Bucharest, the second major university establishment of the modern Romanian state.¹⁰

4. Universities and Elite Formation in Transylvania and Bukovina

The first defining moment in the university history of Transylvania was the foundation, in 1581, of the Jesuit Academy of Cluj

⁴ It is important to note that this term must be contextualized and understood in accordance with the terminology of the period. These “Academies” are discussed in greater detail by Ariadna Camariano-Cioran in *Academiile domnești din București și Iași* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1971), and by Elena Grigoriu in *Istoricul Academiei Domnești de la Sf. Sava (Contribuții documentare)* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1978). See also Gabriel Bădărău, *Academia Mihăileană (1835–1848). Menirea patriotică a unei instituții de învățământ* (Iași: Junimea, 1987).

⁵ See Gh. Platon, *Istoria modernă a României*, vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1985), 89–92.

⁶ Ion Bulei, *O istorie a românilor* (Bucharest: Meronia, 2007), 120.

⁷ See the already cited work by Gabriel Bădărău, *Academia Mihăileană (1835–1848). Menirea patriotică a unei instituții de învățământ* (Iași: Junimea, 1987).

⁸ Lucian Nastasă, *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă. Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864–1944)* (Cluj: Limes, 2006), 13–15.

⁹ For further details, see Gheorghe Iacob and Alexandru-Florin Platon (coords.), *Istoria Universității din Iași* (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2010).

¹⁰ Ilie Popescu-Teiușan, *Contribuții la problema legislației școlare românești. Legea instrucției publice din 1864* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1963); Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu and Ovidiu Bozgan, *O istorie a Universității din București: 1864–2004* (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 2004).

(*Academia Claudiopolitana Societatis Iesu*), established at the initiative of Prince Stephen Báthory, sovereign of Transylvania and King of Poland.¹¹ The institution was conceived according to the model of Catholic academic colleges in Western Europe, with Latin as the language of instruction and a curriculum covering philosophy, theology, rhetoric, and the natural sciences. Although its full university status was at times contested by the imperial authorities, the Jesuit Academy made a decisive contribution to the formation of an educated Catholic elite in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation.

After the incorporation of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire, the educational system was subjected to a process of centralization and secularization. In 1698, the Jesuit Academy was reorganized under the name *Universitas Claudiopolitana*, with three faculties—philosophy, theology, and law. In the context of Josephinist reforms, marked by the expulsion of the Jesuit Order in 1773 and by the affirmation of Enlightenment rationalism, the institution was reduced, in 1786, to the level of a *lyceum academicum*.¹² This decision reflected the will of the Habsburg state to exercise stricter control over education and to subordinate it to imperial interests. Throughout the nineteenth century, higher education in Transylvania remained in a provisional institutional condition, oscillating between local aspirations and the educational priorities of the imperial center.¹³

A turning point came in 1872 with the founding of the Franz Joseph University of Cluj, with four faculties—Law, Medicine, Philosophy, and Mathematics-Natural Sciences.¹⁴ This institution was a direct expression of the policy of cultural Magyarization initiated by the government in Budapest after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. By ministerial decision, Hungarian became the language of instruction¹⁵, which drastically limited the access of young Romanians to higher education. In fact, Franz Joseph University was conceived as an instrument for the consolidation of the Transylvanian Hungarian elite and for the integration of the province into the political and cultural system of Hungary. Although formally open to all citizens, the university operated de facto in an exclusionary manner with regard to the Romanian majority.

The University of Cluj developed at a rapid institutional pace. Its first decades were dominated by the faculties of Law and Medicine, which attracted the majority of students. The Hungarian state invested heavily in infrastructure: between 1880 and 1909, the main university building, the medical clinic complex, and the

central library were completed. By 1910, the institution had become one of the best-equipped universities in the Hungarian Kingdom, training jurists, officials, and physicians for public administration and imperial services.¹⁶ Even so, its orientation remained predominantly utilitarian. Scientific research was subordinated to professional training, while the Faculty of Law dominated university life. Between 1884 and 1910, law students represented the majority of those enrolled, turning Cluj into a center of juridical and administrative instruction that contributed to the formation of a bureaucratic elite integrated into the structures of the Hungarian state.¹⁷

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the autumn of 1918 created the premises for a profound institutional restructuring in the eastern historical provinces. Following the Union of Transylvania with Romania, the *Consiliul Dirigent* initiated a broad reorganization of the institutions of higher education in the province, a process focused above all on the university of Cluj. On 12 December 1919, by decree of this governing body, Franz Joseph University was transformed into the University of Dacia Superior, later renamed “King Ferdinand I,” thus marking the beginning of a new stage in the institution’s history.¹⁸ The majority of the Hungarian teaching staff left the city, while the university’s infrastructure—the main building, laboratories, clinics, and library—remained under Romanian administration.

The transformation of the university of Cluj into a Romanian institution involved more than a simple administrative change; it represented a project of redefining the cultural and scientific identity of Transylvania. The replacement of the Hungarian teaching staff with Romanian professors coming from Bucharest, Iași, and Cernăuți was coordinated with the support of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs. Among the major figures involved in this reorganization were the historian Vasile Pârvan, the scholar Nicolae Iorga, the linguist Sextil Pușcariu, and the physician Iuliu Hațieganu, all of whom contributed to the design of a curriculum adapted to the needs of the new national state.¹⁹

The process of “Romanianization” was complex and often tense. Debates concerning institutional succession between the Hungarian university relocated to Szeged and the Romanian university of Cluj continued throughout the 1920s. The University of Szeged claimed the status of legal successor to Franz Joseph University, whereas the Romanian state regarded the Cluj university as the legitimate public institution of higher education in Transylvania. In practice, a dual continuity took shape: the university of Cluj inherited the

¹¹ On the foundation of the Jesuit Academy of Cluj, see György Szabados, “Báthory István egyetemalapításáról,” in *Acta Historica*, no. 127 (Szeged, 2007), 85–97.

¹² Zsigmond Jakó, “Négy évszázad a művelődés szolgálatában,” in *Korunk*, XL, nos. 7–8 (1979), 545–555.

¹³ László Marjanucz, “A kolozsvári egyetem Szegeden,” in *Tiszataj*, University of Szeged, March 2008, 77–83.

¹⁴ *1872-ik évi XIX. törvényzikk. A kolozsvári magyar királyi tudományegyetem felállításáról és ideiglenes szervezéséről, in Képviselőházi irományok 1872*, vol. I, doc. no. 95, 395–396.

¹⁵ György Gaal, *Egyetem a Farkas utcában. A kolozsvári Ferenc József Tudományegyetem előzményei, korszakai és vonzatai* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Magyar Műszaki Tudományos Társaság, 2002), 92.

¹⁶ See Viktor Karády and Lucian Nastasă, *The University of Kolozsvár/Cluj and the Students of the Medical Faculty (1872–1918)* (Budapest–Cluj: CEU-CRDE, 2004).

¹⁷ Lucian Nastasă, *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă. Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864–1944)* (Cluj: Limes, 2006), 28–29.

¹⁸ Vasile Pușcaș, *Universitate, societate, modernizare. Organizarea și activitatea științifică a Universității din Cluj, 1919–1940*, 2nd ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003), 129–130.

¹⁹ Vasile Pușcaș, *Universitate, societate, modernizare. Organizarea și activitatea științifică a Universității din Cluj, 1919–1940*, 2nd ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003), 79–245.

material patrimony, whereas that of Szeged preserved part of the academic staff and the Hungarian university traditions.²⁰

A similar trajectory can be observed in the case of Cernăuți. Founded in 1875 by Emperor Franz Joseph, the university functioned until 1918 with German as its principal language of instruction and with a cosmopolitan teaching staff made up of Germans, Jews, Ruthenians, and Romanians.²¹ After the entry of Romanian troops into Bukovina in November 1918 and the vote of union by the General Congress of Bukovina, the university passed under the authority of the Romanian state and was reopened in 1920 under the rectorship of the historian Ion I. Nistor. Unlike Cluj, where the infrastructure was exceptional, Cernăuți remained a relatively modest institution, without a faculty of medicine and with limited resources. Even so, the Bukovinian university became a center for the formation of the Romanian intelligentsia of northern Moldavia, thus contributing to the regional balance of the interwar Romanian university system.²²

At the same time, the passage from the former German university to the Romanian institution required a difficult organizational transition, documented in ministerial files relating to the reconstitution of the academic structure, the appointment of professors, and the adaptation of the institution to the legal framework of Greater Romania.²³

5. Interwar Reform, Political Pressures, and Institutional Disruption

During the interwar decade, Cluj consolidated its position as a laboratory of Romanian university modernization, where new forms of organization, research, and international cooperation were tested. Among the most innovative initiatives was the creation, in 1924, of the University Extension program, inspired by the English model of University Extension, through which the university sought to place science “in the service of the people.”²⁴ The initiative of the sociologist Virgil I. Bărbat, supported by Minister Alexandru Lapedatu, opened the university toward society through lectures, public courses, and cultural activities, attempting to

combine the ideal of pure science with that of civic education.²⁵ In this sense, the period 1919–1930 represented the moment when the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți were transformed from former imperial institutions into centers of national education. Through their resources, the profile of their professors, and their ideological orientation, these universities contributed decisively to the formation of the Romanian interwar intellectual elite, which would later play an essential role in the political, scientific, and cultural life of Greater Romania.

Beginning with the 1930s, Romanian universities entered a new phase of administrative consolidation and legislative reform. In 1932, on the initiative of Nicolae Iorga, the Law on the Organization of University Education was promulgated. It consecrated university autonomy and established the principles governing the operation of institutions of higher learning in Greater Romania. The law granted legal personality to universities and faculties and introduced, for the first time, an Inter-University Council composed of the rectors and deans of all universities, whose role was to coordinate scientific policy and university budgets. At the same time, the law specified the fundamental purposes of the university: promoting science, educating the state's elites, and spreading culture among the masses.²⁶

These regulations had direct consequences for the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți. In Cluj, the measures facilitated the advancement of younger generations of scholars, while the Bukovinian university suffered from the loss of valuable professors who did not meet the new formal criteria.²⁷ At the same time, the tense political climate of the 1930s strongly affected university life. Economic crises, governmental instability, and the rise of authoritarian currents led to an intense politicization of the student environment. Phenomena such as university antisemitism, visible especially in Iași and Cluj, were denounced both in internal ministerial reports and in the work of the historian Lucian Nastasă, who examined the limits of “tolerated alterity” within the interwar university system.²⁸ In this context, the interwar reform of universities should be understood not merely as an administrative act, but also as an instrument of social and moral construction. Ion Petrovici synthesized this perspective in his lecture *Menirea Universităților* (1928), arguing that the purpose of the university was not only to train professionals, but also to form individuals of culture and national responsibility.²⁹

²⁰ László Marjanucz, “A kolozsvári egyetem Szegeden,” in *Tiszataj*, University of Szeged, March 2008, 77–83.

²¹ Erich Prokopowitsch, *Gründung, Entwicklung und Ende der Franz-Josephs-Universität in Czernowitz (Bukowina-Buchenland)* (Clausthal-Zellerfeld: Pieper Verlag, 1955).

²² Lucian Nastasă, *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă. Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864–1944)* (Cluj: Limes, 2006), 33–34.

²³ For information on the transition from the former German university to the Romanian one, as well as on the organizational beginnings of the Romanian university in Cernăuți, see Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Municipiului București, Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice, dos. 443/1920; Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Municipiului București, Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice, dos. 451/1921, fols. 1–160.

²⁴ Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, *Cetatea universitară. Texte și evocări*, anthology edited by Mircea Popa and Viorica Sâncrăian (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001), 62–84.

²⁵ Dan Dungăciu, “«Mesianismul pozitiv» al sociologiei românești. Virgil Bărbat și Extensiunea Universitară,” in *Revista Română de Sociologie*, VII, nos. 3–4 (1996), 280.

²⁶ *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 96, 22 April 1932, 2715–2731.

²⁷ Vasile Pușcaș, *Universitate, societate, modernizare. Organizarea și activitatea științifică a Universității din Cluj, 1919–1940*, 2nd ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003), 190–192.

²⁸ Lucian Nastasă, “Die Unmöglichkeit des Andersseins. Überlegungen zum universitären Antisemitismus in Rumänien 1920–1940,” in *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte*, vol. 4 (2001), 6–67; Lucian Nastasă, *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919–1939). Mărturii documentare* (Cluj: ISPMN/Kriterion, 2011).

²⁹ Ion Petrovici, “Menirea Universităților,” in *Minerva* (Iași), II, no. 2 (1928), 20–37.

At the same time, the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți were called upon to assume a more active cultural and civic role. Through University Extension, student scientific circles, and newly founded research institutes—such as the Institute of Psychology directed by Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă—the university of Cluj became a model of modernization for the entire Romanian university system.³⁰

This fragile balance was abruptly broken in 1940. As a result of the territorial losses caused by the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact and by the Vienna Dictate, Romania was forced to evacuate the universities of Cernăuți and Cluj. The professors from Cernăuți were redistributed to other university centers. North-Western Transylvania was ceded to Hungary, while the University of Cluj was provisionally relocated to Sibiu, with its technical sections transferred to Timișoara.³¹ In the university buildings of Cluj, the Hungarian university was re-established, and Romanian academic life had to reorganize itself in a form of internal exile.

Under these dramatic circumstances, Decree-Law no. 3670, concerning the adaptation of higher education to the structure of the National Legionary State, was issued on 2 November 1940, reflecting the ideological orientation of the new regime.³² Although it remained in force for only a few months, until the removal of the Legionary Movement, the law attempted to subordinate the universities to the new political order. After January 1941, Ion Antonescu's regime reconfigured higher education through Decree-Law no. 1535 of 23 May 1942, which stated that the mission of universities was “to train elites through the theoretical orientation of future professionals and the formation of men of science, to promote and disseminate science, technology, and art.”³³ Despite the war, the universities in exile at Sibiu and Timișoara continued their academic activity, preserving scientific standards and a spirit of university solidarity.³⁴

Thus, between 1872 and 1944, the history of the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți illustrates a process of continuity and transformation within a multicultural space constantly situated at the intersection of empires, nations, and confessions. Their evolution can be understood only in relation to the political, confessional, and social changes that defined Central and Eastern Europe in the modern age.

6. Conclusion

The historical evolution of higher education in Romania illustrates that the university significantly contributed to the emergence of contemporary elites. From the initial academies of Bucharest and Iași to the institutional consolidation of the universities in Iași, Bucharest, Cluj, and Cernăuți, higher education served not merely

³⁰ Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, *Cetatea universitară. Texte și evocări*, anthology edited by Mircea Popa and Viorica Sâncrăian (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001), 62-84.

³¹ Jean A. Vătășescu, *Réorganisation, créations, activité de l'Université Ferdinand Ier réfugiée de Cluj* (Sibiu: Tipografia „Cartea Românească din Cluj”, 1943), 15-19.

³² *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 257, 2 November 1940, 6276-6277.

³³ *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 118, 23 May 1942, 4228-4250.

³⁴ Jean A. Vătășescu, *Réorganisation, créations, activité de l'Université Ferdinand Ier réfugiée de Cluj* (Sibiu: Tipografia „Cartea Românească din Cluj”, 1943), 15-19.

as an instructional framework, but also as a venue for selection, social mobility, professional accreditation, and symbolic validation.

The analysis indicates that the development of universities was intricately connected to significant political transformations of the modern age. The modernization of the Romanian Principalities, the establishment of the national state, the incorporation of Transylvania and Bukovina post-World War I, and the crises instigated by authoritarian regimes and territorial losses significantly impacted the structure, objectives, and societal function of higher education. Universities were influenced by political change, while they also played a significant role in shaping the administrative, intellectual, and cultural frameworks that underpinned the state and its institutions.

The Romanian university landscape must be contextualized within the broader framework of Central and Eastern Europe. Academic mobility, engagement with prominent international universities, and the transfer of institutional and intellectual paradigms have substantially enhanced the education of Romanian elites. The university served as both a national institution and a conduit to broader European academic and cultural networks.

The instances of Cluj and Cernăuți exemplify the intricate interplay between higher education, political power, and identity development within a heterogeneous and frequently volatile regional framework. Their evolution signifies both the growth of the Romanian university system and the conflicts arising from imperial legacies, national integration, ideological strife, and institutional displacement.

In conclusion, the university should be considered a primary mechanism for the formation, organization, and legitimization of contemporary Romanian elites. The history of higher education in Romania is intrinsically linked to the history of modernization, since universities played a crucial role in developing professional competence, cultural status, and public authority within modern Romanian society.

References

1. Bădărău, G. (1987). *Academia Mihăileană (1835–1848). Menirea patriotică a unei instituții de învățământ*. Iași: Junimea.
2. Berciu-Drăghicescu, A., & Bozgan, O. (2004). *O istorie a Universității din București: 1864–2004*. București: Editura Universității București.
3. Bourdieu, P. (1989). *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
4. Bulei, I. (2007). *O istorie a românilor*. București: Meronia.
5. Camariano-Cioran, A. (1971). *Academiile domnești din București și Iași*. București: Editura Academiei.
6. Croicu, M., & Croicu, P. (Eds.). (1978). *Scrisori către Ioan Bianu* (Vol. IV). București: Minerva.
7. Daly, L. J. (1961). *The medieval university, 1200–1400*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
8. Dungaciu, D. (1996). „Mesianismul pozitiv” al sociologiei românești. Virgil Bărbat și Extensiunea Universitară. *Revista Română de Sociologie*, 7(3–4).
9. Gaal, G. (2002). *Egyetem a Farkas utcában. A kolozsvári Ferenc József Tudományegyetem előzményei, korszakai és vonzatai*. Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Magyar Műszaki Tudományos Társaság.

10. Grigoriu, E. (1978). *Istoricul Academiei Domnești de la Sf. Sava (Contribuții documentare)*. București: Didactică și Pedagogică.
11. Hunt, J. (2008). *The university in medieval life, 1179–1499*. London: McFarland.
12. Iacob, G., & Platon, A.-F. (Coords.). (2010). *Istoria Universității din Iași*. Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.
13. Jakó, Z. (1979). Négy évszázad a művelődés szolgálatában. *Korunk*, 40(7–8), 545–555.
14. Karády, V., & Nastasă, L. (2004). *The University of Kolozsvár/Cluj and the Students of the Medical Faculty (1872–1918)*. Budapest–Cluj: CEU-CRDE.
15. Lascăr, C., & Bibiri, I. (1901). *Colecțiunea legilor, regulamentelor, programelor și diferitelor decizii și dispozițiuni generale ale acestui departament, 1864–1901*. București: Imprimeria Statului.
16. Marjanucz, L. (2008). A kolozsvári egyetem Szegeden. *Tiszataj*, 77–83.
17. Nastasă, L. (2001). Die Unmöglichkeit des Andersseins. Überlegungen zum universitären Antisemitismus in Rumänien 1920–1940. *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte*, 4, 6–67.
18. Nastasă, L. (2006). *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă. Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864–1944)*. Cluj: Limes.
19. Nastasă, L. (2011). *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919–1939). Mărturii documentare*. Cluj: ISPMN/Kriterion.
20. Petrovici, I. (1928). Menirea Universităților. *Minerva*, 2(2), 20–37.
21. Platon, Gh. (1985). *Istoria modernă a României* (Vol. I). București: Didactică și Pedagogică.
22. Popescu-Teiușan, I. (1963). *Contribuții la problema legislației școlare românești. Legea instrucției publice din 1864*. București: Didactică și Pedagogică.
23. Prokopowitsch, E. (1955). *Gründung, Entwicklung und Ende der Franz-Josephs-Universität in Czernowitz (Bukowina Buchenland)*. Clausthal-Zellerfeld: Pieper Verlag.
24. Pușcaș, V. (2003). *Universitate, societate, modernizare. Organizarea și activitatea științifică a Universității din Cluj, 1919–1940* (2nd ed.). Cluj-Napoca: Eikon.
25. Stan, A.-M. (2021). De la separatism regional la centralizare: două proiecte legislative ale universitarilor clujeni privind reforma învățământului superior românesc după 1918. *Plural*, 9(1), 141–144.
26. Szabados, G. (2007). Báthory István egyetemalapításáról. *Acta Historica*, 127, 85–97.
27. Ștefănescu-Goangă, F. (1937). *Lege pentru completarea unor dispoziții din Legea învățământului universitar*. Cluj: Tipografia Cartea Românească.
28. Ștefănescu-Goangă, F. (2001). *Cetatea universitară. Texte și evocări*. Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
29. Vătășescu, J. A. (1943). *Réorganisation, créations, activité de l'Université Ferdinand Ier réfugiée de Cluj*. Sibiu: Tipografia „Cartea Românească din Cluj”.
- szervezéséről. (1872). În *Képviselőházi irományok 1872* (Vol. I, doc. nr. 95, pp. 395–396).
2. *Monitorul Oficial*. (1932, April 22). Nr. 96.
3. *Monitorul Oficial*. (1938, November 4). Nr. 257.
4. *Monitorul Oficial*. (1940, November 2). Nr. 257.
5. *Monitorul Oficial*. (1942, May 23). Nr. 118.

Archival Sources

Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Municipiului București, Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice, dos. 411/1919.

Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Municipiului București, Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice, dos. 443/1920.

Official Documents

1. *1872-ik évi XIX. törvénycikk. A kolozsvári magyar királyi tudományegyetem felállításáról és ideiglenes*