

COORDINATES OF ROMANIAN CONSERVATISM 1866-1922

**Assistant Professor Florian Olteanu Ph.D.
University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, ISPRI Department**

Abstract

Conservative Party of Romania (1880-1922) had a history highlighted by the permanent struggle with their traditional enemies, the Liberal Party. The Conservative Party has been a counter-balance force used by King Carol to ensure a democratic way of the Romanian politics. The conservatives were the followers of the alliance with the Central Powers military blocks, due their specializations and studies in the German culture countries.

Their attitude during World War I influenced their final destiny, the end of their parliamentary life at the general elections of 1922.

Key words: conservatives, Romania, 1866-1922 period, Grigore Cantacuzino, Alexandru Marghiloman

A century ago, as a result of the first legislative elections in Greater Romania, the Conservative Party disappeared from the political scene, after an existence of 42 years.

My motto for this article is:

"It will be very difficult to demonstrate how effective the Conservative Party was on the Romanian political stage during its existence, but it is very easy to notice how much the lack of this party was felt in the interwar period."

The motto of the Conservative Party was "the politics of small steps". Even though the Conservative Party was officially established in February 1880, conservative groups existed and were in permanent confrontation with the radical liberal group and in conditional cooperation with the moderate liberal group that would be absorbed into the future Conservative Party, the best-known example of moderate liberal switched to conservatives being Emanoil Manolaki Costachi Epureanu [1].

The Liberals had succeeded in grouping themselves as a party in May 1875, but very quickly, splits within this party began to appear.

In the conditions where there was wealth-based voting (census vote) until 1919, the conservatives had as their electoral base the large landowners, a part of the Romanian intelligentsia (especially the Transylvanian and the Banat, the Bukovine people who came to the Principality, later in Romania after 1877), small entrepreneurs, while the liberals had access to the liberal trades, most of the intelligentsia, merchants, entrepreneurs of medium and large industry, the latter, at an early stage [2].

Conservatives and Liberals had agreed to the removal of AI Cuza in 1866 to bring in a foreign prince, in accordance with the wishes of the Ad-Hoc Assemblies of 1857.

After the arrival of Prince Carol, the liberals wanted to force the prince's hand to get closer to France, but Germany defeated France in 1870. The conservatives had an elite who had studied in the Germanic world (Vienna, Hohenheim, Berlin), while the liberals were formed, in their majority, in the hotter neo-Latin space (Paris, Padua).

Let's not forget that the great Romanian prose writers, playwrights and poets were conservatives: Ion Creangă, Mihai Eminescu, Ion Luca Caragiale, Ioan Slavici are just a few examples. One of the great theoreticians of culture, the spirit of Junimism from Iași, alongside Petre P. Carp, Vasile Pogor, was the Transylvanian born in Craiova, Titu Maiorescu.

Above them all dominated the imposing figure of Grigore Gheorghe Cantacuzino, who for a long time was the richest Romanian in the country, owning the fabulous Palat cu Lei, where today, on Calea Victoriei, is the George Enescu Museum, because Cantacuzino's daughter-in-law, his son's wife, Maruca, after the death of her husband she married the musician George Enescu.

Grigore Cantacuzino's fortune was surpassed by Constantin Dini Michail from Craiova, whose son, Ioan C. Michail, one of the greatest Romanian philanthropists of all time ended up circling with his immense fortune in 1929-1933 the very Romanian state that during the Great Depression it ran out of cash and had to get loans from France [3].

At the time in 1871, when the liberals wanted to force the hand of Prince Carol to abdicate, Carol called Lascăr Catargi to form a conservative government that would smooth the ground for the conquest of independence. It was the most important Conservative government, followed between 1876-1888 by the great Liberal government (which won independence, gained international recognition, proclaimed the Kingdom and entered into a secret alliance with the Central Powers, which the Conservatives later maintained) and until 1895 by another conservative government.

In 1895, the government rotation was introduced, whereby after a mandate in the Government of the PNL, a mandate in the Government of the PC followed mandatory. Conservatives objected to too quick adherence to Western ideological and institutional imports which they called "forms without substance". Titu Maiorescu says it most openly.

Later, even the future communist leader Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (son of the Bacău historian and journalist D D Pătrășcanu, follower of currents close to conservatism, poporanism, „sowing seeds trend”, animator of "Romanian Life") in his book "A century of social tensions 1821-1907", quoted a thought of Ion C. Brătianu who, after a long career as a revolutionary, conspirator (investigated for Felice Orsini's failed attempt against Napoleon III), politician, had said that they, the radical liberals, instead of waiting to have their clothes tailored, they rushed like chumps who had made easy money, to buy ready-made luxury clothes that didn't quite fit them.

So, the conservatism was reluctant, perhaps too reluctant to reform, and that was their downside. The Conservatives left government in March 1907 when the peasants revolted because they heard that the Conservative government would not let them jointly buy the estates that the renters had sold. The agrarian reform of Cuza in 1864, carried out by the liberals had been insufficient and the conservatives and the liberals had always postponed this reform which would only occur in 1921, with a strong promise from King Ferdinand in 1917 who had promised land and the broadening of the electoral base, obviously, animated by his circle of liberals, hostile to conservatives [4].

The liberals were the ones who, on the order of Ion C. Brătianu, minister of the interior, put the guns on the peasants in 1907, ruling until 1910. Titu Maiorescu, an important Junimist leader, led the Romanian Government in 1912 which obtained Quadrilater, southern Dobrogea, through the Bucharest Peace of August 1913, from the end of the Balkan wars [5].

If the First World War had not broken out, the Romanian, of course conservative solution to pacify the Balkans (still in tension today) would certainly have remained viable. With a conservative government in power, Romania asserted itself as a leader generating stability because the Great Powers, concerned with organizing themselves in the already formed military blocs, the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy), respectively the Entente (France, Great Britain, Russia) had their plans to divide the world in which the Balkans, the "gun powder barrel" did not matter much at that time.

The conservatives were filo-Germans, they wanted Romania to be on the side of the Central Powers in the First World War, for fear of Russia which had

not behaved as it should in 1878, when it had taken the south of Bessarabia, offering in exchange the much more modest Dobrogea, as it was expressed Mihai Eminescu in his press articles.

Romania's entry into the First World War, the war of reunification, ended with the disaster of the military occupation of Romania in 1916, in December, Romania being reduced to Moldova [6].

In March 1918, Alexandru Marghiloman assumed as a conservative leader a sacrificial government, after the Government, the Parliament and the Royal Family, as well as part of the population had retreated to Moldova.

Although victorious on the front in Mărăști, Mărășești, Oituz, Romania was affected by the outbreak of the October Revolution and the withdrawal of Russia from the war by Lenin in March 1918.

The Marghiloman government (among others, Alexandru Marghiloman's wife Eliza had married Ion C Brătianu, his biggest rival) received the acceptance that on March 27/April 9, Romania would unite with Bessarabia and the Romanian troops led by Alexandru Averescu would enter Bessarabia.

However, on May 7, 1918, in Bucharest, the conservatives had to sign the most humiliating peace that left us without Dobrogea, the crown of the Carpathians, and with a control of the Romanian economy by Germany that would have been completed in 2008.

The Parliament did not ratify the Peace of Bucharest, and by entering the war in November 1918, Romania lost its juridical effects.

The conservatives withdrew in October 1918, when Germany was already the only fighting Central Power (the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria laid down their arms, Italy in 1915 joined the Entente), and on November 10, 1918, Romania declared war and engaged in fighting with Germany, the Armistice of Compiegne on November 11, 1918 finding us on a war footing, therefore with the right to participate in the negotiating table as the victorious force.

On March 27/April 9, 1918, on November 15/28, 1918 and on December 1, 1918, Bessarabia, Bucovina, Banat, Crisana, Maramureș, Transylvania united with Romania, which had also regained the Quadrilater - Southern Dobroudja [7]. The change of the electoral base in 1919, the refusal of the conservatives towards the agrarian reform, the impression of public opinion of collaboration made the Conservative Party no longer enter the Parliament, its leader, Alexandru Marghiloman dying in 1925 [8].

It should be noted that the National Liberal Party knew how to orient itself better. Ionel Brătianu propelled Alexandru Averescu as the leader of the

People's Party, a party that grouped moderate liberals, moderate conservatives, a party that ensured the government several times between 1919-1922, until the PNL re-calibrated his strategy. Losing its electoral base, hated by those who since 1919 had received universal suffrage (women still could not vote), the Conservative Party which had been more reluctant to be in step with the political trend, paid the price of its political inertia and disappeared from the scene politics, because the liberals and the People's Party had the ascendancy of victory, over the conservatives last the curse of cooperation with the enemy, with the occupier.

The Conservative Party left from 1922 to 1941 an empty seat on the political scene. Take Ionescu, the leader of the Democratic Conservative Party allied with Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the Romanian National Party from Transylvania. The Romanian National Party united in October 1926 with Ion Mihalache's Peasant Party to form the National Peasant Party, which had a moderate left-wing political line, to the displeasure of the conservatives, making the PNL, which itself had a moderately left-wing orientation, occupy the right side of the political spectrum.

The disappearance of the Conservative Party left a gap that was taken advantage of by the Communist Party of Romania (founded in 1921, outlawed in 1924, operating illegally for 20 years), the Legionary Movement (founded in 1927, outlawed in 1933, occupying of 3rd place in the 1937 elections, after an electoral cartel signed with PNT). Against the backdrop of the Great Depression (1929-1933) [9].

So, to return to the current political context, a century after the disappearance of the conservatives as a political party, today, PSD and PNL make a role-play- a kind of Averescan party (with General Ciucă as prime minister). However, it is worth noting that the classic Romanian conservative tradition is polluted with extremist nuances reminiscent of fascism and legionnaires, especially since in Italy and Germany, under the guise of sovereignty and anti-immigration policy, the nuances of right-wing extremism have been revived.

Romania cannot afford an anti-European discourse, there are almost 10 million Romanians who would be seriously affected by a possible exit of Romania from the EU, and a massive return would bring unemployment to 25-30%. A new conservative party, at the level of the one before 1922, attached to national but also European values, which does not allow itself to be seduced by the siren songs of European extremism, could contribute to a stable equilibrium on the Romanian political scene.

I am among those who believe that the EU needs reforms, that the European institutions must take more into account the opinion of the member states, but the reform of the EU must not destroy it, as they used to say in medicine: "the operation was successful, the patient is dead".

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