

Journalism in Transylvania during WWI – Between Censorship and Propaganda. Case Study: *Libertatea* newspaper

Carmen ȚĂGȘOREAN, Ph.D. candidate

Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca

Email: carmen.tagsorean@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract. *The First World War, one of the most difficult times in the Romanians' history, during which the opportunity of uniting Transylvania (part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at the time) with Romania became real, generated counter-measures from the Hungarian authorities, and the press was the hardest hit. Besides a more severe censorship of the Romanian press in Transylvania, jail sentences and steep fines for printing ideas different from the official line, the Hungarian authorities used the Romanian press to manipulate the population and for propaganda purposes with regard to Romania's position in the war and toward the Central Powers. Most Romanian newspapers in Transylvania ceased to exist during the war. This is a case study of a newspaper – Libertatea – that managed to survive, but that was subjected to the abuse of censorship, manipulation and propaganda.*

Keywords: *Transylvania, WWI, propaganda, manipulation, censorships, press.*

Theoretical framework

At the beginning of WWI, we can identify two categories of journalists: “the foot soldiers” and “the ivory tower” ones. The first ones are those in the field gathering information who then pass it on to the ones in the “ivory tower” who work on it and synthesize it (Hentea, 2000, 9). Even though the military profession has nothing to do with journalism, at a closer look we can identify a number of common traits:

devotion, initiative, ability to make critical decisions in a crisis (Clem, 1992, 63). For a journalist to do his job, he needs free access to the battlefield, freedom of movement within that area, and access to official military information. In case one of these conditions are not met, the accuracy of the data becomes doubtful. Unfortunately, more often than not, the military curtailed access to information or war zones by claiming "military secret". (Hentea, 2000, 18). A war correspondent is usually up against a few very specific hurdles. Kevin Williams sets the norms as follows: "to tell the truth" (Regardless of the reaction triggered by the news at home, the journalist has the obligation not to hide the reality on the battlefield), "the nation's victory in war" (the press must be different from the propaganda machine), and "the right of the public to be informed" (based on the assumption that the public wants to know what's going on, and the journalist claims to act on people's behalf when his requests for information are met with resistance from authorities), "military censorship" (which was always there as a means to conceal errors, defeat, or horrors of war), "self-censorship" (which comes either from fear for personal safety, or the editor's decisions), "to do your job as a journalist" (the speed of unfolding events may hinder his duty to sift through and verify the information which in case of error it may turn him easily into a victim of manipulation), "truth to whom and for whom" (it's hard to draw a line between truth and falsehood, authentic and manipulation) (Williams, 1992, 155-168).

During military conflicts, we can identify three types of actors, each following a secret agenda: the military (that wants to limit public's access to information or use the media for disinformation), the politicians (who want to win over the public's support for their decisions thus holding on to their positions), and journalists (who crave sensational news to increase circulation and the prestige of their newspaper) (Hentea, 2000, 86-88). These three actors' (the military, the politicians, and the media) perception and the handling of the headline news can be very different. Even minor events like: the low quality of food on a military menu, a soldier's desertion from his unit, an act of mutiny, may be considered minor by an officer, but great news for a reporter in terms of news shortage (Hentea, 2000, 22). Regardless of the journalist's eagerness, it is hard, if not impossible, for him to get a complete picture of the battlefield. As a result, his reports are sketchy at best (Hentea, 2006, 27). Moreover, in reporting the news, the human factor may cut in, and subjectivity may take its toll on accuracy. It's all in the eye of the beholder. This explains why, sometimes, "the journalist offers to his reader a totally different explanation of an event he himself witnessed, but his own version is not as interesting and well described as the one in the newspaper (Teodorescu, 2007, 324).

The truth from the front depends on factors like witnesses' testimony, official reports about casualties' identification and property destruction, and official press releases that the journalist has limited access to (Hoskins, O'Loughlin, 2010, 65).

In time of war there is no freedom of movement around the front zone. Check-points are set up everywhere and special permits are required even for the local population. The military have to guard their secrets because spies are milling around with permits. Even civilians come under scrutiny from the army counterintelligence. Rumors abound, people talk about what they see happening and exchange ideas. "Loose lips sink ships", but it's hard to sort out fact from fiction. Under the circumstances, the job of a reporter is extremely difficult. His movements are limited by the draconic laws of secrecy and communication with his main office is hard. His reports become sketchy and inaccurate, based on hear-say, or worse, manipulation.

Propaganda has always been part of our lives, only its techniques have changed over time. It has become a weapon like any other, but in time of war its role increases tremendously with a lot of newer means, specially developed to do its part for winning a particular type of war (Hetea, 2002, 7-8). For these reasons, the war propaganda, compared to other types, features very specific goals, with the motivation of the soldiers and of the civilian population while trying to do the opposite to the enemy (Teodorescu, 2007, 318). The government has the hard job to convince the public opinion that the war is right for the country and to boost the morale of both the population and the military. Motivation becomes of utmost importance: "Our cause is holy, our enemy is the aggressor", our values are genuine, the enemy lacks morals and scruples. The enemy can only be depicted as "the usurper" – cruel, greedy, corrupt and dictatorial. Everything that's negative in the vocabulary of a language is thrown at the enemy (Raquin, 2007, 36).

The easiest means of communication for this purpose is the printed press (Hoskins, O'Loughlin, 2010, 162). As far as propaganda is concerned, "the newspaper is the principal instrument" (Domenach, 2004, 65), this being an extremely useful "instrument to invade and keep under permanent control the field of ideas of the community that's supposed to be dominated" (Teodorescu, 2007, 247).

Experts know that in order to be successful, propaganda should be based on bits of truth because "you cannot impose the masses any idea at any time". Propaganda has to be based on a preexistent backdrop because any nation has its own sensitivities "that propaganda seizes and exploits" (Domenach, 2004, 83-84).

The WWI imposed the priority of the national interest over the truth: "The first lesson drawn from World War I with regard to the press was to demonstrate the inability of the mass-media to oppose the irresistible combination between the political-military imperatives and the patriotic appetite of the public opinion in a country fighting for her supreme values and interests" (Hentea, 2000, 40).

Winning over the public opinion can be done in many ways, but two have been proven effective in history: drawing a false picture of the adversary depicted as a monster, as an inferior animal species, or by presenting an inflated image of one's own army while lessening the importance of the losses (Kunczik, 2002, 30-37).

For the propaganda machine to be effective, it's absolutely necessary to also gain access to the international public opinion. Through shrewd manipulation propaganda may be able to turn some foreign institutions into "judicial institutions that can enlighten and give direction to it." It's the only explanation why the countries involved in the conflict publish their diplomatic correspondence that becomes "the dossier of the trial" (Gusti, 1995, 109).

Referring to the quality of information printed in the German press during WWI Emperor Wilhelm told reporters: "I'd like to congratulate you. You are unbelievable! Thank you very much! You're doing a great job! I'm delighted to read your articles. They are full of patriotic fervor. It is extremely valuable for our men in the trenches if we can deliver it to them" (Kunczik, 2002, 19).

Due to the strong beliefs thus created in readers by the independent newspapers, the press becomes a powerful stream that cannot be controlled by the government. The manipulation of the public opinion can be successful only if all the sources of information are in the hands of the state, in other words- censored (Ficeac, 1998, 54).

The Hungarian censorship of the Romanian press in Transylvania had been in effect before WWI broke out. As Nicolae Iorga points out, "Press-related trials are raining down on the other side of the mountains: the defendant can be sure he's going to be found guilty, unless he finds some strong support from both the Romanians and the Hungarians in high places". There were trials to which the jurors came with the written verdict in their pockets (N. Iorga, 2008, 196).

Hungary was just mocking the freedom of the press in Transylvania, including that for the large Romanian minority. But there were numerous cases in which the Romanian journalists paid a steep price for the illusion that they were free to publish what they wanted. More often than not they served time in jail or paid stiff fines for the articles they published by defying censorship. Even publishing a translated article from the Hungarian press, critical of the authority, triggered reprisals-jail time or fines. The editorials in *Libertatea*, *Unirea*, *Țara noastră*, for example (*Ibid.*, 47). A few examples are related to *Libertatea* newspaper whose editor was sentenced to 3 months in jail and an 800-crown fine for publishing an article during the parliamentary elections of 1906, in which he urges the Romanians "to unite for victory". Another example is that in which the newspaper is sued by the Hungarian authorities for supporting the Romanian national candidate, Vasile Lucaciu, in the same elections (*Ibid.*, 285).

The state of the press in Transylvania was regulated by law XIV, of 1914, whose wording was "totally cunning" because despite the statement that the press was "free to communicate in writing any ideas and to found freely newspapers", in the following articles "these rights get so twisted by other provisions that in the end they get totally suppressed". Some of these provisions of the same law demand that all the newspapers "post bail" (an amount of money) from which the Hungarian

authorities can draw money in case the newspaper has to pay a fine for breaking the rules in Law XIV. The responsibility for obeying the law was split among the article's author, the editor, and the printer. As far as marketing the newspapers was concerned, those with a political profile needed a special permit to sell locally, while for the newspapers that wanted to go nationwide a license from the Minister of Interior was required. Moreover, for a new publication a notice of 15 days prior to launching was also required (Theodorescu, 1941, 84-85).

Although under severe Hungarian censorship, the Romanian press in Transylvania "set high moral and patriotic standards, with a strong Romanian feeling" and played an essential role in galvanizing the energy of the Romanians throughout the province, with debates on politics, law, linguistics, history etc. that spread both around Transylvania and the sister province in the south, Muntenia, (aka The Old Kingdom), over time turning into the same forum with valuable contributions that, in the end, led to numerous cultural and political achievements of the oppressed Romanian community (Vasiliu, 2001, 110-111). The circulation numbers show how great the demand for Romanian newspapers was in the province. "What gave the city of Braşov a peculiar image was the special edition of these newspapers. People simply snatched them from vendors and, for the first time, people could be seen reading the newspaper in the street" (Puşcariu, 1978, 14).

A positive development was the content dedicated to the people in the countryside, as the Romanian provinces' population was predominantly rural, which, among other things, promoted the Romanian national ideals. ("The materials published in these Romanian newspapers were constantly making the difference between the policies coming from Austria and those of the Austrian-Hungarian origin, both oppressive, but affecting Romanian and Hungarians alike, who, otherwise, were living side by side peacefully"). The materials published in the press were educational for both nationalities (Manciu, 2001, 17-18).

Transylvania was the first place where the offices for the censorship of the press to be set up ("group for the press censorship"). All newspapers coming from enemy countries were banned, while those coming from Romania proper had to be approved by the Vienna, Austria office (Grecu, 2005, 374). Censorship worked by either banning an entire article from being printed or only some paragraphs seen as inappropriate. It became the norm that newspapers were published with a lot of blank columns just because the articles that were supposed to fill them were banned (*Ibid.*, 369).

Case Study: *Libertatea*

The weekly *Libertatea*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Transylvania, was founded in Orăştie, in 1907. At the outbreak of WWI, due to the scarcity of information, the editors decided to publish it twice a week. Another change in

the life of the paper was its relocation from Orăștie to Bucharest, from Bucharest to Cleveland (Ohio, USA) and to Orastie again, at the end of 1918. The newspaper targeted the common folk living in rural communities, and the materials published were not only easy to understand, but also useful. Under the circumstances, the topics revolved around the war in progress: the unfolding war operations, (military draft, official announcements, and praise for the armies of the Central Powers), and information for the soldiers' families. Although the paper was forced to carry the official line of announcements, decrees, ordinances, rules and laws, in a very subtle way, it also carried the idea of unification between Transylvania (province in Austrian-Hungarian Empire) and Romania proper, the motherland in the south, an economic powerhouse, courted by all sides to join the war.

The Hungarian authorities continuously issued memo after memo to all newspapers with regard to the new regulations concerning censorship. The pinnacle of this campaign was reached when these authorities ordered all the newspapers to take their editions to the local police prior to printing. "The latest was to show the newspaper to police to get approved" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 5). By inserting this piece of news, the editor warned the reader that their publication had fallen under the total control of the hostile authorities and, as a consequence, the content became unreliable (*Libertatea din Ardeal*, 1916, issue#24, 5). *I knew, but we couldn't tell the truth* was the title of an article confirming that the war censorship was hard at work. Even when the news was abundant, the press couldn't make it public out of fear of reprisals under the censorship laws, as any news about the war may do harm to "military secrets" and its interests (*Libertatea din Ardeal*, 1916, issue#24, 5).

After the newspaper *Libertatea* moved to Bucharest, in the relatively free province of Romania, (also in a state of war, but against the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the oppressor in Transylvania), it started speaking openly about censorship. Now the editors could speak freely about censorship and manipulation in their editorials: "In the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, just like in Germany, lie is every-day food with which governments feed the masses, hungry of news from the battlefield" (*Libertatea of Ardeal*, 1916, issue#11, 2-3).

An ample editorial explains to the readers how the censorship in Transylvania works, and what information is totally ruled out from print. Even poetry was under scrutiny. It's the case of A Romanian woman who lived in Budapest whose poem was censored due to the fear that it may contain some hidden message. Any kind of written message in any form that could generate fear or doubt in the masses was forbidden, not to mention any message that would create public panic or revolt. Censorship was carried out in red ink and "only what he [the censor] approved could be published" (*Libertatea of Ardeal*, 1916, issue#13, 4).

It would suffice to check the information sources of this newspaper to become skeptical about the accuracy of the news it published. Information was extracted

from publications in Vienna and Berlin, and occasionally, Bucharest. The information and the titles in that press favored the German and Austrian-Hungarian governments that were keen on spreading rumors about their infamous enemies, *The French, who dropped poison in the water fountains in German territory* (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#35, 3) or that a *German warship shelled a Russian port!* (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#35, 2) compared to news of a lesser impact: *The stand of Italy* or *The Poles in the Balance* (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#35, 3).

It is surprising the amount of information on censorship that is floating around in the era. The situation becomes disturbing even for the press in Budapest that appeals the authorities hoping for a break (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#36, 5). Interestingly, the press in Budapest was censored even when their articles had nothing related to the army or the war. (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#36, 2).

Censorship was not fully in place when the newspaper published an article titled *Hungarians of Romania a Slap at the Hungarian authorities*: "Imagine what the papers and the Hungarian prosecutors would say about us if we sent this kind of letter to the political rulers of Romania, telling them that: When your call will sound out, we will beat any hurdle, we will sneak through the forest at night, and we will line up behind the Romanian flag! etc. They would break our necks if we spoke like that". The paper publishes a letter addressed to Karolyi in which he is praised for the struggle he and his party are putting up (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#31, 3).

The propaganda machine was targeting both the Romanian population in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the Romanian authorities in the province of Muntenia (part of the The Old Kingdom). On one hand, it was an attempt to weaken the patriotic feelings of the Romanian population in Transylvania, who secretly hoped for a union with Romania proper, while, on the other hand, to cultivate the idea that the Romanian minority was loyal to the Empire and quite happy living there. The written press was their favorite tool to pursue that goal because it covered a lot of ground and had a certain prestige among a population with little education. For the Romanians in Transylvania, the press was not only a means of information, but also a bond among themselves and a direct connection to the motherland, Romania.

Since the outbreak of the war, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire had tried to get Romania on its side against Serbia. Romania's actions and decisions were employed by the Hungarian authorities to demotivate the Romanian minority in Transylvania from patriotic fervor. Editorials on Romania's neutrality became very frequent and, at one point, daily. From criticizing the neutrality, it moved to denouncing her position on supporting the Central Powers, in order to suggest that the Romanian minority in Transylvania was abandoned by the motherland. If this campaign had worked, the Romanians there would have stayed loyal to the Empire and even would have fought for it for the entire duration of WWI. In retrospect, reading the chronicles of the time, we realize how much tension those events generated, largely

reflected in the press on both sides of the trenches. Both camps scrambled to create new rules, laws, and strategies to win over both the national and international public opinions. The energy and the money spent on such an effort were truly remarkable.

Some of the first positions of the Romanian government are reflected in the *Libertatea* newspaper. The Romanian prime-minister, Ion I.C. Brătianu and the minister of Foreign affairs, Emanoil Porumbaru, were the first to express the official position, stating that: "Romania will not do anything about the war going on between Austria-Hungary and Serbia because it will not touch any of her business interests for the time being", but "In case the situation changes, Romania is ready to take the steps to defend, in the best way she can, the Balkan Peace" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 2). The newspaper also publishes some reports coming from Budapest which hint that Romania would lean towards an alliance with the Central Powers, but it also mentions the Romanian King's declaration that he would abide by "the Crown Council's decision to stay firmly neutral". Although a severe censorship was now in place, the journalist was still able to send a warning to the Transylvanian readers about the accuracy of news coming from Budapest, "the news contrary to this position that are spread here and there by the word of mouth, or written in different papers should be regarded as dubious" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#37, 4-5).

The diplomatic efforts of the Central Powers and Russia to get Romania on their side were justified as this may have tipped the balance in their favor to win the war. "What can we make of all this? That neither of the two giant camps in conflict is sure of victory, but with Romania and Italy on their side that will surely be victorious". "We don't know what Romania will do" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#38, 3).

The newspaper gives ample space to one of King Carol's declarations that tied in with the interest of the Central Powers. The Romanian monarch "was convinced that the great interests and the future of the country demand that we follow a policy of good will with the Central Powers" and, "the friendship with the two Central Powers does not come from emotions, but it is demanded by interests easy to understand. While Russia is faking friendship, her policy is totally contrary to our country's interests. (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#52, 3).

With talent and wit, the Romanian journalists manage to get their messages across to their brothers living in Transylvania under Hungarian control, through ideas implied, not stated, trying to raise their patriotic pride and fervor. One of these messages belongs to István Tisza himself: "It is that in great times like these great truths from the bottom of the nations' souls rise to the surface and all the petty frictions of daily life vanish". In the opinion of the Hungarian prime minister, "Romanians have to demonstrate their loyalty to the country." The Romanian journalist's comment: "Words with twisted meanings" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#35, 6).

Just as history demonstrated, the Transylvanians paid close attention and became very receptive to the subtleties in Tisza's statements and totally committed themselves

to the national cause of unification with their motherland, Romania. A specialist in psychology and a fine diplomat, István Tisza is always present in the press of the time, with words of praise for both the Romanians in the Empire and in Romania proper, the Old Kingdom, in an attempt to change the perception of the Romanian nation about their Transylvanian brothers. He is trying hard to demonstrate that the Transylvanians, as citizens of the Empire, are loyal to the Hungarian cause: "I'm happy that I can confirm that the Romanian population in Hungary takes part with patriotic fervor to the great effort we are pursuing, for the order, civilization, and freedom in the South-Eastern European tradition. Our Romanians won't flinch in the great task that has united all the nationalities around the throne of our country under attack. The reservists are happily going to their regiments; all of them: women, children and elderly alike do their patriotic duty". This is to imply that all nationalities that made up the Empire are dedicated to the cause and that all of them call the Austrian-Hungarian Empire home. Tisza's stand on Romania's neutrality was truthful, though. He really valued it because by staying neutral, Romania was not able to make any territorial claim in the aftermath of the war. Moreover, the eastern border was well fortified and defended by Romania, which was a great advantage for the neighbors at war. Fully aware of the importance of public opinion, István Tisza is courting not only governments, but also ordinary people of different nationalities throughout the Empire. He praises and emphasizes the importance of neutrality: "If I were Romanian, I would only aim for neutrality" he says. (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#44, 3).

Occasionally, the Hungarian officials release messages on Romania's neutrality, whose government "has kept its cool and its vision clear and never believed the slogans (thundering and tempting) of the Russians talking about the liberation of Transylvania." The Hungarian propaganda emphasized that "the Romanian peasant in Transylvania is living well" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#61, 4).

Another objective was to constantly remind Romanians that their country was Austria-Hungary. To promote such a task, the editorials featured testimonials of Romanian soldiers who were fighting alongside the Hungarian army. Moreover, the priests, personalities with a high profile in rural communities, were asked to preach exactly the same thing: that they were fighting for the right cause, and that their country deserved any sacrifice for the final victory of the "Hungarian" motherland. Apparently, the Romanian soldiers "were fighting with a fanatical zeal against the Russians". In order to win over the conscience of those reading the newspapers full of propaganda, catch words like: "soul", "duty", "loyalty", "motherland", "sacrifice" are repeatedly employed, "and later, when our troops will be coming home with the wreath of glory, leaves out of it will fall on our brave Romanian brothers, who, on the battlefields soaked in blood, have shown that in heart and soul they are Hungarians" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#45, 4-5). Needless to say that this article was not written by a Romanian reporter...

The Hungarian government was trying by all means to convince the Romanians in Transylvania that their fate would be a lot better if they stayed within Hungary. But all these promises come too late, as through the union with Romania the Transylvanians would benefit of all the civil rights of a democratic society and also economically, as Romania was a power house recognized by all Europe. Moreover, the Transylvanians prefer: "The democratic Romanian Kingdom, led by a king who, for the good of the country, had renounced his German kinship" (The Romanian kings were of German origin, but the royal family chose to fight against Germany in WWI) (*Libertatea*, 1918, issue#3, 1).

The Hungarians pulled all the stops in propaganda and manipulation even when everything looked totally hopeless for their cause. Flyers against the unification with Romania were circulated even days before the historic event that took place in Alba Iulia. But, the unfolding events are irreversible, and the attempt is seen as a desperate act "to lure the weak and the small, to create havoc and confusion right before the Great National Convention of Alba Iulia, holy day of rebirth and renewal of the nation" (*Libertatea*, 1918, issue#3, 2).

Interestingly, Turkey, that had lost her grip on the Balkans in the previous century, was praying for the victory of Austria, Hungary and Germany (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue# 48, 4).

At the onset of the war, the newspapers boosted their publication of patriotic and mobilizing articles written for the Romanians living in Transylvania, who, at the time, had no other sources of information because public gatherings had been totally banned. In one of them, Teodor Mihali makes an appeal to the people "that during these dangerous days they should be fully aware, with their eyes wide open and careful with words, to take a patriotic posture, and, just like in the past, with devotion to the country and the ruling royal family, to prove that we are worth to be given what is ours and fought for so humbly" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#34, 3).

Depending on the method of presentation of information, the messages may have different meanings. Such is the case of an article in which the basic training of the Romanian recruits was announced as a measure of country's defense rather than a change in Romania's position on neutrality. The information had a double meaning as it may have been a subtle message to the Romanians in Transylvania that the motherland was getting ready to join the war (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#38, 4).

In order to raise the morale of the troops, but also to induce optimism into general population, news updates on the state of the troops are published regularly. All reports were favorable to the armed forces of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire or Germany. Regardless of the subject, they always shed a positive light on the size of the army, the soldiers' bravery, the number of the wounded or prisoners. It is unthinkable that accurate information about armies, battle plans, weapons,

numbers about losses to ever be published in time of war by any country. Such a piece of information may also have a secondary purpose (besides manipulating own population) – to feed misinformation and confusion among enemies. At the beginning of the war, newspaper readers used to learn that the Austrian-Hungarian army was made up of about 800,000 soldiers, compared to Serbia's 300,000. Moreover, it was said that the Serbs' armament was obsolete. "The Serbs' weapons, rifles and artillery, are almost all from the previous war against the Turks and later Bulgarians, so that they cannot be as good and accurate as today's weapons" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 3). The Germans' fighting spirit, backed up by a very supportive public opinion, but also the sheer power of the army rendered invincible, with 1.2 million volunteers just signed up, make headlines in the press of the time (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#38, 2).

By contrast, the losses of the British army are highly exaggerated – 110,400 soldiers and 8,500 horses (roughly one third of the army) – to render that enemy as weak and lacking motivation (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue# 67, 4). The two contrasting images, own army and the enemy's, were perceived as accurate by the public on each camp, even though both sides had tremendous losses on the battlefield. In spite of all this, in the end, the reader was left with the idea that his side was winning. A dreadful image is drawn in the mind of the reader when he goes over the reports from the front in Belgium where the fierce fighting was going on for the city of Liege. In spite of the tremendous resistance by the defenders of the city, the losses were huge: "So many men died in this prolonged and furious siege, that stacks of dead bodies as high as one and a half meters were all around the fortress" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#38, 2).

The reports from the front about the same battle differ greatly in German and French newspapers. The editors of *Libertatea*, in their quest for fairness, publish both versions, allowing the reader to get his own picture (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#38, 2).

The mobilizing articles were also picked from the foreign newspapers. For example, *Neus Viener Abenblatt* flashed the headline "the Austrian-Hungarian army is ready more than ever to join the battle". We can look forward with trust in the future and we also believe not only in our ally Germany, but also in Italy, that assured us of their friendship" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 3). It became very clear that Germany had encouraged the option for military conflict "it can be seen clearly from the way Germany stepped in, determined and even thundering, against Russia and France that tried to intervene to broker a peace as fair as possible between the parties in conflict". Due to Germany's position „it is believed that [France and Germany] will step aside, and this way, Austria will be spared of the danger of an outside intervention so that she can take a tough stand against a helpless Serbia" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 4). Trying to save face, Austria-Hungary stated that there

was no territorial claim from Serbia on their part, “the Austrian-Hungarian diplomats have made it clear that through the war against Serbia no land grab was the issue” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 4). It was important that the public opinion learn the strategy adopted by Romania. Some details from the Crown Council that had taken place in Sinaia leaked out, but there was no change in the country’s position—neutrality was upheld (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#33, 4).

The morale of the Hungarian forces is estimated as high, or at least that is implied in the article about the war in Bucovina: “our soldiers are getting feverishly ready for further attacks and they are fully confident that they’ll succeed even against the reinforced Russian troops” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#59, 3). Whenever the Hungarian army was taking a beating, it was played down by the press, just as the advancement of the Russian troops whose victories at Varrano Homonna and Eperjes-Bartfa were presented as insignificant “by a high-ranking officer who knew all the secrets of the war with the Russians” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#67, 3). The explanations coming from an experienced career officer were supposed to give legitimacy to the report.

The newspaper is sending a warning to the soldiers that the image of the Russian army some media would like to project may be false. The reporter emphasizes that the purpose of such a message is to ease the worries in the civilian population, but as far as the army is concerned, “to harden their resolve marching toward the borders of Russia and that with faith that their job in defeating the Russians would be easier”. The information regarding the Russian army is important because it may “awaken the feeling of caution and harden the will” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#36, 3). Russia’s recent arms deals become a popular topic, but also a good reason for speculation. News from London informed that Russia had purchased arms from the Japanese, a good occasion for speculation, “Because they are running low on ammunition and they risk to run out pretty soon” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#53, 3).

News about the success of the Central Powers’ armies at the front was present in every issue: “our cavalry is relentlessly hunting down the enemy” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#42, 2), “our center stopped the drive [of the Russians] toward Lemberg (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#42, 3), “after the German army drove successfully into Lüttich, they took over the city” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue 42, 4), “in occupied cities by the German army a military dictatorship is imposed” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#42, 5). As we can see, words like “hard”, “attack”, “victorious” are used to instill positive feelings.

Made up of so many nationalities, the Imperial Army was probably the most unstable army of all belligerents. To establish some coherence and discipline a major task was the cultivation of loyalty and brotherhood among the troops. Although the Transylvanians were told that their country was Austria-Hungary, at the beginning of the war they were allowed to show their Romanian colors and insignia. They were allowed to march under the Romanian nation flag and Romanian national symbols

on their uniforms. The departure to the front of the 64th Detachment of Orăștie is largely described in an emotional editorial. The flags, raised with pride, were like “a small forest in whose shade the 64th Detachment were marching”. Interestingly enough, the flags were hand-made and paid for with private funds, but approved by the army. The importance of these symbols is enthusiastically described by a journalist, “Our dear brothers, animated by the colors of their national flag, in its shade, with vigor and joy, are marching to death as if going to a wedding” (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#49, 5). Surprisingly, the Hungarian press eulogizes the bravery of the Romanian soldiers. Such is the case of a sergeant from the 64th Regiment of Hunedoara eulogized in the Hungarian newspaper *Pesti Hirlap*, with a title *Their Bravery Deserves the Highest Recognition* (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#49, 5).

Through newspapers, the Hungarian authorities in Budapest were relaying to the Romanian population back in Transylvania that they will be rewarded after the war for their bravery, loyalty, and sacrifice on the battlefields. The promises were related to sensitive issues from the past, like: education in own language, changing the electoral laws so that more Romanians be elected in the Hungarian Parliament, and a pardon for the political prisoners. Anyway, the journalist dismisses all these as coming too late and being insignificant compared to the sacrifices of the Romanian soldiers in battle (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#54, 5).

Another type of blatant disinformation is related to casualties (dead, wounded and missing in action). This kind of information is classified in all times and all armies, but people want to know and reporters of war play the guessing game. Authorities are usually extremely cautious with this type of information because it may bring about losses beyond imagination. The information of this kind is sketchy at best. Actually, it's designed to confuse, rather than inform: “The losses resulted in this attack haven't been evaluated yet” is usually the stereotype (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#42, 3).

The casualties reports related to the German army are just as vague and meant to misinform and manipulate the public opinion: “The Germans never lost battles that they hid, pointing out that it's really hard to be accurate with losses and casualties because it is an ongoing battle that never stops: “one thing is sure- that the enemy has greater losses than ours” (*Libertatea* 1914, issue#44, 5). A careful reader can easily understand the nonsense of such a statement. How can you determine that the enemy's losses are greater when you don't know how much you lost. But the secrecy was crucial in time of war and everybody had to make do with what they had. Accuracy under these circumstances may bring about the downfall of many institutions, the collapse of national morale, or even final defeat.

Another way of manipulating information is related to defensive preparations of the states that make up the Allies. Taking into consideration the draconic censorship applied to all the media across the continent, it's hard to believe that a publication

was able to print reports on the Belgians' preparation for war, in defense of the city of Antwerp (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#42, 4). The manipulative intent, this time targeting the Belgian population, is also intended for the military authorities of the Allies and it is carried in the article regarding the Germans' preparation of the assault on Antwerp: "The Germans prepare for assault on Antwerp, but they haven't started yet" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#44, 5).

They try permanently to create an atmosphere of optimism when it comes to the fate of prisoners of war from Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It is emphasized that the numbers are lower than the Russian army's: "As Russia has a lot more people, civilian and military, prisoner in Austria-Hungary, just like we have our prisoners in Russia" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#52, 4-5).

Information is picked from Hungarian newspapers where soldiers tell tall stories fresh from the front. For example, they tell about one Hungarian officer who, all alone, captured 3 Russian officers left behind enemy lines on purpose by their army to communicate enemy troops' movement by telephone: "Because their army had retreated toward Lublin, they left over here a hidden telephone with which to inform their command in Lublin about our direction of movement, how many of us and what we do" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#52, 5).

The bravery of the Austrian-Hungarian army is always brought into the limelight: "on the battlefield, with the Serbs located in the north, last night, half of our battalion captured an entire Serbian battalion" (*Libertatea*, 1914, issue#53, 3).

Conclusions

At a closer look, the content of all the articles published in *Libertatea*, a typical paper of the press of World War One, we can see, as expected, the majority have a strong tint of manipulation, directed to an entire panoply of targets: the Romanian population in Transylvania, the Romanian soldiers of Transylvania, the authorities and the public opinion in Romania proper, but also the population and authorities in other countries whose correspondents were manning offices in Bucharest and elsewhere.

Judging by the result of the war, it is safe to say that the campaign of manipulation unleashed by Hungary during WWI failed because the Romanians in Transylvania had never given up the idea of national unity with all Romanians from the other provinces. The failure was not necessarily due to faulty plans or wrong strategies, but to the strong patriotic drive of an entire nation who saw the historic opportunity to unite the three provinces into a state once and for all. This drive made the dream come true.

References

Periodicals

Libertatea (1914-1918)

1914

- issue#31, "Hungarians of Romania"
issue# 33, Column: "News"
issue#33, "Romanian Ministers Bratianu and Porunbaru on Romania's Stand"
issue# 33, "The Serbian Army"
issue#33, "Can it Be a Bigger Trouble?"
issue#33, "Thundering Germany"
issue#33, "The Monarchy Doesn't Want a Land Grab"
issue#33, "Romania's Stand"
issue# 34, "Romania mobilized. The Pledge of Allegiance"
issue#35, Column: "News"
issue# 35, "Rumors about the Fleets Clash!"
issue# 35, "King Carol on Romania's stand"
issue#36, "The Newspapers Discontent"
issue#36, "What the Romanian Officers Who Were There Think of the Russian Army"
issue#36, Column: "News"
issue#37, "The Romanian Stand"
issue # 38, "Romania Pulled by the Sleeve"
issue#38, "Lüttich Has Fallen. Not Really!"
issue#38, "Stacks of Dead One and a Half Meters High"
issue#38, "One Million Two Hundred Thousand Volunteers in the German Army"
issue# 38, Column: "News"
issue#42, "At the Boundaries of Russia. The Battle of Krasnik"
issue#42, "Russians Toward Lemberg"
issue#42, "In Belgium. The Hostages of City of Lüttich"
issue#42, "Where they Set Foot, the Germans Run the Place by Military Orders"
issue#42, "What Happened to Five Hungarian Infantry Divisions"
issue#42, "Antwerp Is Preparing for Defense"
issue# 44, "Tisza Praises Some Romanians and Romania"
issue#44, "How Much the Germans Lost"
issue#44, "In Belgium"
issue# 45, Column: "News"
issue# 48, "The Turks Prey for Us"
issue#49, "About Romanians' bravery"
issue#49, Column: "News"
issue#52, "Russia's Proposals Regarding the Prisoners of War"

issue#52, "The Russian Espionage"
issue#53, "The Russians Running Low on Ammunition"
issue# 53, "Fighting the Serbs"
issue#54, "Romanians' Grievances and their Solution"
issue#59, "In Bucovina, Great Battles Will Be Fought"
issue# 61, "István Tisza on Neutral States"
issue#67, "How Much England Has Lost Until Now in the War"
issue#67, "The Importance of the War in the Carpathians"

1916

issue#24, "I knew, but We Couldn't Tell the Truth"
issue# 11, "With Lie"
issue #13, "What's New at Home? What Is Not Permitted to Publish in Ardeal?"

1918

issue#3, "Answer to the Hungarian Proclamation to the Non-Hungarian Nations"
issue# 3, "Romanian Brothers!"

Books

1. Domenach, Jean-Marie. (2004). *Political Propaganda*. Iași: Institutul european.
2. Ficeac Bogdan. (1998). *Techniques of Manipulation*. IIIrd edition. București: Nemira.
3. Grecu, Dan Simion. (2005). *The Censorship of the Postal Correspondence in the Romanian Space (1916-1946) from Censorship in the Romanian Cultural Space*. Bucharest: Communication.ro.
4. Gusti, D. (1995). *The Sociology of the Nation and War*. București: Floare albastră Publishing House.
5. Hentea, Calin. (2000). *150 Years of Media War. The Army and the Press during the War Time*. Bucharest: Nemira.
6. Hentea, Călin. (2006). *The Blurred Images of Propaganda. Studies and Essays*. Bucharest: Army Publishing House.
7. Hetea, Călin. (2002). *Propaganda without Borders*. Bucharest: Nemira.
8. Hoskins, Andrew; Ben O'Loughlin. (2010). *War and Media. The Emergence of Diffused War*. Malden (MA), USA: Polity Press.
9. Iorga, N. (2008). *Transilvania V. Romanian Life in Ardeal*. Bucharest: Saeculum I.O. Publishing House.
10. Kunczik, Michael. (2002). *War Saved. Communication in Wartime*. Reșița: InterGraf Publishing House.
11. Lloyd, Clem. (1992). *The Case for the Media*, published in *Defense and the Media in Time of Limited War*, Frank Cass & Co.
12. Manciu, Luca. (2001). *The Romanian Press in Cluj (1845-1 Dec. 1918). Aspects of the Struggle for the Advancement of the National Ideal*. Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star Publishing House.

13. Pușcariu, Sextil. (1978). *Memoires*. Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House.
14. Teodorescu, Bogdan. (2007). *Five Millennia of Manipulation*. Bucharest: Tritonic.
15. Theodorescu, Vasile M. (1941). *Transylvania under Hungarians and Romanians. Historical Documentation of the Exercise of Romanian and Hungarian Justice in the Fields of Culture, Nation, Society, Politics, Economics and Law*. Bucharest: Monitorul oficial și Imprimeriile statului, Imprimeria națională Publishing House.
16. Vasiliu, Gabriel. (2001). *Issues of Language in the Romanian Press in Transylvania*. Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star Publishing House.
17. Williams, Kevin. (1992). *Something more important than the truth*, in *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*, Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick.