

# R. W. SEATON-WATSON AND THE POLITICAL LIFE IN ROMANIA IN THE DECADE OF THE BRATIANU FAMILY (DECEMBER 1918 – NOVEMBER 1928)

RADU ȘTEFAN RACOVITAN\*

## R.W. SEATON ȘI VIAȚA POLITICĂ DIN ROMÂNIA ÎN „DECADA BRĂȚIENISTĂ” (DECEMBRIE 1918-NOIEMBRIE 1928)

**ABSTRACT:** *In the interwar period, remaining the same constant and valuable friend of the Roumanians, the British historian and publicist Robert William Seton-Watson (1879–1951) followed closely the evolution of the political life of Great Roumania. He visited Roumania in the interwar period, in April and November 1920, in June 1923, in June 1927 and in July 1929.*

*The function of the democratic mechanism established through the Constitution of 1923 proved to be extremely complex and difficult. Convinced that this would be achieved only in the conditions of the coming to power of the National-Peasant Party, which demanded decentralization, free trade and an authentic democracy, and, influenced by the fact that most of his Roumanian friends came from the Transylvanian political leaders, Seton-Watson vehemently criticized the liberal governments of the third decade. Worried about the disputes between the National Peasant Party and the liberals, he expected, just as in case of Yugoslavia, from Roumania’s monarch, Ferdinand I (1914–1927), to play a major role in establishing of an internal harmony. Of course, the National-Peasant Party winning the elections in 1928, has brought high hopes regarding Roumania’s future, which were swept away by the failure of the National-Peasants’ governments, unfolded on the background of a global economic(al) crisis.*

**KEYWORDS:** *the Liberals, the National Peasants, Transylvania, parliamentary system, Hungarian minority*

**REZUMAT:** *În perioada interbelică, rămânând același constant și valoros prieten al românilor, istoricul și publicistul britanic Robert William Seton-Watson (1879–1951) a urmărit cu atenție evoluția vieții politice din România Mare. El a vizitat România, în perioada interbelică, în aprilie și noiembrie 1920, în iunie 1923, în iunie 1927 și în iulie 1929.*

*Funcționarea mecanismului democratic stabilit prin Constituția din 1923 s-a dovedit a fi extrem de complexă și dificilă. Convins că aceasta s-ar fi realizat doar în condițiile venirii la putere a național-țărăniștilor, care cereau descentralizare, un comerț liber și o democrație autentică, și influențat, probabil, și de faptul că majoritatea prietenilor săi români proveneau din rândul liderilor politici transilvăneni, Seton-Watson a criticat în mod vehement guvernările liberale din deceniul al treilea al secolului XX. Îngrijorat de disputele dintre național-țărăniști și liberali, el s-a așteptat, ca și în cazul Iugoslaviei, de la monarhul României, Ferdinand I (1914–1927), să joace un rol major în stabilirea unei armonii interne. Desigur, câștigarea alegerilor, în 1928, de către Partidul Național-Țărănesc i-a adus mari speranțe în ce privea viitorul României, ce i-au fost spulberate de eșecul guvernărilor național-țărăniștilor, desfășurate pe fundalul crizei economice mondiale.*

**CUVINTE CHEIE:** *liberalii, național-țărăniștii, Transilvania, sistem parlamentar, minoritatea maghiară*

For his support to the national cause of small European peoples subject to foreign domination until 1918, the British historian and publicist Robert William Seton-Watson (1879–1951) enjoyed

\* Senior Lecturer, PhD. “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Faculty of Humanities, Department of History, Heritage and Protestant Theology; email: radu.racovitan@ulbsibiu.ro

enormous prestige and countless proofs of appreciation from a range of political rulers of the Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croatians and Romanians.

After the end of the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), he mostly dedicated his time to academic activities. In 1922, he became the first Masaryk Professor of Central-European History within the School of Slavonic Studies. He also had a significant contribution to the establishment of the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London and he was an active member of the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (established in 1920). In 1929, he was elected member of the British Academy<sup>1</sup>.

Seton maintained relations with his former colleagues in the Foreign Office, as well as friendships with various leaders of the peoples in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, mainly with: Thomas G. Masaryk<sup>2</sup>, Eduard Beneš<sup>3</sup> and Milan Hodža<sup>4</sup> – Czechoslovakia, Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida Voevod – Romania, Svetozar Pribičević<sup>5</sup> and Stepan Radić<sup>6</sup> – Yugoslavia.

During the inter-war period, Seton mostly focused on the relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks. After the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, frustration appeared among the Slovaks for political, economic and religious reasons. The Czechs dominated public offices in Slovakia, due to the lack of qualified Slovak individuals. Due to the considerable German and Hungarian minorities, the Prague government failed to introduce the political autonomy it had previously promised. Slovak nationalists were divided into two groups. The National Party, led by Vavro Šrobar<sup>7</sup> and Hodža, advocated for a strongly Czechoslovak politics, though a higher decentralisation was requested<sup>8</sup>. Intransigent

<sup>1</sup> Seton-Watson 1981, p. 418; Rychlik, Marzik, Bielik 1995, vol. I, p. 31; Seton-Watson *et al.* 1976, vol. I, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas G. Masaryk (1850–1937) – born in Göding (Hodonin, Moravia). Statesman. Philosophy professor in Leipzig (1878), Vienna (1879), Prague (1882). Member of the Austrian Parliament. Founder of the Czechoslovak People's Party. President of the Czechoslovak National Council, 1915–1918. First president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, 1918–1935. Apud Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. I, p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) – born in Kozlany (Bohemia). Professor at the Academy of Commerce and at the Czech University of Prague. Representative of the independence movement in the exile, in Paris, 1915–1918. Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, 1918–1935. President of the Republic, 1935–1938. Leader of the movement to regain the independence of Czechoslovakia, in exile, 1940–1945. President of the Republic for the second time, 1945–1948. Apud Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. I, p. 501.

<sup>4</sup> Milan Hodža (1878–1944). PhD in Law. Slovak political leader and publicist. Deputy in the Hungarian Parliament, 1905–1910. Secretary of the Club of Non-Hungarian Deputies. Leader of the Slovak National Party. He was a member of the group attached to the chancellery of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. He supported close cooperation with the Czechs and the creation of the Czechoslovak state. After 1918, head of the Agrarian Party; minister for several times; prime-minister 1935–1938. Exiled in the United States after 1938. Apud Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. I, p. 473.

<sup>5</sup> Svetozar Pribičević (1875–1936). Born in Croatia, he was the leader of Serbians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After 1918, as the leader of the Democratic Party, he became a fervent supporter of extreme centralisation, and in 1927 began to support federalism. He opposed the dictatorship of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and he dies in exile.

<sup>6</sup> Stepan Radić (1871–1928). With his brother, Ante, he organized the Croatian Peasant Party (1904). After 1918, he advocated for the preservation of Croat national identity. He had conflicts with the leadership of Belgrade and he was imprisoned during 1919–1920. After the Constitution was voted on June 28, 1921, resulting in the kingdom having the status of a unitary, national and centralised state, Radić and the party he led refused to take part in the works of the Skupština (Yugoslavia's single-chamber legislative body), on repeated occasions. During July 1923–August 1924, he unsuccessfully sought for support for a Croatian republic outside Yugoslavia. After coming back to the country, he was imprisoned until July 1925. He accepted the centralising constitution of 1921 and was a member of the government as of 1925; however, starting 1927, he again became a member of the opposition. This year, he formed an alliance with the party of Svetozar Pribičević, which claimed the federalist reorganisation of Yugoslavia. On June 20, 1928, as he took part in the debates of the Skupština, he was shot to death by a Serbian member of the parliament.

<sup>7</sup> Vavro Šrobar, 1867–1950. Slovak politician, member of the Hlas Group. Plenipotentiary minister for Slovakia, 1918–1919. He held various ministerial offices during the First Czechoslovak Republic. He was a member of the resistance movement in the Second World War. President of the Slovak People's Council in 1944. Minister of Finance in 1945. Apud Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. I, p. 459

<sup>8</sup> In 1922, this party would merge with the (Czechoslovak Republican) Agrarian Party, with Hodža as leader.

autonomists formed the Slovak People's Party, led by priest Andrej Hlinka<sup>9</sup>. Discontent was also due to religious reasons. Catholic priests, very influential among the Slovak population, felt offended by the Czech anti-clericalism. The Slovak economy was exposed to Czech competition<sup>10</sup>.

While Seton appreciated that Czechoslovakia indeed evolved towards genuine democracy, the English historian was instead disappointed by the domestic evolution of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The main issue was the conflict between Serbs and Croats, which Seton qualified as a conflict between centralism and federalism. He did not believe in the existence of a single "Yugoslavian" nation; he rather considered that the new kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was a state with three nations, which had to live together as equal, as happened with the English and the Scots, who he hoped would be joined by the Irish. The failure of a coexistence of the English and the Irish, obvious as of 1921, was always present in his consciousness as a warning of the danger Yugoslavia had to prevent<sup>11</sup>.

The main reason for the damage in the political situation of Yugoslavia and the tense relations between the Croats and the Serbs was, in Seton's opinion, Nikola Pašić, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, along with his entourage. In the opinion of the English historian, this man introduced a regime of corruption, favouritism, election fraud, brutal administration and economic exploitation. Seton also blamed the damage in the relations between the Serbs and Croats on Svetozar Pribičević and Stepan Radić and hoped that King Alexander would play a constructive part and would become involved in the solution of domestic conflicts, though he was well aware of the latter's inclination toward an authoritative regime<sup>12</sup>.

The events of the Skupstina of June 1928, when a Serbian member of the parliament shot Radić to death and wounded two other Croat members horrified Seton-Watson. King Alexander intervened for a conciliation between the Serbs and the Croats; as negotiations failed, he established a personal dictatorship in January 1929. This decision was a mistake, in the English historian's opinion. After the assassination of King Alexander (1934), the establishment of the regency (King Peter was under age), with the main focus on Prince Paul, the king's cousin, renowned as an Anglophile and a supporter of the reconciliation between Serbs and Croats, filled Seton with hope<sup>13</sup>.

Seton visited Romania in the inter-war period, in April and November 1920, in June 1923, June 1927 and July 1929<sup>14</sup>. The Great Economic Crisis (1929–1933) brought along great financial losses and limited his possibilities to travel; therefore, he did not visit Romania again after 1929. In the 1920s, he argued that Romania and Yugoslavia had a partially similar situation. The political life of inter-war Romania was dominated by two parties: the liberals and the national peasants. The National Liberal Party inherited the confidence of the dynasty and the strong political apparatus of the kingdom; therefore, the liberals dominated the political life of the first post-war decade<sup>15</sup>. They attempted to gain direct administrative control on the new provinces and, even though they had in theory agreed to support the parliamentary system, they actually preferred to organise elections traditionally and govern in an authoritative manner, through a small-sized financial and industrial oligarchy<sup>16</sup>.

Happy that the events had developed as he had militated for, Seton visited Romania in the same month when the Treaty of Trianon was signed. The Romanian Parliament acclaimed him on June 29,

<sup>9</sup> Andrej Hlinka (1864–1938) – a Slovak Catholic priest, leader of the Slovak People's Party. Leader of the national movement against the dual Hungarian regime and of the Slovak autonomist opposition, within the Czechoslovak government of the 1920s–1930s.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see Seton-Watson 1982, p. 175–177; Crampton 2002, p. 86, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Seton-Watson *et al.* 1976, vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Seton-Watson *et al.* 1976, vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Seton-Watson *et al.* 1976, vol. I, p. 37–39; Seton-Watson 1981, p. 421, 424–425.

<sup>14</sup> Seton-Watson 1981, p. 418.

<sup>15</sup> Sugar 2002, p. 236.

<sup>16</sup> Barbulescu *et al.* 2002, p. 345, 346.

1920 in the session of the Chamber, for his contribution to the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and his support to the Romanian unity<sup>17</sup>. The country's government celebrated him on July 2, with a reception in the Marble Room at the Boulevard, provided by foreign affairs minister Take Ionescu and with an enthusiastic participation.<sup>18</sup>. Members of the government (led by Averescu) took part, as well as higher representatives of the Orthodox and united clergy (Metropolitan-Primate Miron Cristea and the Metropolitan of Blaj, Dr. Vasile Suci), British diplomatic representatives, former ministers, plenipotentiaries and other Romanian diplomats, politicians, former pre-war friends from Transylvania, representatives of higher and secondary education, journalists, etc.: N. Iorga, I. Maniu, Al. Vaida Voevod, M. Popovici, I. Inculet, I. Pelivan, Stelian Popescu et al. Take Ionescu toasted to England and to the British people, who "knows to combine order with freedom". Seton-Watson took the stand and expressed the emotion he felt on his first visit to the Great Romania and his happiness to have seen the Romanian unity achieved.

At the middle of November 1920, Seton-Watson came to Romania again, with the purpose of taking a study trip to Transylvania<sup>19</sup>. From Bucharest, the English historian passed through Brasov, where he met local officials and journalists; Fagaras, where he visited the joined church erected in 1697 by Constantin Brancoveanu, the Wallachian ruler; Sibiu, where he met Nicolae Balan, the Metropolitan of Transylvania and visited the Astra Central Museum<sup>20</sup>.

From Sibiu, Seton went to Blaj, where he was welcomed at the metropolitan residence, and then stopped for a few days in Cluj<sup>21</sup>. He arrived in the Transylvanian town on November 27 and was hosted by Morandini, the director of the Central Bank<sup>22</sup>.

The second day after his arrival to Cluj, Seton had meetings with the representatives of minorities, such as the rabbi Eisler and Dr. Dobo Ferencz, the director of the newspaper "Ellenzek"<sup>23</sup>. In the following days, he had meetings with representatives of the University of Cluj, of the civil and military authorities of the town, some officials and Romanian journals in town. On December 2, the English historian went to the estate of Al. Vaida Voevod of Olpret, where he had a political meeting with the latter, and on December 7, after also having visited Baia Mare, he left the country through Halmei, heading to Prague, from where he would go back to London.

During the third decade, along with on-site findings during his visits, the correspondence with V.V. Tilea was Seton-Watson's main source of information on the domestic political situation in Romania, along with discussions with Romanians who visited London or who were members of the Romanian Legacy staff (such as Titulescu, Ciotori, Boerescu) or readings of British or European, even Romanian newspapers. Likewise, the correspondence with Tilea was a means to communicate with Vaida and Maniu. Most of the discussions between them during this period, regarding the evolution of the domestic political life in Romania, referred to the relations between the Romanian National Party and the other parties, especially the Peasants Party, with which it merged in 1926. The fact that most information was provided by Transylvanian political leaders somehow affected his objectiveness in assessing the Romanian domestic political situation, but he always tried to be impartial<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Romania. Debates of the Assembly of Deputies*, 1920, Extraordinary session, issue 9 of July 2, p. 137, 148–149; "L'Indépendance Roumaine", June 30, 1920; "The New Europe", nr. 197 of July 15, 1920; Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. II, p. 905–910.

<sup>18</sup> "L'Indépendance Roumaine", July 3, 1920; "Universul", July 3, 1920; "Patria", July 3, 1920; Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. II, p. 910–914.

<sup>19</sup> Department of National Archives of Bucharest (hereinafter DANMB), stock of the General Police Department (hereinafter DGP), file 55/1920, f. 40–42.

<sup>20</sup> "Patria", November 17, 1920, p. 2; "Gazeta Transilvaniei", November 21, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Patria", November 24 and December 5, 1920.

<sup>22</sup> "Patria", November 28, 1920.

<sup>23</sup> DANMB, stock of DGP, file 55/1920, f. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 119–120.

The first parliamentary elections based on universal vote took place in November 1919. The Parliamentary Block was formed after the elections, including the Romanian National Party, the Peasants Party from the Old Kingdom, the Peasants Party from Basarabia, the Nationalist Democratic Party, the Democratic Union Party from Bucovina and the independent group of Dr. N. Lupu. A coalition government led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod was formed on this basis. The cabinet of the Parliamentary Block had a short life, until March 13, 1920. The united opposition of the King and Averescu, the leader of the People's Party, at the height of his popularity and who wanted power by all means, paralysed the government; therefore, the latter was dismissed in March 1920. Pursuant to an agreement between Bratianu and Averescu, with the former approaching the king to re-appoint the general in office, the latter was appointed president of the Council of Ministers<sup>25</sup>. The Averescu government effortlessly won the parliamentary elections of May-June 1920, taking advantage from the state of spirit of the population, which held high hopes in the general.

In 1921, Seton was informed by V.V. Tilea on how the elections of 1920 had taken place; he also wrote on the manoeuvres of Titulescu, Take Ionescu<sup>26</sup> and argued that O. Goga and his followers<sup>27</sup> would soon leave the National Party. He also notified the existence of coalition plans between the liberals and PNR<sup>28</sup>.

However, the manoeuvres of the liberals and the divergences within his own party made Averescu resign in December 1921<sup>29</sup>. After the brief government of Take Ionescu (December 17, 1922 – January 17, 1923), who also had to resign due to the manoeuvres of the liberal leader, the government chaired by Ion I. C. Bratianu (January 19, 1922 – March 27, 1926) organised elections for the National Constituent Assembly in March. The electoral campaign took place in a very difficult atmosphere: mayors and prefects appointed by Averescu were replaced by PNL officials, forces of order intervened and obstructed the contact of opposition candidates with the electors or dissipated their electoral assemblies. The National Liberal Party obtained 222 of the 369 mandates, followed by the Peasants Party – 40 mandates, the Romanian National Party – 26 mandates, the Peasants Party of Bassarabia – 22 mandates, the Democratic Party for Union of Bucovina – 15 mandates, the People's Party – only 13 mandates. With such a majority, that provided the National Liberal Party with the possibility to adopt a new fundamental law, the parties in the opposition vehemently appealed the outcome of the elections and asked the king to cancel them; after the sovereign's refusal, the Peasants Party and the National Party declared that they did not recognize the legitimacy of the Parliament "elected through theft and fraud"<sup>30</sup>.

Seton was again informed on the 1922 elections by Tilea, in their correspondence, who wrote about the electoral abuses of Bratianu. Tilea referred to a development of the republican feeling among Transylvanian peasants, but this was not shared by PNR leaders. Moreover, the Transylvanian showed that the current negotiations with the Peasants Party would probably have no outcome, since they asked for: a) cooperation in opposition; b) to hold government; c) to make a pact providing for the strictest measures so as to take the constitutional powers away from the king (whereas PNR thought that only the king, as a constitutional factor, could change the domestic situation)<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Hitchins 1996, p. 434; *Istoria Românilor* 2003, vol. VIII, p. 249.

<sup>26</sup> In the elections of May-June 1920, the Democratic Party, led by Take Ionescu, participated in cooperation with the People's Party, who held the power, and the government also included the party's leader, N. Titulescu and D. Greceanu. For the development of the 1920 elections, see Scurtu 1972, p. 251–265.

<sup>27</sup> The group led by O. Goga considered that the historical role of the Romanian National Party ended on December 1, 1918 and asked for a merger with a party from the Old Kingdom, in order to put an end to regionalism; in April 1920, this group adhered to the People's Party.

<sup>28</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 121. Starting 1919, Ion I.C. Bratianu and Iuliu Maniu began discussions on a cooperation agreement for the government and for a merger between PNL and the National Party, in the future. The negotiations failed, especially due to disagreements on the division of administrative positions and places in the Assembly of Deputies.

<sup>29</sup> Bitoleanu 1981, p. 17–25.

<sup>30</sup> Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 145–147; Rusenescu, Saizu 1979, p. 140–154.

<sup>31</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 121, 129.

Since, even though the outcome of the 1922 elections had been validated, the opposition asked for the dissolution of the parliament and the organisation of “free” elections, in order to prove that they benefitted from the sovereign’s confidence, the government of Ion I. C. Brătianu announced the coronation of King Ferdinand in Alba Iulia, on October 15, 1922. Even though they had been specifically invited by the sovereign, Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache, the leaders of the National Party and the Peasants Party respectively, refused to take part in the celebrations, considering that they had been relegated to “mere manifestations of a party”<sup>32</sup>.

In his correspondence with V.V. Tilea of 1922, Seton criticised the PNR for its attitude towards the coronation<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, R. W. Seton-Watson would analyse all these events in a story published on October 17 in the *Times*, titled *Romanian Politics*; the story was reproduced by “Patria” in its issue of October 27, 1922. In the above mentioned article, Seton-Watson said that the coronation of Ferdinand as King of Great Romania in Alba Iulia was the logical conclusion of the Great National Assembly which proclaimed the Union of Transylvania with the Old Kingdom on December 1, 1918 and states that its relevance was not only local, as it stood for those national rights that lied at the basis of successor states, as opposed to the dynastic rights that underpinned the existence of the old Danubian monarchy. The coronation occurred in a highly insecure moment for Romania, both externally and internally. Romania had a vital interest in the status of the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and the Turkish victories (in the conflict with Greece) caused concern for Bucharest<sup>34</sup>.

At an internal level, the uncertainty was generated by the attitude of the political leaders of Transylvanians regarding the coronation. The weirdness of this event was caused by the deplorable fact that they refused to take part in the coronation, mostly for political reasons.

In Seton-Watson’s opinion, the methods of corruption and electoral terror used by the Liberal Party in the March elections were similar to those used prior to the First World War by the Hungarian government against the Transylvanian Romanians and the other non-Hungarian peoples. The liberals secured a majority, but the parties in the opposition did not recognize the legality and moral authority of the legislative provisions to be adopted in this context. The boycott of the Parliament by the National Party, the People’s Party and the Peasants Party compelled the government to postpone its intention to pass a new fundamental law of a centralist nature, which resulted in the omission of the oath of office on the Constitution in the Alba Iulia ceremony.

He mentioned the scruple less press campaign that aimed at proving that the Transylvanian leaders were separatist, insinuating that they had made a secret agreement with certain Hungarian large land owners, to the detriment of the agrarian reform, in order to discredit them in front of electors who were peasants. Seton also criticised the attitude of the Transylvanian leaders regarding the coronation; such an attitude could easily estrange the Dynasty from the most progressive elements of the Romanian political life and could weaken the prestige of the Crown and of the political leaders among the peasants in the newly adjoined territories.

Seton also said that the National Party, “weak in its manoeuvres, but strong in its principles”, provided the best hopes for Romania’s future. This party asked for a democratic government, clean elections and a parliament expressing the genuine wishes of the electoral body.

The professor recognized the past merits of the Liberal Party: the introduction of healthy trade principles before the war, the creation of an effective administrative system and, especially, the major part played by the liberals in the introduction of the universal vote and the agrarian reform, which transformed the political and social situation in Romania and created a permanent foundation for Romanian

<sup>32</sup> “Patria”, September 12, 1922; Suci 1997, p. 269–299.

<sup>33</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> “Patria”, October 27, 1922.

unity. However, apparently, its leaders afterwards regretted the democratic and constitutional principles and imposed conditions for cooperation that no party would have accepted.

The English historian said that it would be a fatal mistake for the public opinion in the Kingdom to believe that Transylvanian Romanians would not have faith in the national unity and the throne. Likewise, it had to be considered that a range of political currents in the Old Kingdom looked upon Transylvanians as a purifying and invigorating element in the political life, even if they were still under the influence of their political experience in the past, when they were under the Austro-Hungarian domination and the intransigent opposition was a political creed. On the other hand, Seton said, they were not yet familiarised with the feeling of responsibility resulting from the exercise of power.

The English historian concluded that a restoration of internal harmony between the different psychologies of old and new Romania was compulsory and urgent, and the dynasty could intervene and play a unique part from this point of view, as this was the true meaning of the coronation in Transylvania<sup>35</sup>.

Seton-Watson's statements on the internal politics of the liberals, published in "Patria", resulted in the English historian being qualified as calumniator and Hungarian propagandist by the newspaper "Viitorul", which supported the Liberal Party; this again resulted in criticisms by the body of the National Party against the liberals who, instead of objectively arguing against the English historian's comments, disparaged one of the most distinguished and renowned publicists in Europe and one of the most sincere foreign friends of Romania<sup>36</sup>.

After the coronation, the liberals decided to move on to the achievement of the central issue in their programme: adopting a constitution. After strenuous parliamentary debates, where the members of the National Party and the Peasants Party, forming the United Opposition, tried to prevent the development of the Parliament's work, which resulted in the exclusion from the opposition of various deputies and senators for various reasons, under the pretext that they had obstructed the normal development of works, and in the army coming out against the public meetings of the opposition, the new Constitution was adopted and published in the Official Gazette on March 29, 1923. On the same day, Ion Mihalache read, from the stand of the Assembly of Deputies, a declaration on behalf of the National Party and the Peasants Party, stating that the fundamental law adopted by the liberals was void<sup>37</sup>.

In fact, the 1923 Constitution responded to a national and political necessity, providing the legal basis for all actions envisaging the reinforcement and development of the Romanian unitary state, as one of the most democratic fundamental laws of Europe at that time. The members of the National Party and the Peasants Party, who were so intransigent in 1923, not only accepted it subsequently, but they also governed based thereon.

Due to the controversies between the liberals and the opposition regarding the Constitution, Seton-Watson published an article in The Times of December 6, 1922, titled *Romania at a Crossroads. A Dangerous Situation*, reproduced by "Patria" in its issue of December 19, 1922<sup>38</sup>.

In the above mentioned article, Seton expressed his concerns regarding the attempts of the Bratianu cabinet to force a highly controversial Constitution to a Parliament whose legality was solemnly challenged by the entire opposition. This controversy resulted from the fact that the union of Romanians was based on a contract between three stakeholders: the Romanian government, chaired by Bratianu, the Directory Council of Transylvania and the Crown, as well as the clear commitment that the future Constitution of Romania would be founded on the principles proclaimed by the National Assembly that took place in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918.

Therefore, as he had been one of those who had supported the union of Romanians before

<sup>35</sup> "Patria", October 27, 1922.

<sup>36</sup> "Patria", October 29, 1922.

<sup>37</sup> Nedelea 1987, p. 40–51; Istoria Românilor 2003, vol. VIII, p. 253; Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 151–152.

<sup>38</sup> "Patria", December 19, 1922; "Adevărul", December 13, 1922; D.A.N.M.B, fond D.G.P., dos. 55/1920, f. 43.

Romania entered the war, even in the grim days of its defeat and shackling, the historian thought he had every right to protest against the methods promoted by the liberals, who prevented the Hungarian and German minority from being fairly represented in the Parliament of Bucharest, thus infringing the decisions from Alba Iulia and the very will of Transylvanian Romanians. He stated that the day would soon come when “the entire nation will rebel like a single person and will call the current government to account for all its impertinences and infringements (...) *Quo vadis domine Bratianu?*”<sup>39</sup>.

In January-February 1923, Tilea again informed Seton on the negotiations between PNR and the Peasants Party, as well as the efforts of the liberals of gaining control on the Transylvanian industry and the abuses of liberals in several partial elections. There is no answer from Seton to this letters<sup>40</sup>.

In March 1923, in a conference held in London in the memory of the democrat H. M. Hyndman, thought to be the father of English socialism, Seton presented a brief abstract of his work *The Emancipation of South Eastern Europe*, published in London in 1923, thus answering again all those who kept on saying that the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had resulted in a disaster in central Europe.

In his conference, the English historian said that such a deep and quick transformation of political, social and cultural values as in southern Europe after the First World War had perhaps never occurred in history before. Comparing the approach of minority issues, school-related issues, the problem of agrarian and electoral reforms in successor states with the situation in the former Austro-Hungary, Seton found a visible progress, even in the challenging issue of minorities<sup>41</sup>.

The historian showed the important social changes that occurred in this country with the ascension of the bourgeoisie in the economic and political life and due to the undertaken agrarian reforms, except in Hungary, where an agrarian reform was not achieved during the short period when power was held by communists, and there were no chances for this either. He then detailed the nature of these reforms, outlining that the Yugoslavian one was radical, the Czechoslovak one was moderate, and the Romanian one, a combination of the two. In Romania, “the class of the boyars [...] was worth of praise”, as it initiated the agrarian reform on a wide scale, being “the only class of owners in Eastern Europe” that agreed to fulfil the reform. The King himself set the example, by giving up some of the territories of the Crown, as Seton challenges the statements of some Hungarian groups that claimed that the only purpose of the reform was to expropriate minorities. Soon, Seton said, due to the agrarian reform, as well as the fact that “education and cooperation principles become rooted among the peasants, who now own land”, Romania would even rival Yugoslavia in terms of general prosperity and solid social structure.

Besides the fulfilment of the agrarian reform, the universal vote was introduced in successor states and, if progress was sometimes too fast, this was due to the population’s lack of political education. In a comparison between the parliamentary systems of these states, Seton said that the most representative parliamentary system could be seen in Czechoslovakia, where electoral corruption was non-significant. In Yugoslavia, the parliament did not represent the people’s wish in full, due to the “manoeuvres of the Serbian reaction”, led by Pašić, as well as the political passiveness of the group led by Radić, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party.

The historian declared that, of the three states of the Little Entente, electoral corruption only persisted in Romania to a large extent, due to its lack of political experience, the disagreements within the opposition and the monarch’s oscillations. The fact that the Bratianu government used methods similar to the most corrupt elections in former Hungary, in order to secure power, was a sign that the old government system was doomed to fail and Bratianu had played his last card, trying to postpone a genuinely democratic system. The introduction of the latter would not take much longer, Seton considered, as the

<sup>39</sup> “Patria”, December 19, 1922.

<sup>40</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> “Patria”, October 7, 1923.



penetration of culture among population, by means of school education – and schools had attracted a lot of pupils after 1918, would entail knowledge on the use of means of self-government.

In conclusion, Seton argued that a real progress could be seen in all successor states, except Hungary. The main difficulty fought by the successor states was “the deep psychological differences between the groups of the same race”, the different mentalities and customs thereof. “In Czechoslovakia, which is the simplest case, we have the contrast between the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Czechs) and the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Slovaks), in Poland one finds a gap between those who lived under the domination of the Tsarist corruption, under the effective and destructive tyranny of Prussia or under the autonomy of Austria. In Romania, you have a mixture between the oligarchic traditions of the Old Kingdom, resulting from the long-lasting phanariot domination, the Transylvanian Romanians with advanced democratic tendencies and the semi-revolutionary currents of Bassarabia, infected by all nuances of Russian political and social theories. As for Yugoslavia, it can be said that at least six centuries now live together.” The historian declared that the bases of new structures were being laid and the succession of two generations was needed in order to implement the generous ideas of 1918. Everything would have been smoother if the influence of the pre-war political clique had been done away with. In his opinion, a peaceful and attractive Western influence would have had remarkable results<sup>42</sup>.

In 1923, between June 1 and 9, coming from Slovakia, Seton took a short trip to Cluj, to see his Romanian friends.

On the same year, in its meeting of May 26, the Romanian Academy chose him as a honorific member, thus recognizing the work of “one of the rare foreign men of a genuine culture” who supported the rights of Romanians in the hard days of their national fight.<sup>43</sup>

On his way to Cluj, Seton also had a brief encounter with Jász Oskár in Oradea<sup>44</sup>.

The English historian arrived in Cluj on the afternoon of June 1; the distinguished guest was warmly welcome by the Anglo-Romanian society<sup>45</sup> and renowned scholars of Cluj; he was welcome by Al. Vaida Voevod, Professor P. Grimm, Romulus Boilă, D. Călugăreanu – Vice-Rector of the University of Cluj, Professor I. Hațiegan, Professor S. Dragomir, Dr. G. Moroianu, V.V. Tilea, C. Casian – representing the Cluj City Hall, D. Tomescu – president of the Romanian Press Trade Union of Transylvania, I. Clopoșel – representing Bucharest newspapers, etc. After talking with them for a few minutes, Seton left the station in the car of Vaida Voevod, who would host him in his house<sup>46</sup>.

The second day, Seton was officially welcome in the University’s aula by the teaching staff and the university management<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, the Anglo-Romanian Society organised a festival at the National Theatre and the Press Trade Union offered a reception<sup>48</sup>. On June 4, Seton had lunch with Carol, the Crown Prince, who happened to be in Cluj<sup>49</sup>.

During his stay in Cluj, Seton was interviewed by “Keleti Ujság”. Asked about the purpose of his travel to Romania, he declared that he had intended to spend a few weeks to study the political and cultural events that had taken place after his last visit. However, he would only research issues regarding minorities, so as to convince himself, as a member of the English League for the Protection of Minorities, whether the numerous memoirs submitted by the minorities in the successor states, especially the

<sup>42</sup> “Patria”, October 7, 1923.

<sup>43</sup> “Patria”, May 31, 1923; “Universul”, June 5, 1923; Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988, vol. II, p. 950–951.

<sup>44</sup> “Patria”, June 2, 1923.

<sup>45</sup> A society established at the end of 1922, with a view to enhancing Anglo-Romanian relations, based on the model of the Anglo-Romanian Society of London, of which Seton-Watson was a member.

<sup>46</sup> “Universul”, June 3, 1923; DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 191–196.

<sup>47</sup> DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 203–205; “Patria”, June 3, 5 and 7, 1923; “Universul”, June 6, 1923.

<sup>48</sup> “Patria”, June 9, 1923.

<sup>49</sup> DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 196.

Hungarian one, were justified or not. He said he would try to discuss with representatives of all the parties, ethnic minorities and confessions, to get acquainted with all the viewpoints and principles implied by the issue of minorities and how they were implemented in practice<sup>50</sup>.

As for the rights minorities should have enjoyed, Seton said that their achievement was not conditioned by amendments to the peace treaties. It would be a mistake for the minorities to trigger propaganda to this purpose. Even though the League of Nations failed to meet the ideal requirements, Seton believed that it could also develop so as to be a genuine support for minorities and made sure that the public opinion in the West was not indifferent to the claims and requests of minorities. Even though the friendly feelings towards the former allies in the great war were still alive, interventions had to occur when the reliable representatives of minorities proved that their rights, as guaranteed by the peace treaties, did not apply in practice; this was a moral duty and should not be qualified as an interference with the internal affairs of the successor states.

Seton admitted that some claims of the Hungarian minority were justified and that its national and cultural existence was not sufficiently secured. A cause of this unsatisfactory situation for the Hungarian minority was, in the English publicist's opinion, the fact that the relations between the Transylvanian Romanians and those from the Old Kingdom, between the Slovaks and the Czechs, etc. were not clearly defined either, as they had been separated for centuries. Another cause was the "specific spiritual state" of Hungary at that time.

In conclusion, Seton expressed his belief that the only solution to solve the issue of minorities was the effective operation of constitutional, parliamentary and judicial institutions, which – as the English historian said – was not yet applicable in Romania. Another solution to improve the fate of national minorities in Eastern Europe was the mitigation of national rivalries and the spiritualisation of borders, i.e. maintaining them, but reducing their importance<sup>51</sup>.

On June 6, in the Assembly Hall of the Cluj City Hall, Seton was awarded the honorific citizenship of the Transylvanian city<sup>52</sup>.

In his answer, Seton declared his deep gratitude for the honour he was granted. Referring to the tradition of self-government in Transylvania, "the classical land of national self-government in terms of communes or municipalities, nations or confessions", the English historian expressed his hope that those the reinforcement of Great Romania depended on would not waste their energy to introduce administrative centralisation systems, but they would adapt the numerous precedents in the history of this province to the current conditions, and they would consider those national and religious freedom traditions Transylvania had been renowned for in the distant past, which could provide models for the harmonious coexistence of the various nationalities in Transylvania<sup>53</sup>.

Before leaving Romania, Seton was briefly interviewed by "Patria", communicating his impressions pursuant to the visit. He admitted that the British public opinion was insufficiently informed not only on Romania, but on the entire South-Eastern Europe in general, even though England's interest in this area was higher than before the war. However, those who knew something about Romania were sympathetic and believed that it could become a "heaven in miniature". Unfortunately, the contrast between the perspectives and the deplorable realities of the political situation at that time was obvious. The historian said that, under the government system leading at that time, there could be no actual political stability, which resulted in a lack of confidence from Western states and affected Romania's possibilities to obtain loans. Seton thought that this was due to the fact that Romania was undergoing a transition period, and political parties and groups were experiencing a period of adaptation to the new political realities. The

<sup>50</sup> DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 208–213; "Patria", June 3, 1923; "Universul", June 5, 1923.

<sup>51</sup> DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 208–213; "Patria", June 3, 1923; "Universul", June 5, 1923.

<sup>52</sup> "Patria", June 7, 1923; "Neamul Românesc", June 7, 1923.

<sup>53</sup> "Patria", June 7, 1923.

English historian again recognized the wide concessions agreed by the Romanian political class from the Old Kingdom, but, unfortunately, the political groups that could have taken advantage of the effects of reforms [Seton meant the National Party and the Peasants Party – out note] were not able to reinforce power and proved their lack of political experience, which allowed the liberals to become arbitrators on the political stage. This, in Seton's opinion, resulted in the current administrative and political anarchy and the authoritative attempts to exercise power, the tendency to denounce as Bolsheviks and revolutionaries all those who tried to turn democracy into a reality. Seton only saw two alternatives for the evolution of the Romanian political life: the establishment of a genuine parliamentary system, based on free elections and an accurate interpretation of the Chamber's rules, or the restoration of an obvious absolutism. However, the last alternative was impossible, for the general European context, for the situation in Russia, and, last but not least, for the monarch's devotion to the Constitution<sup>54</sup>.

On June 9, Seton-Watson went back to Bratislava; he would spend a few days more in Slovakia and go back to London through Prague, on June 21.

After the adoption of the 1923 Constitution and based thereon, the liberals adopted the union laws on administrative, electoral, judicial and educational issues. The most important was the administrative law of June 14, 1925. Even though, in its programme of November 1921, the National Liberal Party stated that they would perform administrative unification through a wide decentralisation, the liberals actually pursued a centralisation politics<sup>55</sup>, thus being criticised by the opposition parties. The Electoral Law of March 27, 1926, introducing the majority premium, was also vehemently condemned by the opposition. The National Party and the Peasants Party did not take part in the vote on this law and declared that they did not recognize it and that they would repeal it when due, replacing it by a democratic one<sup>56</sup>.

During their four years of government, the liberals focused on the development of economy, according to the liberal doctrines "through ourselves". However, through the legislative acts passed to this purpose, the liberals aimed at making sure that both them and their clientele would benefit from all these measures and that they would retain control of the economy after they would have to withdraw from government<sup>57</sup>. The adopted laws were vehemently contested by the opposition; the members of the National Party and the Peasants Party argued for an "open gate" politics, that would not hinder foreign capitalists in any way<sup>58</sup>.

The political leaders of the opposition also challenged some of the social legislation of the liberals, condemning it as yet another violation of parliamentary democracy principles and of the trust in the Constitution's capacity to protect civil freedoms and rights<sup>59</sup>.

The laws adopted by the liberals during their government helped reinforce the unitary national state, as well as the modernisation of the Romanian society and economy. At the same time, with the adopted legislation, the liberals aimed at dominating the economic and political life. Seton-Watson, who, of course, was sympathetic with the leaders of the National Party, as they were old friends of his, and who considered them to be, along with the members of the Peasants Party, the most democratic political group in Romania, would repeatedly criticise the liberal government, condemning their monopoly on the political and economic life.

Thus, in an article on the part played by the Little Entente in international relations, published in

<sup>54</sup> DANMB, stock of Microfilms England, roller 227, no. c. 214–217. "Patria", June 10 and June 12, 1923.

<sup>55</sup> Nedelea 1987, p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 163.

<sup>57</sup> Hitchins 1996, p. 436.

<sup>58</sup> Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 156.

<sup>59</sup> Istoria Românilor 2003, vol. VIII, p. 256.

Bitoleanu 1981, p. 153–162; Rusenescu, Saizu 1979, p. 167–170; Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 157, 159.

the renowned English journal “Review of Reviews”, edited by Wickham Steed, and reproduced by “Patria” in its issue of May 18, 1924, Seton re-analysed the situation in the three successor states: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. The English historian again illustrated the progresses undertaken by the first, severely criticising the governments of the other two, especially the Pašić government, and stated that the fate of the dynasties in these two countries depended on their refusal to identify themselves with the reaction<sup>60</sup>.

In January 1925, Seton visited the United States, as he had been invited by the American Historical Society for a conference in Boston. On his way, he stopped in Cleveland, where he had been invited by the Romanians, the Czechoslovaks, the Yugoslavians and the Polish living there. A reception was thrown in his honour at the Cleveland hotel, with the participation of, among others, Dr. Ropcea – physician, G. Anagnostache of the Romanian Consulate of Cleveland, B. Popovici – lawyer, I. Vasu and W. Gabriel – entrepreneurs, I. Spător, I. Vanca and Ilie Pop – priests, G. Stănculescu and A. Prie – editors of the Romanian newspaper “America” of Cleveland, as well as a large number of American citizens, including the Mayor of Cleveland, Hopkins and Newton Baker, a former war minister. After the reception, Seton went to the Western University, where he held a conference in front of an audience mainly including history professors and students. Seton again talked about the causes resulting in the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, about the political and economic situation in the successor states and about the situation of the minorities in these states. Outlining Czechoslovakia’s progress in the political and economic field, Seton argued that they were due to the strong industry of this country, dating back to before the war, which did not happen in Romania or Yugoslavia. He briefly mentioned the positive aspect of the nationalisation of natural resources in Romania. Speaking about the political situation in Romania, Seton said that the corrupt administration, the precarious state of economy and finance were insignificant compared to the great social justice brought along by the agrarian reform. A country’s prosperity depends on its political and economic situation. The historian said that Romanian peasants had the economic power in their hands, and they knew how to successfully use it to the benefit of themselves and of the country; with this power, they would gradually conquer the political one; the power of the majority, through its representatives [the National Party and the Peasants Party – our note] was a mere question of time<sup>61</sup>.

The domination of the political life by the liberals resulted in a more intense cooperation of the opposition parties, culminating in the perspective of a merger agreement between the National Party and the Peasants Party by the end of May 1924. The National Liberal Party was concerned about this merger, which would have resulted in a strong party. For this reason, Bratianu agreed with Averescu that the succession for government would go to the People’s Party, which would continue the liberal work<sup>62</sup>. On June 12, the National Party and the Peasants Party reached a 10-point merger agreement. Even though the congresses of the two parties ratified the merger on June 22, it did not actually happen, due to the manoeuvres of the liberals. Moreover, the members of the National Party and the Peasants Party began to mutually accuse one another of ill-faith and mistrust<sup>63</sup>.

In 1924, Tilea informed Seton on these negotiations between the Romanian National Party and the Peasants Party. In Tilea’s opinion, the merger of the two would have created the most popular party in Romania, which would militate for free elections, the introduction of parliamentarism and good

<sup>60</sup> “Patria”, May 18, 1924.

<sup>61</sup> “Patria”, January 30, 1925; “Neamul Românesc”, January 31, 1925.

<sup>62</sup> Mamina, Scurtu no year, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> For the merger to fail, the liberals brought the “Stere case” to the front, aiming at accrediting the idea that the Transylvanians could not morally stand along this “traitor”. The manoeuvre was successful, as the members of the National Party refused Stere’s presence in the leadership of the merged party, while the Peasants Party, especially the organisation from Bassarabia, claimed for their full freedom to appoint their representatives in the leadership bodies. Scurtu, 1994, p. 29–36; Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, p. 156.

administration, and the inclusion of the radical elements of the Peasants Party (militating for a new agrarian expropriation, for the nationalisation of private companies, etc.) would have reinforced the dynastic idea, and the monarchy would have found support if it wanted to<sup>64</sup>.

Negotiations between the National Party and the Peasants Party were resumed in the fall of 1925, resulting in a government agreement; however, no agreement was reached on the distribution of ministries, parliamentary mandates and prefectures, in a possible coalition government, as the divergences were too significant<sup>65</sup>.

In 1925, Tilea again wrote to Seton on the negotiations between the two parties. He showed that Maniu made one more effort for the merger, in his appeal of January 1925, addressed to all the parties, where he underlined the danger for the country and for the democratic parties, if they failed to reach an agreement for changing the existing regime. Until the congress, which would have elected a president, the coalition would be led by all the leaders of the merging parties. Only Nicolae Iorga answered this appeal<sup>66</sup>, which was rejected by the Peasants Party and by Averescu. However, the Romanian National Party and the Peasants Party reached a new agreement, based on the following programme: legal cooperation to change the liberal government and introduce a lawful and honest administration and free elections<sup>67</sup>.

In 1926, Tilea informed Seton on the merger of the two parties, presenting him with the wide echo of the establishment of the National Peasants Party among the Romanian public opinion, not so among the intellectuals, who were well aware of the influence of the liberals in the Court. Tilea regretted that Iorga and Argetoianu had left the newly established party, both for their personal ambitions, as the first realized he would not be elected president, and the second would not even be one of the four vice-presidents. Tilea presented the new structure of the party, organised on a provincial basis: the Old Kingdom, Transylvania, Bassarabia, Bucovina, each with its president and local committee, and a central committee with a single president (Maniu) and a general secretary (Madgearu). The programme was qualified rather more liberal than radical, based on the 10 points drawn up by Maniu in 1924 for the merger, and arguing for monarchic regime, decentralisation, properly paid and controlled administration, an economic policy protecting producers, the reduction of import and export taxes, currency stabilisation, collaboration with foreign capital for the country's economic development, the implementation of the Alba-Iulia decisions on minorities, a strictly constitutional and parliamentary regime and a clear opposition against any kind of dictatorship<sup>68</sup>.

In 1927, Tilea and Seton exchanged letters on the desirability of the return of Prince Carol, instead of the Regency that would become operational in case of King Ferdinand's death<sup>69</sup>. The English historian could not understand how someone could be in favour of the prince, as a king who had no prestige in his country or abroad or among his relatives was a "useless item". Seton was alarmed since *The Times*, after having announced that the National Peasants Party formally stood for Carol's return, had informed that General Averescu had made a statement to the Parliament, declining any discussions on the prince's rehabilitation. While he understood the position of the latter, the English professor was obviously irritated by the National Peasants Party's sympathy for Carol, since Carol's character had proved that, if he had come back to the throne, he would waste the entire wealth of the country. What seemed more

<sup>64</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 122.

<sup>65</sup> Scurtu, 1994, p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> In December 1923, a group led by Constantin Argetoianu separated from the People's Party, merging with the Nationalist-Democratic Party of N. Iorga in May 1924. The resulting organisation was named the Nationalist People's Party; in March 1925, it would merge with the Romanian National Party. After the creation of the National Peasants Party, N. Iorga and Constantin Argetoianu would separate themselves, and the former re-established his original party.

<sup>67</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 131–132.

<sup>68</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 132–133.

<sup>69</sup> Tilea and Seton's discussions took place in February-March, i.e. before the king's death (July 1927).

serious to him was the fact that among South-Eastern Europe countries, Romania included, 50% of the monarchs' attributions were related to external politics, and Romania's neighbours included the Soviet Union, which should have been duly noted by the Romanian politicians. The prince failed to prove that he would be able to decently conduct himself in public, to maintain cordial relations with the other royal houses, he failed to prove a sense of duty. Tilea replied that Prince Carol had been removed by the liberals for his attitude towards them, which was noted by the population and the army. The regency included people under the influence and control of the liberals, and the heir Mihai was less than 18 years old; the danger for the country through its government by an under age person, given its geographical situation and its neighbours, was far more serious than Carol's return, whose drawbacks were much exaggerated, who was loved by the people and the army and who could be a solution for the liberals' dictatorship (sic). Seton was mostly afraid that the tendency to "talk about Carol's return" could have been exploited, in terms of uncertainty, by the Hungarian propagandists connected to Lord Rothermere<sup>70</sup>.

In June 1927, Seton made a new trip to Romania, after having previously visited Vienna, Belgrade and Sofia. Probably due to the domestic political crisis, Romanian newspapers include almost no stories on the English professor's visit. It is only known that he visited Bucharest and Cluj from May 31 to June 9. In Bucharest, he was the guest of the Anglo-Romanian Society<sup>71</sup>. On June 6, he arrived in Cluj. On June 7, he visited the offices of the "Patria" newspaper. The Cluj City Hall threw a banquet for him at the New York Hotel, with the participation of members of the intellectual and administrative elite of the city<sup>72</sup>. During his stay in Romania, Seton also took a five-day trip to Bucovina, with his wife, May<sup>73</sup>.

Even though he did not spend much time in Romania, Seton managed to get an image on domestic political events. In 1927, he published a story on the evolution of the domestic political situation during 1926–1927, titled *The Situation in Romania*. Arguing for the relevance for the West of the internal and external situation of the two neighbours of the Soviet Union, Poland and Romania, since the rupture in the Anglo-Soviet relations, Seton asserted that Poland's situation had improved after Pilsudski's coup d'état of May 1926, while the situation in Romania was obscure and difficult. He showed that the king's choice of Averescu for the new government, in March 1926, came from Bratianu, who, at the beginning of the year, had become aware of the decreasing popularity of the liberals in the country. Bratianu's choice of Averescu was due to the liberal leader's belief that the People's Party was weak and would have been a docile instrument at the hands of the liberals, and Averescu's commitment to pursue the liberal politics would have allowed for the future succession of a liberal government. The elections organised by Averescu and Goga (Minister of Internal Affairs) under a state of siege and based on the provisions of the new electoral law of March 1926 brought a comfortable majority to the Averescu government. Gradually, the English historian said, Averescu began to pursue an independent politics and his relations with the liberals worsened. When King Ferdinand's disease became known, the politicians were alarmed; the general sought a way to keep the power and contacted Carol, asking him to return, provided that he, Averescu, would remain head of the government. Carol refused and the general tried to establish a personal dictatorship; however, the liberals revealed this to the king, who told him that he no longer had his trust and announced his intention to establish a national concentration government. Averescu's suggestion that he should form this government was accepted, but the Liberals and the National Peasants refused to cooperate, and the king appointed prince Barbu Stirbey, Bratianu's brother-in-law, to form a "neutral" government (the government would not include leaders of the most important parties – Bratianu, Maniu, Vaida, Averescu – but persons of a secondary significance – our note). Stirbey managed to get the approval of the

<sup>70</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 124–126.

<sup>71</sup> "Universul", May 31 and June 1, 1927.

<sup>72</sup> "Patria", June 8–9, 1927.

<sup>73</sup> Seton-Watson 1981, p. 422.

National Liberal Party, the National Peasants Party, the Peasants Party – Dr. Lupu and some independents, Argetoianu included. The new government would sign a manifest agreeing to observe the laws of January 4, 1926. Thus, Bratianu had obtained the recognition of the act of January 4 by the National Peasants Party and, as the king's health aggravated, he began a campaign to take down the Stirbey government; after 15 days, due to the withdrawal of liberal ministers, the cabinet had to resign. The King appointed Bratianu to form a new purely liberal government; making use of their own methods, the liberals secured 75% of the parliamentary seats<sup>74</sup>.

In conclusion, Seton pointed out that it was clear that, in Romania, only two political parties mattered: the Liberals, who, though unpopular, had a great tradition behind them and were the most experienced and resourceful leaders, and the National Peasants, who, despite their errors in the last years (their failure to attend the coronation and their attitude towards Prince Carol), won back lost ground and elaborated an admirably valid programme. After again describing the changes brought along by the war – national unity, the agrarian reform and the universal vote – Seton showed that the first one turned Romania from a minor power to a secondary one, following Poland and Spain in this category; the second one discarded the danger of the Bolshevik revolution, despite the Soviet Union's neighbourhood, and the third one provided the nation with means of democratic self-expression, though it was almost useless until the electorate acquired the required political experience. The 1922, 1926 and 1927 elections could be compared, in Seton's words, with those of the old Hungary. The king's attributions included appointing or dismissing the government, and King Ferdinand drastically exercised this power during his 13 years of reign: the dismissal of the Marghiloman germanophile government (1918), of the Transylvanian leader Vaida (1920) and of general Averescu (1922 and 1927). In the last three cases, Seton said, though the legality of the king's act could not be disputed, the Constitution's spirit was about to be infringed, and the crown's prestige was at stake. The historian wondered what would happen when the initiative would not belong to a king, but to a prestige-less Regency, acting on behalf of a boy born in 1921? Would this Regency – Seton wondered – take such drastic measures? Or, actually, in the long time until King Michael would come of age, the current initiative of the Crown would be assigned to the prime minister (or to the stronger person in the Cabinet)? Those who believed in a constitutional and democratic government would think of this as a blessing, if the future cabinet would actually represent the wishes of the majority. However, he said, the idea of the country being led by a Regency until 1940 was appreciated in many circles, provided that the only alternative would have been Carol's return to the throne, which he again condemned<sup>75</sup>.

Therefore, Seton said, these were the issues Bratianu, as a minister, faced. However, Bratianu had to be acclaimed for his foreign politics. One of the causes of the fall of general Averescu was his flirts with the fascist Italy, which had recently come close to Hungary. Bratianu, instead, even if he was intransigent at the Peace Conference of Paris, was irrevocably committed to the Paris Regulations, to the friendship with France and to the reinforcement of the Little Entente; he also had his reserves toward Russia. Eventually, Titulescu's election as a foreign affairs minister was a proof that the foreign politics would be pursued on a conciliating basis, in full accordance with the Geneva principles and, at a domestic level, it was a sign that the government would resign its xenophobic and ultra-protectionist economic policy promoted during 1922–1926 and would have moderate political manifestations<sup>76</sup>.

On July 20, 1927, King Ferdinand deceased. On the same day, Prince Michael (who was only 6 years old) was proclaimed King, with the monarch's prerogatives being exercised by the Regency. The members of the latter were taken over by the personality of Ion I.C. Bratianu; therefore, from the very moment of the king's death, a group mostly represented by the National Peasants Party came forward,

<sup>74</sup> Seton-Watson 1927, p. 3–7.

<sup>75</sup> Seton-Watson 1927, p. 7–9.

<sup>76</sup> Seton-Watson 1927, p. 9–10.

recognising the Regency as a mere fact and vehemently criticising it, threatening to repeal the act of January 4 and bring Carol to the country.

The tension in the country increased day after day, when Ion I.C. Brătianu unexpectedly died on November 24. The death of the Romanian prime minister left a huge void on the Romanian political stage. The Regency appointed Vintila Brătianu as the president of the Council of Ministers. He did not manage to keep the power and his party entered an obvious decline. The Vintila Brătianu government had to face the campaign led by the National Peasants Party.

Unhappy with the evolution of the internal politics and worried that these divergences between the National Peasants and the Liberals could be used by the Hungarian revisionism, Seton, in his 1928 correspondence with Tilea, advised the National Peasants to take every action to obtain Transylvania's autonomy within the Romanian Kingdom. As early as 1924, the English historian informed Tilea, in a letter, of his opinion that there was no analogy between the situations of Czechoslovakia and Romania. The English historian considered that Transylvania could be awarded a wider autonomy than Slovakia in the Czechoslovak state, as the geographical conditions were much more favourable in Romania. He appreciated that the region inhabited by the Szekelys had to be awarded a special position within the Romanian state, that would not threaten the latter's integrity. In a letter of July 14, 1928, Seton said that the only solution for the disastrous administration of Romania was decentralisation, simultaneously with autonomy for Transylvania; thus, the guarantees provided to the Hungarians and Germans in Alba Iulia in 1918 would have been put into practice. He considered that the request for reasonable autonomy, that would transform any accusation of separatism into something grotesque, would be a fatal blow to the "clique" of Bucharest and an attractive programme for Bassarabia and even for the public opinion in the Kingdom. The argument supporting this solution was the belief that it was the only possible way for the intolerable regime of those times, especially since a return to the old Hungarian regime was out of question. The English historian hoped that the young generation of Hungarians and Germans in Transylvania had more realistic views and would fully support the idea. Moreover, he considered that autonomy for Transylvania would have been welcome abroad. It would have clearly shown that minority rights were observed in Romania. It would have also meant a reinforcement of the peasants element, which would have become a genuine bastion against Bolshevism and the subversive ideas circulating in this part of Europe<sup>77</sup>.

In his answer, Tilea said that he studied Seton-Watson's proposals with Maniu and Vaida, who were pleasantly surprised by some of them, especially by the professor's belief that the inclusion of some autonomy for Transylvania in the National Peasants programme could provide this party with the much needed support to do away with the liberal government. In general, the idea of both autonomy and decentralisation was attractive to National Peasants leaders, since this was thought to be the only solution for Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. The problem was how far to go: Romania had 5–6 provinces, while Czechoslovakia only one. In Tilea's opinion, autonomy for Transylvania was needed and claimed by its population. Vaida considered an autonomy similar to what the Slovaks had requested, with a local parliament and a joint Reichsrath, led by a king's governor, if the monarchy was maintained. Such an autonomy would have reinforced the country's cohesion, by removing the frictions existing within the various regions and also creating a healthy competition for development. Vaida's views were also supported by Mihalache. Maniu considered that Romania was better off than the other states in the Little Entente, as it had no regional parties. Therefore, the head of the National Peasants Party considered that a wide administrative decentralisation would have been enough, along with the award of wider powers to local councils and the establishment of regional councils for agriculture, trade, etc. He did not think that the government should have been threatened with a claim for autonomy, especially since

<sup>77</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 126–127.



the adoption of such a programme would have hindered their accession to power even more, due to the lack of understanding and the sensitivity of the politicians in the Old Kingdom. Tilea agreed with Maniu from this point of view, but he argued that the material and ideological bases for wide autonomy existed not only in Transylvania, but also in Dobrogea, Bassarabia and Bucovina, and the National Peasants had to accept such a programme, if they did not get the power soon; the effects of the bad administration had to be channelled to some direction, and the autonomy could save the unity of the kingdom. Therefore, Tilea said, they had to begin with decentralisation and go even further than Maniu's beliefs, as needed. The young generation of the Hungarian and German minorities gave up the hope to fully regain the pre-war Hungarian borders and they would have been happy to find a *modus vivendi* within an autonomist regime, Tilea said<sup>78</sup>.

Seton answered that he did not believe that the liberals would gladly renounce their power, if they were not threatened with the idea of autonomy. He agreed both with Maniu, on the reaction of the public opinion in the Old Kingdom regarding autonomy, and with Vaida, thinking that everything was an issue of tactics to be solely decided by the stakeholders, i.e. the National Peasants leaders. After Radič's assassination and the complete rupture between the Belgrade government and the Croats, alarmed by the situation in Yugoslavia, Seton advised the Transylvanians, in October 1928, not to follow the Croat direction, but to adopt the Slovak one and press for gradual autonomy in Transylvania. Iuliu Maniu's appointment as a prime minister by the Regency, on November 9, 1928, and the formation of a government exclusively including National Peasants, put an end to these discussions on a possible autonomy for Transylvania<sup>79</sup>.

Therefore, convinced that the operation democratic mechanism established in the 1923 Constitution, which proved to be extremely complex and difficult, could have taken place only with the National Peasants getting the power, as they asked for decentralisation, free trade and genuine democracy and perhaps influenced by the fact that most of his Romanian friends were Transylvanian political leaders, Seton-Watson vehemently criticised the liberal governments of the third decade. Worried by the disputes between the National Peasants and the Liberals, he hoped, as for Yugoslavia, that the Romanian King, Ferdinand I (1914–1927), would play a major part in establishing domestic harmony.

However, it is our opinion that, sometimes, his criticism of the liberal leaders was perhaps too harsh. It cannot be admitted that the liberal governments of the 1920s were the expression of a liberal or a Bratianu-led dictatorship, with serious and repeated infringements of democratic rights and freedoms. Last but not least, the liberal government of 1922–1926 was one of the most fruitful in the entire history of modern Romania. During the "Bratianu-led decade", Romania achieved significant progress both in economy, and in politics, administration, culture, etc. The industrial production had doubled, Romania had a democratic constitution, the unitary national state had modern legislation, and education, science and culture was at their peak. The country had foreign alliances with several states, it was a remarkable presence in the League of Nations and an active participant in international life.

On the other hand, Seton welcomed the reinforcement of the national unity, the fact that Romanians from various provinces, with a mostly different historical and cultural experience, merged into an absolutely viable single nation. Causes of friction existed at the beginning, but they were overcome. In his studies on the history of Romanians, he was always impressed by the Romanian people's extraordinary capacity to survive the long periods of conquest and separation and he was happy to have lived to see the triumph and reinforcement of unity.

Secondly, though Seton criticised Romania's failure to meet its promises to minorities in the Union Resolution of Alba Iulia, he appreciated the Romanian state's progress in minority approaches.

<sup>78</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 127–128.

<sup>79</sup> Seton-Watson 1985, p. 128–129.

The main motivation of Seton-Watson's criticism of the Romanian inter-war political system, in general, was due to his belief that the divergences between the National Peasants and the Liberals and the repeated complaints from the political leaders of the Hungarian minority to the League of Nations turned Romania into a vulnerable state against the Hungarian revisionist campaign.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

**Archives**

Department of National Archives of Bucharest (DANMB), stock of the General Police Department (DGP)  
Department of National Archives of Bucharest (DANMB), stock of Micro-films, England.

**Press**

«Adevărul», 1922.  
«Gazeta Transilvaniei», 1920.  
«L'Indépendance Roumaine», 1920.  
“Neamul Românesc”, 1923, 1925.  
“Patria”, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1927.  
“The New Europe”, 1920.  
«Universul», 1920, 1923, 1927.

**Lucrări**

Bărbulescu *et al.*, 2002 – M. Bărbulescu, D. Deletant, K. Hitchins, Ș. Papacostea, P. Teodor, *Istoria României*, Bucharest, Corint, 2002.  
Bitoleanu 1981 – I. Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României moderne 1922–1926*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981.  
Bodea, Seton-Watson 1988 – C. Bodea, H. Seton-Watson, R.W. Seton-Watson și românii (1906–1920), vol. I-II, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988.  
Crampton 2002 – R.J. Crampton, *Europa răsăriteană în secolul al XX-lea ... și după*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2002.  
Hitchins 1996 – Keith Hitchins, *România 1866–1947*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1996.  
*Istoria Românilor*, 2003 – *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România Întregită (1918–1940)*, coord. by Ioan Scurtu, Bucharest, Enciclopedică, 2003.  
Mamina, Scurtu no year – I. Mamina, I. Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți 1916–1938*, Bucharest, Silex, no year  
Nedelea 1987 – Marin Nedelea, *Aspecte ale vieții politice din România în anii 1922–1926*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987.  
Rusenescu, Saizu 1979 – M. Rusenescu, I. Saizu, *Viața politică în România 1922–1928*, Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1979.  
Rychlik, Marzik, Bielik 1995 – J. Rychlik, T. D. Marzik, M. Bielik, R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906–1951, vol. I, Praha, Ustav T.G. Masaryka, 1995.  
Scurtu 1972 – I. Scurtu, *Lupta partidelor politice în alegerile parlamentare din mai-iunie 1920*, in *Carpica*, tome IV, 1972, pp. 251–265.  
Scurtu, 1994 – I. Scurtu, *Istoria Partidului Național-Țărănesc*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 1994.  
Scurtu, Buzatu 1999 – I. Scurtu, Gh. Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX (1918–1948)*, Bucharest, Paideia, 1999.  
Seton-Watson 1927 – Robert William Seton-Watson, *The situation in Romania*, London, 1927.  
Seton-Watson 1981 – H. and C. Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the last years of Austria-Hungary*, London, 1981.  
Seton-Watson 1982 – H. Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the wars*, Colorado, Westview Press, Inc., 1982.  
Seton-Watson 1985 – H. Seton-Watson, *A private anglo-romanian political correspondence (R.W. Seton-Watson and V.V. Tilea 1919–1929)*, in *AIIA “A.D. Xenopol”*, XXII/1, 1985, pp. 117–135.  
Seton-Watson *et alii* 1976 – H. Seton-Watson (eds.), *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. Correspondence 1906–1941*, vol. I, London, British Academy, 1976.  
Suciu 1997 – Dumitru Suciu, *Monarhia și făurirea României Mari 1866–1918*, Bucharest, Albatros, 1997.  
Sugar 2002 – P. F. Sugar (coord.), *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2002.