

ELECTIONS OF 1928 REFLECTED IN THE ROMANIAN PRESS

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Abstract. *The article tackles the subject of elections in 1928 and the way they were presented in the press at that time. In the same time it produces and it analyses the punctual way the subject of elections is represented in a series of newspapers like Adevărul, Dimineața, Curentul, Universul, Cuvântul, Dreptatea and Viitorul. The conclusion it brought to is that the overall image of elections in 1928 is fairly correct, clear, some scattered small incidents reported.*

Keywords: *elections, 1928, press, analysis.*

The National Peasants' Party – P.N.T., the second biggest party in the interwar period was created in 1926 having merged the Romanian National Party in Transylvania - P.N.R. and the Peasants' Party - P.T. in the Romanian Old Kingdom (*Vechiul Regat*). The new founded party (P.N.T.) together with the National Liberal Party - P.N.L. will ensure the governmental turns and the sound development of democracy in the period above mentioned.

After the death of King Ferdinand and Ionel Brătianu's, at the beginning of November 1928, Iuliu Maniu is assigned by the Regency to form the new government. His assigning comes on the background of a harsh opposition campaign that is large political demonstrations that had as climax the big popular assembly at Alba Iulia on May 6th 1928, where more than 100.000 people were present. (Caiete Silvane – Marin Pop *Aspecte privind viața politică din Plasa Cehu în perioada 1918 – 1948* online, October 11th 2008, accessed on June 10th 2010. <http://www.caietesilvane.ro/indexcs.php?cmd=articol&idart=483>).

Iuliu Maniu presented the list to the new ministers two days after the Regency committed the mandate, before taking the oath. In the structure of the government there were: Alexandru Vaida-Voievod (interior), Aurel Vlad (cults and arts), Mihai Popovici (finances), Ion Mihalache (agriculture and domains), Virgil Madgearu (industry and trade), Gheorghe Gh. Mironescu (foreign affairs), Grigore Iunian (justice), Ion Răducanu (work, cooperation and social insurance), Nicolae Costăchescu (public instruction).

Afterwards, according to the procedures, under Iuliu Maniu's leadership, the new P.N.T. government dissolved the Parliament and set the date of elections on December 12th at the Chamber that is December 15th-19th 1928 at the Senate. (The Foundation Corneliu Coposu *Prima perioadă de guvernare național-tărănistă 10th November 1928 – April 18th 1931* online accessed on June 12th 2010. http://www.corneliucoposu.ro/articol/index.php/319_prima_perioada_de_guvernare_nationaltaranista_10_November_1928_18_aprilie_1931/).

In order to be able to observe more clearly the phases that concern the elections in 1928, we shall briefly explain how the multiparty political and Romanian parliamentary system in the interwar epoch worked. It was a quite simple and accepted scenario in that epoch. When a government was wearing away and losing the credibility in front of the public opinion (so when its political legitimacy in regress did not allow it to govern the country), the king (or regent) intervened, demanding the government's resignation and naming, following consultations with representative political forces, a new prime minister (the president of the Council of Ministers, according to the entitling of that time) and his task was to create a new government.

Thus, the party called to govern organized the general elections (legislative) with the aim to ensure the necessary majorities (at the Chamber and the Senate). According to the law the governmental party benefited also of 'first election' that allowed it, in case it obtained minimum 40% of the valid votes expressed, to round the percentage at 51% or more, in order to be able to apply the governmental program without obstructing and blocking up the parliament.

This system had been taken from the western democracies and compared to the electoral system applied before the First World War, which was based on the census vote, represented undoubtedly a progress in the field, thus we do not consider as relevant the theory according to which at that moment that electoral system was perceived as non-democratic or non-European.

However, following the democracy and verticality line, we have to mention an aspect we can not state it was the expression of an ideal political reality, that is the fact that the party organizing the elections was, usually, the one who won. As an example we pointed out the elections in 1928, when Iuliu Maniu's party got for the first time at the government, but also the year 1933, when the liberals came back. The exception in this sense was the elections in 1937, when the electoral ballot was organized by the liberal government directed by Tătăreanu and his party lost the following vote. (Romania Liberă – Daniel Dragomirescu *Legitimitatea politică în România 1928 – 1946* online September 29th 2007, accessed June 15th 2010. <http://www.romanalibera.ro/opinii/aldine/legitimitatea-politica-in-romania-1928-1946-107286.html>).

As regards the elections in the year 1928 and their representation in the press of that time, we followed the appearance of electoral news in the following newspapers: Adevărul, Dimineața, Curentul, Universul, Cuvântul, Dreptatea and Viitorul.

In the same time, we noticed that according to the newspapers orientation, they showed an opinion more or less objective and beforehand they all allotted a more generous space or smaller to the news and the electoral opinions according to the interest they had for this type of information.

Nevertheless, with few insignificant exceptions, the newspapers had on the first page, during the electoral campaign a central and salient title (written in capitals – big, bold) to which usually they added an article and/or a caricature according to the specificity of the newspaper, and in the pages three, four or five they came back with a page dedicated exclusively to the 'electoral campaign' or 'elections'. This approach lasts up to the upcoming of voting days, and in the eve of the electoral process, during it and when publishing the results, the subjects and the titles that refer to elections occupy large spaces, starting from the first page and continuing with entire pages dedicated to elections.

There are - as a typology of columns - columns for pure information 'the county Brăila – up to now the following lists had been submitted at the Court of Brăila: (for the Chamber) – 1. The PNT list. Head list: Nicolae Orășanu; 2. the PNL list. Head list: Leonte Moldovanu; 3. the list of the Peasants' Party, the leadership of Dr. Lupu. Head list: Petre Bălan; (for the Senate) – the PNL list. Head list: Liviu Macedonescu;' (Adevărul, Saturday November 17th 1928), of attitude 'If they vote for the government, they will assume a small part of the responsibility of mister Maniu. If they do not trust the government, then they should not stay at home. They should report to the polls and place a ballot paper inside, in favour of one of the opposition parties. To exercise the right to vote is a citizen duty; nobody should have the right to back out. From the actual elections no voter should be missing, not being kept by some force majeure.' (Dimineața, Wednesday, December 12th 1928), propaganda columns (hidden or obvious), 'Voters, Vote for the candidates of the National Liberal Party, which acquired the trust of all great states in the west in Romania through its wise politics, when its currency has to gain its stable and final power.' (Viitorul, Wednesday, December 12th 1928), of analysis. 'After the elections – some remarks and findings; now, when the elections for the Chamber and the Senate ended, some remarks and findings are required. The governmental newspapers state, headed by Adevărul, that under the present regime, we had the most civilized electoral campaign and the freest elections in Romania. Because Adevărul tried to set a comparison between the 1927 and the 1928 elections, with no further comments, we shall make a comparison as well, but based on the facts, that could not be denied.[...] Here are the two Adevărul's attitudes that prove the absence of an objective judgement and the interest that it has to mislead the public opinion.' (Universul, Friday, December 21st 1928), etc.

I could repeat myself, but I mention that the type of columns is in close connection with the paper's orientation and the period (more distant or close) around elections.

Next we shall make an overview of part of the newspapers consulted; afterwards we shall point out also personal opinions based on the analysis of the columns. Therefore we shall start with the newspaper 'Adevărul', that was a so-called governmental newspaper (it supported the National Peasants' Party). It allotted elections and electoral campaign a large space in its pages, where it had a special column dedicated to them, but supported PNT in the other columns also, the actual government and its figures, presenting each speech, statement of position and movement of cabinet members that were associated by default with the National Peasants' Party.

'In making their enmity, hatred politics, of destroying all that is not liberal, Mr Vintilă Brătianu's party has used, for some years now, a poisonous publication it produces and spreads among villagers. It is the Peasant's Mail, meant to deceive the country crowds. In the most recent number of this vile publication, there is a furious attack against Mr Iuliu Maniu, embroidered with an unparalleled treachery. (Adevărul, Saturday, December 8th 1928).

Besides supporting PNT methods abovementioned, 'Adevărul' focusses the campaign on the idea of 'free elections', a very delicate subject and having a certain major impact on the population. 'Examining the political situation that was created by calling Mr Iuliu Maniu to government, we showed – having presented the conditions the head of the National Peasants' Party starts its governing, - that the analysis of the new reports is required between the parties and the situation of each party. This examination is necessary now especially, when we shall have truly free elections and when clarifying the public consciousness is a real duty for the publicist.'" (Adevărul, Saturday, November 17th 1928)

Also, another impact point of the newspaper is the presence of the take-offs in almost every number, on the first page – centrally, which are suggestive and create the feeling of a smile in front of adversity, but they all draw a clear direction. (see annexes)

The subject of elections is pointed out quite often without violence (titles with a span broad letters 'elections without stroke' – (Adevărul, Saturday 15th December 1928), without constraints, peaceful – something new at that time and special compared to previous elections.

The newspaper 'Dimineața' is involved in the electoral campaign, in the sense that allotted space and ideas to the elections, but wants to be an objective daily paper, and mainly it succeeds. And here there are take-offs placed in the very center on the first page (see annexes), news about the government and its members: 'Mr. Iuliu Maniu arrived yesterday at Cluj for the first time since his installation at the government. The welcome of the prime minister proves once more the popularity the head of the Ardeal government enjoys, where coming to power of the national-peasant is regarded as a national celebration.' (Dimineața, Wednesday, December 5th 1928), special space allotted to the electoral campaign, but also columns that 'would favour' the opposition, columns that present 'small incidents from elections' (Dimineața, Friday December 14th 1928), 'Serious electoral incidents at Buzău and Cocioc-Ilfov' (Dimineața, Wednesday December 19th 1928). It has also analysis columns, that encourage/tries to make people responsible,

bringing arguments for them to go to vote, set which are the priorities of the government: 'Elections are finished or almost. On them, as well as on their results we do not intend to give an opinion in this column. The role of this column is to bring out the duties that come out for the government, as well as for the community of the citizens now when, by power of things, we enter in a more calm, more quiet period'. (Dimineața, Wednesday December 19th 1928), as the elections ran – overall considering that there were no special problems that highly disturbed the smooth development of things.

'Dreptatea' – the official paper of National Peasants' Party, that obviously allotted a large space to the electoral campaign and government. The main axis of columns is to point out PNT and to blame especially the liberals – the main adversaries. It is pointed out the idea of 'free elections' and it is reminded repeatedly the fact that these elections reported no violence. As a new fact compared to the other newspapers read up to this moment is the appearance at the top right corner (first page), in each number, of a quotation of peasants' leader/leaders: 'We decided to have free, legal elections and order. Thus we believe we shall enter adequately among the great democracies in the West'. (Mr prime-minister Iuliu Maniu to the foreign press) – (Dreptatea, Friday November 30th 1928).

At the opposite in the newspaper 'Dreptatea' we meet 'Viitorul' – the official paper of the National Liberal Party, where we see the same campaign style, but in my opinion a more aggressive, a more virulent one – 'Vote against – Demagogy and anarchy – the citizen consciousness to make his duty – a party which in opposition fails like the National Peasants' Party and which in only few days of governing, commits the same mistakes Mr Maniu's government did, provides a wide way to all mistakes and dangers in the future. This is why the National Liberal Party asks confidently the young community to vote it meant as a defense weapon of community interests in the hands of the citizen of Great Romania, in order not to fall prey to wandering and demagogy which are more dangerous today at the government than yesterday in the opposition' ('Viitorul', Wednesday December 12th 1928).

The newspaper 'Universul' succeeds in maintaining its objectivity from political point of view. Thus, during the electoral campaign there are few columns on this subject, and when they appear, they are pure campaign information, that brings news on all political sections. 'The central electoral office of LANC for the Capital and the county of Ilfov was formed of: Popescu-Mozaceni, Dr. Nicu Ionescu, I. Emilian, N. Mucichescu.' (Universul, Monday December 3rd 1928).

In the same time, we meet also the columns attitude regarding those aspects of the electoral campaign and elections that offer seriousness and professionalism to the newspaper. 'The electoral campaign is coming to an end, but some reprehensible means want to stand out eventually. Among these, they occupy an important place to repeated statements in all the regions of the country: we shall change that dignitary, we shall dissolve that council, etc. And as a political deposit, there are warnings, suspensions, investigations, etc.'" (Universul, Thursday December 13th 1928)

The columns in 'Universul' show that there were some clashes and small irregularities at local level, but they do not prevent the smooth overall running of the elections. 'An aggression at Timișoara – an abuse at San Nicolau Mare and a murder in the commune Urvin'" (Universul, Saturday December 8th 1928)

The newspaper 'Curentul' has almost the same approach as 'Universul' – Pamfil Șeicaru's, the difference is the fact that there are more electoral news, presentations, attitudes, than in 'Universul'.

'Cuvântul' seems more an investigation newspaper, that points out the liberal not quite orthodox practices, forcing banks and citizens to vote – 'Today's head of the liberal party believes he has a providential mission for this country. It has become an obsession when it comes to Mr. Vintilă Brătianu, who believes that, by using the most criminal means, he can get – as soon as possible – to upset the government. In the light of this obsession, we have to see the criminal attempt of liberal banks against the *leu* – an attempt applauded by Mr Vintilă Brătianu, but which nevertheless tries to exonerate beforehand by stating sententiously in liberal party press: «No good Romanian can rejoice the leu drop»"

Finally, the conclusion we drew from the newspapers regarding the elections in 1928 is that they confronted two large parties, PNL and PNT, with senior leaders, and the idea of 'free elections' is grounded and extremely important for that period. The electoral campaign and the elections, as we previously mentioned took place in a normal setting, with no major incidents that would have undermined the general fate of elections.

In the end, we remind that the results of the elections showed a clear victory of the National Peasants' Party, with 77,76% votes and 348 mandates for the Chamber, followed by the National Liberal Party, with 6,55% (13 mandates) and the Hungarian Party, with 6,08%.

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CURRENTUL 1928.

CUVÂNTUL 1928.

DIMINEAȚA 1928.

DREPTATEA 1928.

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UNIVERSUL 1928.

VIITORUL 1928.

ANNEXES



Fig. 1. Adevărul luni 19 noiembrie 1928.
Fig. 1. Adevărul, Monday, November 19th 1928.

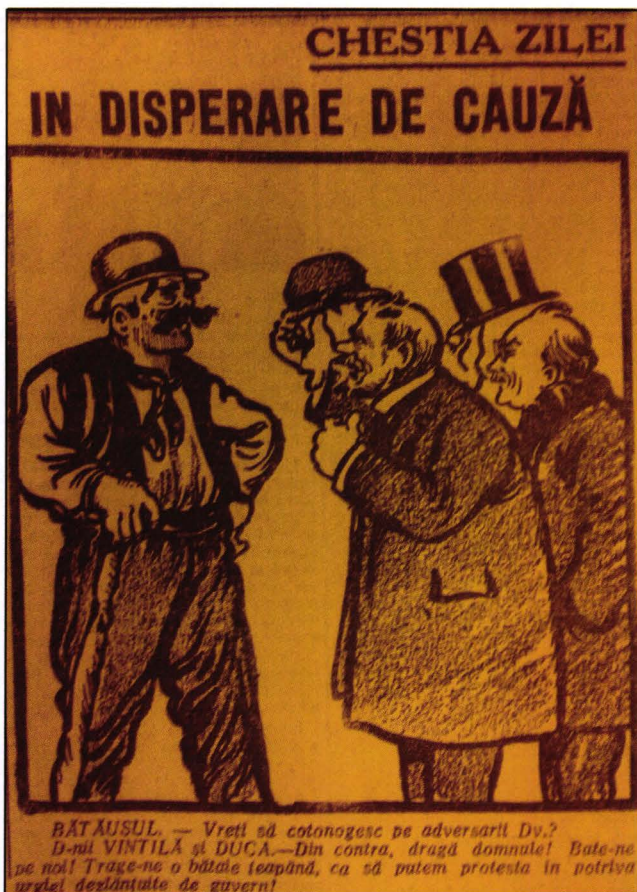


Fig. 2. Adevărul sâmbătă 1 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 2. Adevărul, Saturday, December 1st 1928.



Fig. 3. Adevărul marți 11 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 3. Adevărul, Tuesday, December 11th 1928.



Fig. 4. Adevărul sâmbătă 8 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 4. Adevărul, Saturday, December 8th 1928.



Fig. 5. Adevărul joi 6 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 5. Adevărul, Thursday, December 6th 1928.



Fig. 6. Dimineața miercuri 12 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 6. Dimineața, Wednesday, December 12th 1928.



Fig. 7. Dimineața sâmbătă 8 decembrie 1928.
Fig. 7. Dimineața, Saturday, December 8th 1928.