

The National Liberal Party and the National Peasant Party Assembly of Alba-Iulia (May 1928)

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“Moartea lui Ionel Brătianu a prăbușit sistemul dictaturii camuflate, lăsând liberă în mișcări o democrație rahitică. Voința lui autoritară o împiedicase să aibă o dezvoltare normală / The death of Ionel Brătianu broke down the disguised dictatorship system, letting loose a rachitic democracy. His authoritarian drive had hindered its normal development.” (Pamfil Șeicaru)¹

On May 6, 1928, the National Peasant Party (NPP) organized in Alba-Iulia, the symbolic capital of the United Romania, one of the most important political events in Romanian inter-war history. It was regarded by the majority of participants and contemporaries as a “popular gathering unequalled before”², and it coincided for NPP leaders with the ideal timing within the legitimizing sequence of their own power aspirations. According to the estimations made by neutral observers³, a hundred thousand people, peasants from Transylvania, but also workers from the Jiu Valley, had come to promote the cause embodied in the action taken by the party led by Iuliu Maniu. In *Chemarea Partidului Național-Țărănesc adresată poporului* [= The Appeal of the National Peasant Party addressed to the people], the enforcement of freedom and the establishment of “*belșugului pentru țara asta frumoasă și pentru toți fiii ei bravi și cinștiți* / the welfare of this country and of its brave and honest sons” set up the basis of a privileged relations with “*împărăția omeniei, legei și*

¹ Pamfil Șeicaru, *Ionel Brătianu, arhitectul României Mari*, in idem, *Scrieri din exil*, vol. II, *Portrete politice* (ed. by I. Opreșan), Bucharest, 2002, p. 73.

² This syntagma reflecting the public discussion of that time belonged to Constantin Argetoianu; see *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, vol. VIII, part VII: 1926-1930 (ed. by Stelian Neagoe), Bucharest, 1997, p. 229.

³ N. Iorga, *Memorii (Agonia regală și Regența)*, vol. V, Bucharest, 1935, p. 286; when presenting the Alba-Iulia assembly as “*adunarea națională a poporului românesc* / the national assembly of the Romanian People”, NPP members argued that 150-200,000 people had attended the manifestation in the symbolic capital of Great Romania (ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 105). Like the Liberals, the members of Averescu Party limited the number of participants to 40,000 Romanians (Al. Averescu, *Limpezirea unei situațiuni. Alba-Iulia de abis. Articole publicate în ziarul “Îndreptarea”*. *Numerile: 107, 108 și 109 din Marți 15, Mercuri 16 și Joi 17 Mai 1928*, Bucharest, 1928).

dreptății / the reign of honour, law, and justice”⁴. Thus, after the ousting of the Liberal Party from governing everything became tangible for most of the people, and this was the declared purpose of the meeting. The discourse by Ion Mihalache on the gathering from Alba-Iulia, foreseen as “*revoluția care să mântuiască națiunea românească* / the revolution to redeem the Romanian nation”⁵, included the essential terms of the national peasant representations: beyond a party congress, “*adunarea națională* / the national assembly” of the people proposed a “new era” for the Romanian society. The assembly-congress symbiosis had to refute the Liberal governing prolongation.

The description of these events is not the unique purpose of this paper. Their arrangement in an uncomfortable space would be obvious, since the actions and their effects are generally known through the effort made by a great number of historians performing on the Romanian inter-war political scene. I shall further attempt to draw an analysis that shifts the focus on the Royal crisis or the fight over power of NPP members – the favourite approach of this event⁶ – towards the representations of the Romanian inter-war political system. The meaning of the Alba-Iulia assembly (May 1928) transcends the suggested interpretative restrictions, of NPP governing “conquest” stage and/or of Carlist restoration trial. Internalized by all the political actors as one crossroad in the Romanian post-WW I political life, this gathering represented a moment in the institutionalisation process of the oppositionist practice aiming to power, a new political game in time of masses and universal suffrage. Meanwhile, it is also interesting to learn the means used by the Liberals to prescribe or re-write the NPP radical attempt unfavourable to them as party, and to modify the political power system.

1. The Actors

The gathering of Alba-Iulia has a prehistory, which began after the death of Ion I. C. Brătianu and after the NPP refuse to come to a political compromise, fact that eventually expressed the more obvious weakness of the government led by Vintilă Brătianu. “*Național-tărăniștii au putut să ridice capul și să revendice, în fine,*

⁴ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 43; see also *Poporul Român. Chemarea Partidului Național-Tărănesc*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 162, Monday, April 30, 1928.

⁵ Cf. *Politica de amenințare și de anarhie continuă*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6031, Wednesday, March 28, 1928.

⁶ Among those dealing with this moment I should like to mention Ioan Scurtu in particular, with *Istoria României între anii 1919-1940. Evoluția regimului politic de la democrație la dictatură*, Bucharest, 1996, with a chapter dealing with this event essential for inter-War Romania (*Campania Partidului Național-Tărănesc pentru răsturnarea guvernului*, p. 84-106); see also, idem, *Istoria Partidului Național-Tărănesc*, Bucharest, 1994, p. 87-99; I. Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică*, vol. I, Iași, 2002, p. 161; I. Ciupercă, *Opoziție și putere*, Iași, p. 249-256, although he insists mostly on the overthrowing campaign and not on the assembly itself; Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu. Naționalism sau democrație. Biografia unui mare român*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 172-174 etc.; there is also an approach of the event by Dan Alecu, *Alba-Iulia. 6 mai 1928*, Constanța, 1928.

serios puterea / The National Peasants were able to raise their heads and finally claim the power seriously⁷, noted Constantin Argetoianu. The action taken by the group led by Iuliu Maniu had a double objective: to bring to power a National Peasant government as legitimate representative of the nation, which entailed the organisation of free elections and the reiteration of the new society of the United Romania. NPP's opposition was multi-faceted, violent in speeches, aiming at exercising a constant pressure upon the authoritative factors. The contest of the Liberals seizing the power, springing from the rejection of a Parliament "*izvorât din violență și fraudă* / created from violence and fraud", equally involved the *de jure* non-recognition of Regency. Accused of sympathising with Brătianu, the constitutional factor seemed to have been "*alcătuit fără concursul liber exprimat al națiunii* / formed without the free expressed participation of the nation" and also an emanation of the Liberal Parliament "fabricated" in 1922. Beyond the *democratism* of such reasoning, the national peasant speech represented a manner to exert pressure on the High Institution, the public opinion being projected as a second constitutional arbitrator⁸. Under the circumstances of Vintilă Brătianu government crisis, Iuliu Maniu claimed the power refusing "*orice formulă care n-ar cuprinde dominația lui absolută, fără nici o condiție și fără nici o rezervă* / any formula that would be

⁷ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁸ Iuliu Maniu declared in the national peasant reunion of Craiova (February 12, 1928), that the government is maintaind "by the gendarmes' mercy and the Regency grace / *din mila jandarmilor și grația Regenței*"; Mihai Popovici made use of similar terms: "*Parlamentul era o adunătură* / the Parliament was a mob" (in *Setea de putere. Agitația anarhică și de dezordine continuă*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 5995, Tuesday, February 14, 1928); see also I. Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea politică*, Bucharest, 1995, p. 45; in an interview for the Parisian newspaper "*l'Oeuvre*" (cf. *Alt interviu al d-lui Madgearu*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 5988, Monday, February 6, 1928), Virgil Madgearu had stated that "*guvernele se schimbă nu numai fiindcă arbitru constituțional o vrea, dar și când opinia publică o cere* / governments change not only at the constitutional arbitrator wish, but also when the public polls request it"; "*Regența este datoare să privească realitățile în față* / the Regency is obliged to face realities", the national peasant leader considered (see also *Datoria Regenței*, "Dreptatea", II, no 105, Monday, February 20, 1928); in a speech on the political situation given before the general assembly of NPP Bucharest organisation, the same politician and president of branch maintained that "*noi nu recunoaștem Regența decât de fapt și nu de drept; am pornit de la ideea că noi avem nevoie în țara românească de un factor constituțional independent, care să fie arbitru între partidele politice* / we recognize the Regency only as fact and not as right; we started from the idea that we need an independent constitutional factor in Romania, which should be an arbitrator for the political parties" ("Dreptatea", II, no 148, Wednesday, April 11, 1928). As Iuliu Maniu argued in an interview for "*Le Petit Parisien*" to question the role of the institution of Regency was a fact based on the unfulfillment of its duties. Constitutionally placed above the parties, the Regency imitated King Ferdinand's stance of "*monarh absolut* / absolute monarch" in supporting the Liberals. However, what had been tolerable for founder of Great Romania could not continue under the current situation, NPP members thought. To fight against Vintilă Brătianu government by legal or non-legal means (the appeal to the Prince, the Republic) depended exclusively on the Regency. It was a matter of "*șantaj politic* / political blackmail" for the Liberals (cf. "Viitorul", XX, no 5956, Thursday, December 29, 1927).

devoided of his absolute domination, without any condition or reservation”; according to N. Iorga, he was “*ca un biruitor care nu e dispus să discute și să facă tranzacții cu nimeni* / as a victor not willing to discuss or transact with anyone”⁹. By not accepting “*sfatul cuminte* / the reasonable advice” given by Regent Buzdugan, who brought in Vintilă Brătianu’s offer to leave the power somewhat later in the interest of the same opponents¹⁰, the National Peasant leader drove the party towards a manifest and total opposition. The fast deterioration of the government-opposition relation became a feature of the Romanian public space at the end of 1927, as noticed by Grigore Trancu-Iași¹¹.

“The civic resistance / *rezistența cetățenească*”, adopted by the National Peasants in November that year so as to impose the respect of the law from bottom to top¹², was followed by the discrediting abroad of the government attempt to acquire a stabilization loan, justified by the fact that it had neither the endorsement of the nation nor the moral authority to conclude such a transaction. Promoted by several important newspapers (“*Dimineața* / The Morning”, “*Adevărul* / The Truth”, “*Lupta* / The Fight”, “*Cuvântul* / The Word”, “*Curentul* / The Course”, etc.) and by intellectuals with great influence on the public (Nichifor Crainic, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru etc.)¹³, **the campaign for overthrowing** the Liberals from power resorted constantly to the nation and to the entire society, regardless of the political and ethnic space, in order to carry out a joint political action against the “dictatorship” and as a promise for another democratic kind of sociability¹⁴. The provincial events of Jassy, Făgăraș, Craiova, Ploiești, Czernowitz and Galatz (at the beginning of 1928), which had proved the support given by the masses to the party, escalated into an uprising on March 18 in Bucharest¹⁵. The motion adopted on that occasion with regard to the necessity of the immediate overthrowing of the Liberals from power was rejected by the Regency based on the fact that decisions could not have been taken under the street pressure¹⁶, and worsened the political relations. The

⁹ N. Iorga, *Orizonturile mele. O viață de om așa cum a fost* (ed. by Valeriu and Sanda Râpeanu), București, 1976, p. 731; see also Mihail Rusenescu-Ioan Saizu, *Viața politică în România. 1922-1928*, Bucharest, 1979, p. 229; I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁰ N. Iorga, *România contemporană de la 1904 la 1930. Supt trei regi. Istorie a unei lupte pentru un ideal moral și național*, București, 1999, p. 362.

¹¹ Grigore Trancu-Iași, *Memorii politice (1921-1938)* (ed. by Fabian Anton), Bucharest, 2001, p. 48.

¹² I. Mihalache, “*Rezistența cetățenească*”. *Fundamentul ei moral*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 79, Friday, January 20, 1928. See also Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice. 1916-1939* (ed. by Al. Gh. Savu), Bucharest, 1990, p. 75; I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹³ See for example C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Criza politică*, “Ideea Europeană. Socială, critică, artistică & literară”, IX, no 210, April 1, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁴ In that period NPP concluded agreements with the Social Democratic Party and with groups representing the Hungarian and German ethnics (N. Iorga, *Memorii*, p. 280).

¹⁵ I. Ciupercă, *op. cit.*; I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 89; M. Rusenescu-I. Saizu, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

¹⁶ The leading article in “Viitorul” newspaper considered the moment as a political naiveté: a governmental party “*să-și inchipuiască ... că au să facă o adunare de câteva mii de oameni, aduși*

withdrawal from the Parliament and the attempt to form an independent legislative body was only the introduction of this new “constitutional” assembly in Alba-Iulia, the “key” of the entire system¹⁷. Two Romanian states seemed to emerge, and this impression was reinforced by the extremely visible absence of the National Peasants at the celebration dedicated to the union with Bessarabia. In fact, this was the continuation of an older practice that of denying to the Liberal government its authority to control the historical data and hereby deprive it of the capacity to make the contests more relative by the joint commemoration of a past intrinsically connected to the Liberals¹⁸.

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The Alba-Iulia assembly of May 1928¹⁹ together with the other smaller reunions organized in Bucharest, Craiova, Czernowitz, Jassy and Brăila condensed both symbolically and ritually the entire “overthrowing campaign” conducted by the National Peasant Party. According to the contradictory information provided by the Security Special Service²⁰, the assembly reinforced the apprehensions of the Liberal government. The most defined fears were related to the overthrowing of the constitutional order by the arrival of the former Prince Carol to preside the national celebration on May 10; the materialisation of this omnipresent and cultivated rumour of a “sensational event” that was to happen²¹; the potential outbreak of a revolution,

*din toate colțurile țării și că aceasta să fie suficient pentru Înalta Regență să demită guvernul. Prin asemenea mijloace nu se poate revendica puterea în România Mare / to fancy ... it would gather a few thousands of people brought from all over the country and that be enough for the High Regency to dismiss the government. The power cannot be claimed in Great Romania by such means” (Național-tărăniștii s-au retras iarăși din Parlament, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6026, Wednesday, March 21, 1928); see also N. Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 279.*

¹⁷ Idem, *România contemporană*, p. 362; Idem, *Memorii*, p. 277; A. Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁸ *Aniversarea unirii Basarabiei. Ce s-a petrecut în ziua de 9 aprilie la Chișinău*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 151, Saturday, April 14, 1928; from the National Peasant perspective, the Liberals seemed to follow assiduously the celebrations so as to make “*înjghebări festive / festive gatherings*”. According to them, the time for celebrations would come when “*națiunea liberă, în voința și în credința ei, va putea să-și exprime dorințele și va putea porni la realizarea lor / the free nation, in its will and faith, will be able to express its wishes and pursue their achievement*” (*Monopolizatorii serbărilor naționale*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 162, Monday, April 30, 1928); A. Stan, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹⁹ I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²⁰ ANIC, fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 20-21: on the one hand, the government was informed of the great expectations that the leaders in Budapest and Moscow had for the assembly that was to take place in Alba-Iulia, expecting riots meant to jolt the Romanian state, entailing a potential armed intervention; on the other hand, it was mentioned that there were no troop actions, the experienced informers not observing any guards, foreign youngmen, trucks or hidden food storages; in an information analysis, the General Inspector Bianu considered that the reports showed a great number of contradictions without any criticism (ANIC, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 47).

²¹ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 230; N. Iorga, *Memorii*, p. 286; Idem, *România contemporană*, p. 363; I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 93-94; see also *Partidul Național-tărănist de conivență cu ex-prințul Carol*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6067, Sunday, May 13, 1928.

the riots caused by Communists and irredentists that would lead to the intervention of Hungary and Bolshevik Russia; and finally the partition of Romania²². On the other hand, it emphasized the aspirations to power of the party led by Maniu or the hopes for change of an important part of the Romanian society.

2. The Speeches

This event, formally known as the general congress of the National Peasant Party²³, associated the nation to the statutory delegates of the party. The people had been summoned to offer an express mandate to the group led by Iuliu Maniu regarding the political, social, and economic emancipation by adequate means and conditions. The exemplary mobilisation of the National Peasants and Transylvanians reiterated the Revolution of 1848 and the Assembly of Blaj²⁴. The comparison made by N. Iorga in this respect is convincing:

“D. Maniu se vedea la 1848, iar liberalii i se arătau ca niște unguri, dușmani din naștere, prigonitori de veacuri / Mr. Maniu fancied himself in 1848, while the Liberals appeared to him as Hungarians, natural born enemies, oppressors for centuries.”²⁵

Settling the venue of the meeting in Alba-Iulia, a privileged space in the history of our raising nation (connected with the Roman Dacia, Michael the Brave, Horea's martyrdom, Avram Iancu's detention, the union of 1918), augmented the impression that it was a symbolic conquest of the country by the nation, a dramatic action of different type of power²⁶. The National Peasant speeches were quasi-revolutionary²⁷, overloaded with meanings referring to “*continuitatea străduințelor*

²² *Apa trece, pietrele rămân*, “Glasul Ardealului”, II, no 19, Sunday, May 13, 1928, p. 1.

²³ I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²⁴ N. Iorga, *România contemporană*, p. 362; the “*Dimineața*” newspaper compared the National Peasant reunion of Făgăraș to that of 1848 on the Blaj Plain, *Rebeliunea de la Făgăraș. Cine sunt cetățenii care au provocat-o și săvârșit-o*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5989, Tuesday, February 7, 1928. For the mobilisation of the Transylvanians and the one in the Jiu Valley (the workers from Lupeni, Vulcan, Petroșani, etc.), see *Notele and Rapoartele of the Inspectoratul General de Siguranță Cluj* or of *Serviciului Special de Siguranță Petroșani* in May 1928 (ANIC, Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, Serviciul Special de Informații, file 5/1928, p. 9-13).

²⁵ N. Iorga, *O viață*, p. 729.

²⁶ As David Kertzer asserts, “*o demonstrație de masă poate fi interpretată ca o capturare simbolică a unui oraș sau unei capitale / a mass demonstration cannot be regarded as a symbolic seizing of a city or capital*” (David Kertzer, *Ritual, politică și putere* (transl. by Sultana Avram and Teodor Fleșeriu, foreword by Radu Florescu), Bucharest, 2002, p. 136).

²⁷ Sever Bocu declared to a Hungarian newspaper that one million people would oppose in Alba-Iulia to the 60,000 soldiers sent by the government (cf. *Amenințări de carnaval*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6035, Sunday, April 1, 1928); the antithetical terms prevailed in the National Peasant speech: in a mobilisation order addressed to the inhabitants of Banat, the above mentioned leader spoke about the overthrowing of the government or about Jilava (cf. *Politica de duplicitate național-jăranistă*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5984, Thursday, February 2, 1928). The “occasional” poems favoured the

seculare ale neamului românesc pentru dezrobire și unire / the continuity of the Romanian nation secular endeavours of emancipation and union” (Chemarea Partidul Național-Țărănesc adresată poporului / The Appeal of the National Peasant Party addressed to the people²⁸). In a message entitled “Către poporul român din Județ / To the Romanian people from the counties”, the president of Sibiu NPP organisation, Ioan Boauriu, stated that:

“Patria e în pericol [...] [și avem] sfânta datorie să mergem s-o apărăm... așa cum au făcut înaintașii noștri în anul 1848 pe Câmpia Libertății... un mare sfat în cetatea lui Mihai Viteazul... / Our country is in danger [...] [and we have] the sacred duty to protect it ... as our forefathers did in 1848 on the Liberty Plain ... a great council in the city of Michael the Brave.”²⁹

The Liberal government was accused that

“duce războiul împotriva provinciilor alipite, împotriva claselor producătoare și a maselor populare din întreaga țară; că a transformat votul în minciună, țara nemaivând Reprezentanță națională de 8 ani; că făcuse din armată un instrument de partid pentru a robi provinciile unite; că ruinase economia / is waging war against the united territories, against the producers and popular masses all over the country; that it transformed the vote into lie, since the country has not had a national Representation for 8 years; that it transformed the army in a party instrument so as to enslave the united provinces; that it had ruined the economy”;

“clică despotică și hrăpăreață / a despotic and predaceous pack”, “hidră a grecoteilor / hydra of Greeks” (according to N. Romanescu, the National Peasant leader of Craiova), “pojghiță fanariotă, conducătoare azi / Phanariot leading crust” (according to Ion Mihalache, in “Țărănismul”), in the National Peasant conception the National Liberal Party symbolised the pre-war Little Romania, centralised, sharing Eastern administration and governing methods, a fictitious parliamentary regime, and practicing economic xenophobia. From a Transylvanian perspective, the Liberals brought in the nostalgia of the Hungarian ruling in Transylvania and pre-eminence before the entire Romanian nation. Thus, Alba-Iulia resembled the day of

legitimate violence: *“Hai române nu uita / Toți la Alba Iulia / Săriți cu domn Maniu toți / Să scăpăm țara de hoți / De hoți și de șobolani / Că-i destul de zece ani / Că din ceea ce muncim / Numai biruri mari plătim / Let’s go Romanians, don’t forget / To join Maniu in Alba-Iulia/ To free the country of thieves / Of thieves and rats / ‘Cause we’ve had enough for ten years / To pay only taxes of what we gain” (“Dimineața”, XXIV, no 7687, May 5, 1928, *apud* I. Scurtu, *Istoria României între anii 1919-1940*, p. 92-93).*

²⁸ *Poporului Român. Chemarea Partidului Național-Țărănesc*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 162, Monday, April 30, 1928.

²⁹ *Atmosfera de ațătare în care se pregătește Adunarea de la Alba Iulia*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6056, Saturday, April 28, 1928.

judgement of the people³⁰. The ritual connected the participants with a long protesting tradition, and the legitimacy of former actions being lent to the present one: the same order hierarchy from one man to another, the same tribunes, the same sacred flags of the peasant legions were overlapping, according to Iorga, in the image of a storm that “*amenință și să ia cu dânsa orice / threatens to take everything away*”³¹.

The discursive radicalism of the Transylvanian leaders was doubled by the National Peasants an increasing tendency towards a quasi-military organisation of the participants, the so-called unarmed “*grupuri de gărzi naționale / national guards groups*” created in order to efficiently oppose the authorities³². The violent and total contest against the others imposed a civil war atmosphere, some of the Transylvanian peasants brandishing on the eve of the meeting in Alba Iulia “*ciomagile și cuțitele / the cudgels and the knives*”, and asking “*cine este liberal să-l omoare / who was Liberal to kill him*”³³.

3. The Liberals and the National Peasant Assembly

At first, the Liberals did not give much importance to the National Peasant project. The Minister of Interior, I. G. Duca, took a leave in March and left for

³⁰ Vaida Voevod had given many declarations in this direction, such as “*legalitatea era în vechea Ungarie mai respectată decât în România, unde este dată pradă experimentelor politicianismului liberal și averescan / the legality was more respected in former Hungary than Romania, where it fell prey to the Liberal and Averescan petty political experiments*”, affirmations taken with satisfaction by the Hungarian politicians and the press in Budapest; the Transylvanian politician was constrained to reply to “*acestei mistificări maghiare / this Hungarian mystification*” in “*Adevărul*” of October 24 (ANIC, fond familia Brătianu, file 112/1928, p. 25). Similarly, Aurel Vlad considered at the meeting held in Bucharest in March 1928 that the current slavery is even more oppressive than the Hungarian one (cf. *Campania de răsturnare național-fărăniștă-comunistă; “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6025, Wednesday, March 21, 1928*). A National Peasant Party manifesto diffused in Bessarabia declared that in Alba-Iulia “*se va hotări soarta României și a noroadelor trăitoare în ea / the fate of Romania and its people will be decided*” (in *Agitația anarhică. Un manifest agitator al național-fărăniștilor în Basarabia, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6035, Sunday, April 1, 1928*); see also I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

³¹ N. Iorga, *România contemporană*, p. 362; Idem, *O viață*, p. 728.

³² See *Raportul Brigăzii de Siguranță Diciosânmartin din 23 mai 1928*, in ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 58-58 v.; as a peasant said, “*boierii nu vor să știe de nimic alt de cât de frică / the boyards do not want to know of anything but of fear*” (*Notă de la Blaj*, in May 16, 1928, ANIC, fond Brătianu, file 468/1928, p. 53).

³³ Copy from *Raportul Poliției Gărei Simeria No. 225 din 8 Maiu 1928* (referring to the events prior to May 6) către *Inspectoratul General de Siguranță Timișoara* (ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, f. 70). The radicalism that accompanied the assembly of Alba-Iulia: the manifesto calling the Transylvanians stated that no village was to be absent. “*De la 18 ani în sus numai vânzătorii poporului vor rămânea acasă! / Of the people aged over 18, only the traitors will stay home!*”. Alba-Iulia had to mean “*marele praznic al împlinirii dorințelor poporului și al învierii politice a neamului nostru / the great feast of our people’s wishes accomplishment and of our nation’s political revival*” (ANIC, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 43).

Venice³⁴. The several recallings of the meeting (October 1, 1927; November 20, 1927; March 15, April 22, 1928) gave the impression of a ridiculous preparation, of a “revolution play”. The Liberals placed the action of their political opponents in the scope of ridicule, regarding it as a campaign to disinform the public opinion through “*Dimineața*” and “*Adevărul*” newspapers, “*anumita presă / a specific type of press*”, as they named the publications favourable to the National Peasants. The delay of the Alba-Iulia assembly, considered a failure by the Liberals since the beginning of the opposition campaign had an internal political party motivation, which meant to save time and maintain the unity in the circumstances of a long opposition³⁵. Further on confronted with the upsurge of society against the state authorities and with the powerful symbolic meaning of the event, the leaders the Liberal Party changed their attitude.

The Liberal approach with regard to the National Peasant Party activity entailed the change of the power system and the marginalisation of the National Liberal Party a public level, and it was based on speech and action with many interference points.

3.1. The Liberal speech with regard to Alba-Iulia. The Liberal discourse attempted to impose a certain image for the National Peasants, which was to invalidate the latter as positive political factors. The moment of the assembly of Alba-Iulia in May 1928 propelled what I call the **Liberal dogma**, which is a speech meant to prescribe the political conflict and at the same time to invalidate the competing projects of the opposition (National Peasant mainly) in the public area. The representation of the National Peasants as incapable of a positive governing act, as anarchists, anti-nationalists, and anti-patriotic was consolidated in the period prior to the meeting. The contest action promoted by the National Peasant Party, the revolutionary ideas and rhetoric that gave content and form to the opposition manifestation convinced the Liberals that they were facing a radical culture hostile to the methods accepted in Romania until then. In his “*Memorii / Memoirs*”, C. Argetoianu describes the concern of the Liberal leaders (Duca) with regard to a potential revolution³⁶. Therefore, the defining components of the National Peasant action represented a second direction in the Liberal speech. **The civic resistance, the civil struggle, or overthrowing campaign** were reduced by the Liberals to prosaic formulae (as the refusal to pay taxes) and translated into the terms of the political life

³⁴ *Bluff-ul “Congresului general” național-tărănist*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6044, Wednesday, April 11, 1928; C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 230; see also the declaration given by I. G. Duca to the foreign newspapers correspondents in Romania, according to which the political events in the country lacked any importance, being mere political demonstrations that could not decide upon the existence of a government (cf. “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2627, Thursday, March 22, 1928, p. 1).

³⁵ *Motivetele amânării întrunirii dela Alba-Iulia*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 5041, Saturday, April 7, 1928; *Național-tărăniștii și presa lor răspândesc știri mincinoase asupra proporției întrunirii de mâine*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6063, Sunday, May 7, 1928.

³⁶ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 253-255.

anarchy, the Romanian state, and society dissolution: the insubordination towards authorities, the class hatred, Bolshevik political attitude of obstinate negation, action against the general interest with the enemies of the united state (the Communists and the minorities), the sabotage against loans and stabilisation³⁷. The invalidation of the National Peasant means and representations, through the appeal to violent terminology and leftist revolutionism, also made of the Liberals the defenders of the nation, protectors of its traditions and historical interests. According to them, these oppositionist techniques and practices represented the endurance of the post-War troubled period, when the “spirits” were drifting and the values were discerned with difficulty.

The campaign of overthrowing made the object of Constantin Argetoianu’s interested and interesting meditations. In an interview given to “*Lupta*” newspaper and taken by “*Viitorul / The Future*”³⁸, the Liberal minister limited this syntagma to an exclusivist decisional area, voiding it of its popular content so much used by the National Peasants. According to this versatile politician, **the overthrowing campaign** had been invented during King Carol I reign being supported by the Palace, and translated into **democratic appearance**, that is the public opinion influence upon the changing of the government. Promoted with agreement of all party leaders, it was a part of the common rotation ritual of the two governing parties, Liberal and Conservative. As I. G. Duca underlined, the “solution” for the National Peasant Party was not such a campaign, but the revolution or the legal and control opposition against the government’s acts³⁹. Since the first term of the binominal was prohibited in the Romanian public space⁴⁰, the only possibility, according to the leader from Vâlcea, remained the right and simple way of political waiting, entailing the normal withdrawal of Vintilă Brătianu government once its platform was carried out. According to the Liberals, the National Peasant meetings, the mobilisation of the population, the action of overthrowing were part of the political blackmail, destined to impress the Regency (“*locul înalt / the high rank*”)⁴¹. The overthrowing campaign became one of the proofs of the petty politics by NPP leaders, those that did not promote any programme, but only ‘trivial’ formulae regarding social justice, democracy, legality and democracy, accompanied by

³⁷ *Greșelile. “Rezistența cetățenească sau școala anarhiei,”* “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6152, Tuesday, August 21, 1928; “*Istoria se repetă. Campaniile de răsturnare,* “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6162, Sunday, September 2, 1928.

³⁸ “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5977, Sunday, January 22, 1928; see also C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 226-229.

³⁹ *Situația politică. Interview-ul d-lui I. G. Duca, Ministrul de Interne,* “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6030, Sunday, March 25, 1928.

⁴⁰ At the level of the Romanian political culture, the term “revolution / *revoluție*” is bivalent. It was prohibited despite the fact that the Romanians claimed their evolution from a complex revolutionary process including the French Revolution and their own revolutionary myths, that is the actions of 1821 and 1848, the union of 1859, and so on. The approach to Bolshevik Russia transformed any radical manifestation into an official public speech fad.

⁴¹ *În plină operetă,* “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6053, Sunday, April 22, 1928.

accusations against the government. The meetings were transformed into events by a “certain” type of press, independent by form but offering a manifest assistance to the National Peasants and, according to the Liberals, defying the truth and deceiving the public opinion. The Liberals argued that the substance of the opposition manifestations was not nurtured by the Peasants only, but also by “*ciurucurile vieții sociale din Capitală, vechii clienți ai Justiției, aventurierii lumii orientale sau elementele aruncate de Soviete* / the scamps of the social life of Bucharest, the usual clients of Justice, the soldiers of fortune of the Eastern world or the elements cast by the Soviets”, or the few village people brought for one thousand lei⁴².

In the attempt to invalidate these meeting as a means of pressure, the NPP ties with leftist elements and political groups representing the minorities of Romania were intensely speculated by the Liberal press in a nationalist political manner. For a party that pretended to be governmental, “national”, mean to ensure “order”, the “collusion” with the Social-Communists was a serious drawback, for it thus legitimised the objective – the overthrowing of the government and the dissolution of the current Romanian state – and the latter’s “agenda”, that is: Bujor’s release, the pulling down of prisons, the amnesty of the crimes committed by the Communists against the state security, and so on. The the language borrowed from the two Internationales – the Green and the Red through C. Stere and Cristescu-Plăpumarul, the speeches delivered in foreign languages for the Jewish, Polish or Ukrainian “pseudo-citizens”⁴³ appeared as a conspiracy against the state interests and the annulment of the Romanian identity. The Liberals defined as “rebellion” the opposition’s struggle to overthrow the government.

For the Liberals the campaign had failed also because of the scarce participation of the masses as compared to what had been expected. In Făgăraș, the Liberals exemplified, Transylvanians did not gather in great number (thousands of chariots and horsemen) to attend the meeting, as it had been presented by several newspaper special editions. As an overbidding clear attempt to caricature the opposition’s action, the articles in “*Viitorul*” illustrated for the readers the despair of the National Peasant members of Parliament who had taken with the first train after the end of the manifestation. In addition, a peasant wedding was brought to the Square of Făgăraș Townhall so as to highlight an intense participation. The description of these meetings in the terms of a provincial fair, where “*oratorii țipau precum clovnii care invită publicul la panoramă* / the public speakers screamed like clowns that invite the public to panorama”, was destined to induce to the Bucharest public and the followers to the live image of Caragiale’s world. Placed most often

⁴² *Agitația anarhică. Național-țărăniștii au atacat dinastia și au propagat dezordinea la Galați*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6013, Tuesday, March 6, 1928.

⁴³ *Maniu, Ștefanov & Comp. Tovărășia național-țărăniștilor cu comuniștii*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 5997, Friday, February 17, 1928; *Campania de răsturnare național-țărăniștă-comunistă*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6025, Wednesday, March 11, 1928; *PNT uneltește împotriva unității statului*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6007, Wednesday, February 29, 1928, further to the fifth National Peasant meeting of Czernowitz on February 28, 1928.

within the scope of the operetta performance and the burlesque, the Liberal attempt was a warning for the “serious people” and an urge to anticipation. It finally represented a mechanism of the authorities to prescribe the terms in which the action of overthrowing was supposed to be considered. According to the Liberals, the meetings were meant to provoke incidents and disorder that would force authorities to react and afterwards to allow the protest against “the illegal acts” and “the abuses by the government”⁴⁴. *Conu’ Leonida*’s thinking reflected a whole area of political culture.

3.2. The Counter-demonstrations. The Liberal response was not manifested only by speeches. A campaign of meetings “of order” and “civic”, rigorously organized by the National Liberal Party, unlike the “anarchical” ones of the National Peasants (that pushed the whole country in abyss)⁴⁵ represented an attempt to stop the opposition’s offensive. At the same time, they had to prove to the Regency the support that the Liberal party held at national level and the legitimacy of its power. For the opponents the popularity thus structured was nothing but a legitimacy counterfeit for it excluded the only element that validated the democracy: the free elections⁴⁶. The Liberals still supported their efficiency as they emphasised the political capacity of the Liberal group and sustained the creation of an impact image of the proposed nature and goals. It was also an aspect that depended on their party: apart from the importance of the direct communication with the public and the opponent forces, these mass rituals aimed at having a considerable effect upon the participants, thus strengthening the identification with the group they belonged to and amplifying the opposition against their rivals by demonisation and disqualification, as the latter were always attending the demonstrations symbolically. The Liberals attentively manipulated the symbols in combination with the emotional impact resulted from the convening of so many people in the name of a common cause⁴⁷.

The great number of the meetings (“*pentru o întrunire național-țărănistă sunt 10 liberale; pentru un agitator național-țărănist sunt 10 oameni de ordine / there are ten Liberal meetings for one National Peasant; there are ten men of order for a National Peasant propagandist*”, according to predictions made in a Liberal article) convened the real country and the peasant world. Although the Liberal

⁴⁴ “*Rebeliunea*” *dela Focșani. Cine sunt cetățenii cari au provocat-o și săvârșit-o*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5989, Tuesday, February 7, 1928; *Trădătorii. Cum se descalifică un partid*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6984, Thursday, February 2, 1928.

⁴⁵ *Efectele campaniei național-țărăniste*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5996, Thursday, February 16, 1928.

⁴⁶ “*Cel mai bine fără fotografi și fără ingineri / Best without photographers and engineers*”, affirmed confidently the National Peasants (in *Cum vor liberalii să-și dovedească... popularitatea*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 323, Thursday, November 8, 1928).

⁴⁷ As David Kertzer mentioned, the struggle between the political forces is generally abstract and distant from the daily experience of most people. Demonstrations are a means to make politics become palpable; the symbolic dramatisation of the conflict makes an individual to be able to identify abstract principles with human beings and to identify a political position with tangible symbols (D. I. Kertzer, *op. cit.*, p. 136).

manifestation related to the ordinary Romanian peasant concerned with the silence of his work, as he had been conceived by the *sămănătorist* and *poporanist* literature, Vintilă Brătianu government thus found how to justify the endurance of its politics⁴⁸. The citizens' affluence was comparable, especially during the manifestations of Jassy and Braşov⁴⁹, where, according to Liberal sources, the participation amounted to 5,000 - 35,000 persons. The bid of popularity was extremely visible in other towns as well: Focşani, Piteşti, Giurgiu, Târgovişte (February 5), Calafat, Slatina (February 16, "*cea mai mare întrunire publică ținută vreodată în oraş / the largest public meeting ever held in urban areas*"), Rădăuţi, Deva, Czernowitz, Suceava, Câmpulung, etc. The aspect of political struggle within the party had to be taken into consideration in order to interpret the Liberal counter-manifestation⁵⁰. Many of the Liberal meetings double the National Peasant ones not only from the point of view of venues, but also of overlapping: for instance, the meeting in Czernowitz took place on Monday, February 28, 1928, the day following the National Peasant meeting⁵¹. Nevertheless, as Armand Călinescu wrote, under the circumstances of efforts made by the state authorities and secret funds, "*e greu să se tragă o concluzie exactă asupra popularităţii reale / it is difficult to draw an accurate conclusion on its true popularity*"⁵².

⁴⁸ As I. G. Duca depicted the National Peasant campaign, the surface turmoils and anxieties could not deflect the government from its path "*de consolidare a ţării întregite / of consolidating the united country*" (*Situaţia politică. Interview-ul d-lui I. G. Duca, Ministrul de Interne, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6030, Sunday, March 25, 1928*).

⁴⁹ The first from the series of spring party meetings (in Jassy) was to a great extent the quintessence of the ones to follow (*Pentru consolidarea Țării. Dela strălucita manifestație cetățenească din Iași, "Viitorul", XXI, no 5995, Tuesday, February 14, 1928*); the local press also gave a great deal of consideration to this manifestation, which was supposed to demonstrate that the country was not in favour of the National Peasant Party (see the numerous articles in "*Glasul Bucovinei / Bukowine's Voice*" local newspaper: *Grandioasa manifestare a Partidului național-liberal, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2596, Wednesday, February 15, 1928, p. 1*; D. Marmeliuc, *Manifestația cetățenească dela Iași, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2597, Thursday, February 16, 1928, p. 1*; *Marele Congres al Partidului național-liberal, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2599, Saturday, February 18, 1928, p. 1*; *Impunătoarea manifestare cetățenească din Braşov, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6001, Tuesday, February 21, 1928*).

⁵⁰ The leader of Hunedoara organisation at that moment, the very ambitious Gheorghe Tătărescu, managed to gather 15,000 people (*Impunătoarea manifestație populară din Deva, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6013, Tuesday, March 6, 1928*).

⁵¹ Mihai D. Ralea considered that the Liberals proved lack of imagination when copying servilely the National Peasant manifestations (*Logica unei întruniri, "Dreptatea", II, no 103, Saturday, February 18, 1928*).

⁵² Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 79; the National Peasants accused Brătianu government that the manifestations favourable to the National Liberal Party were based on State logistics (a humbug by Mr. Guță Tătărescu, Romulus Voinescu, the Director General of the State Security, and General Davidoglu, the head of the Gendarmerie), since the followers and the individual people, "*gata să-și închirieze conștiința pe câțiva poli și rachiu / ready to rent out their conscious for some change and brandy*" were hired by the pretors (county chiefs), civilian gendarmes, mayors, notaries (*Cum își fac liberalii întrunirile, "Dreptatea", II, no 90, Friday, February 3, 1928, O întâlnire și un*

Similarly, the wish to reduce the emotional impact of the meeting of Alba-Iulia led I. G. Duca to propose the organisation of a concurrent Averescan meeting in the Capital, attended by just as many people as in Transylvania. The project was abandoned due to political reasons, because it implied the explicit support of an opponent's popularity, including the logistics or financial difficulties connected with the dislocation of such a great number of persons to Bucharest⁵³.

The text that accompanies the Liberal manifestation is almost identical, with slight changes. The meeting scenario is also identical: crowds of people in the public square, the reception at the administrative palace, Vintilă I. C. Brătianu's message read by the head of the local Liberal organisation, the speeches by politicians, first of those representing the Romanian regions (Bessarabia, Bukowine, Banat, Transylvania, Dobrudja) in the main halls of the town, the telegram of support, the public banquet. The last speaker was invariably I. G. Duca, NLP General Secretary, who energetically participated in most of the meetings, thus strengthening the conviction that he was the dynamic drive of the response campaign initiated by the Liberals. The uniformity of the action and speech, the similar public spectacle in various geographic areas gave the impression unity in the country around the government and the National Liberal Party. Our focus on this kind of Liberal approach also implies different determinations than the descriptive aspect. The National Liberal Party action concentrates a system of representations which the Liberals attempted to accredit directly now, without supporting the agency of the printed press – meaning, the papers, the reviews, the propagandistic booklets – with regard to contemporary Romania and the functionality of its political regime. The meetings reveal the Liberal political culture from the assumed standpoint of the party.

surogat, "Dreptatea", II, no 100, Wednesday, February 15, 1928); in an interpellation in the Chamber of Deputies (the assembly of February 16, 1928), M. Costăchescu, the National Peasant leader of Jassy, argued that the Liberal meeting of Jassy had taken advantage of trains free of charge (in "Dreptatea", II, no 103, Saturday, February 18, 1928); according to the National Peasants, there was also an action to cavil at the meetings of this party; further to a petition by the Liberal prefect Eduard D. Lazarescu, on the eve of the meeting of Jassy, the Ministry of Domains sent 20 waggons of maize for the villagers living in the droughty areas of the county, which were to be distributed specifically on the meeting day, *Cum vor liberalii să-și dovedească... popularitatea*, "Dreptatea", II, no 94, Wednesday, February 8, 1928.

⁵³ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 248; it was an action that would give the impression of a competition over power, since in fact not only the National Peasant Party claimed the power (cf. *Potrivit ordinului liberalilor, averescanii se agită*, "Dreptatea", II, no 132, Friday, March 23, 1928); in that period, the National Peasants considered that C. Argetoianu was the author of the plan, assisted by "Guță" Tătărescu, the Security, and General Davidoglu (*Lovitura d.-lui C. Argetoianu*, "Dreptatea", II, no 157, Monday, April 23, 1928). Finally, NPP leaders could speak with satisfaction, as a recognition of their own capacity, about the failure of the Averescan "counter-manifestation", about the "demoralisation" of the Liberals, who regarded the Averescan competition as useless, ridiculous, and ineffective (in "Dreptatea", II, no 159, Friday, April 27, 1928).

The meeting in Jassy. In order to demarcate the Liberal public manifestation dating from the period of the National Peasant contest, I shall further on refer to the meeting organised by the Liberal Party on Sunday, February 12, 1928, in Jassy, as it is described by the “official” press (“*Viitorul*”). The first from the series of sping party meetings, this manifestation is to a great extent the quintessence of the following ones. The analysis makes use mainly of the method in which this meeting was illustrated – the photos of the crowds sustained the Liberal message – and reflected in the pages of “*Viitorul*”, the National Liberal Party’s official newspaper⁵⁴.

As a hypostasis of the country and a retort to the accusation coming from the opposition different milieus – especially from the National Peasants – stating that the Liberal Party was the representative of the industrial and financial bourgeoisie of Romania, the meeting signified “the people’s manifestation” of thousands of citizens from towns and villages, from every social class throughout Moldavia, Bessarbia, and Bukowine. The peasants from the Transylvanian regions were also present so as to “fraternise” with the descendants of Stephen the Great and Alexander the Good. Politicians from all the historical regions of the country would brotherly “greet” the Romanians from all over. The idea of representing and the circumscription of the entire Romania dominate the Liberal message of those times. The meeting also designated “*marele șfat al poporului cu sfetnicii lui Ion I. C. Brătianu din vremurile mari ale istoriei naționale* / the great council of the people with Ion I. C. Brătianu’s advisors from a grand epoch in the national history”. Invoked many times by the speakers, the names of the prominent Liberal predecessors such as Ion I. C. Brătianu, “*prezidentul politic al istoriei moderne a României* / the political president of the modern history of Romania”, Gh. Mârzescu (Georgel), the Party’s regretted local chief, “*moldoveanul de treabă și de inimă, cu glas duios și blând, cald și înaripat* / the honourable and good-hearted Moldavian, with a tender and gentle voice, affectionate and enthusiastic” (Vasile P. Sassu), etc., conferred legitimacy to the Liberal present. As underlined by Victor Iamandi, the Liberal great leaders “*n-ar fi putut realiza ceea ce vedem astăzi fără organizația de fier a partidului* / could not have accomplished what we see today without the iron organisation of the party”. The references to a near or remote past are abundant in the Liberal speech conveying a moral force to the government led by Vintilă Brătianu. The political tradition and expertise entitled NLP leaders to appear as the guarantee of the constitutional order defence, from the perspective of the organisers of the meeting. The authority gained

⁵⁴ Pentru consolidarea Țării. Dela strălucita manifestație cetățenească din Iași, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 5995, Tuesday, February 14, 1928; the local press also offered a great space to this manifestation, which was supposed to demonstrate that the country was not supporting the National Peasant Party (see the numerous articles in “*Glasul Bucovinei*” local newspaper: *Grandioasa manifestare a Partidului național-liberal*, “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2596, Wednesday, February 15, 1928, p. 1; D. Marmeliuc, *Manifestația cetățenească dela Iași*, “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2597, Thursday, February 16, 1928, p. 1; *Marele Congres al Partidului național-liberal*, “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2599, Saturday, February 18, 1928, p. 1).

by the generations that knew how to sacrifice for their country secured the evolution of the present carried out now by the Liberals. The meeting represented the resolution to sustain the government called by the great and wise King Ferdinand to govern in difficult times so as to keep the order and consolidate the united Romania. The constant reference to the Liberal speech on the information of June 1927 suggests the fact that the manner by which the National Liberal Party had seized power represented an objective of the public discourse. In fact, the Liberals had to offer their own account of this moment. I. G. Duca's speech, the most entitled orator attending the meeting of Jassi in February 1928, entered the Liberal response within the terms of party sacrifice and country general interests: "*noi n-am venit la guvern acum 8 luni de plăcere / we did not come to power for pleasure eight months ago*", the NLP leader stated.

"Ca să desăvârșim organizarea noastră de partid ar fi trebuit să mai stăm în opoziție, dar am venit chemați de Marele Rege Ferdinand, pentru că a socotit că în momentul morței e necesar la cârmă un guvern care să asigure fără nici o sguđuire moștenirea tronului și respectul constituțional. Am îndeplinit această dorință. Era momentul greu, când vrăjmașii de pretutindeni stăteau la pândă / In order to complete our party organisation, we would have had to stay in opposition, but we were summoned by the Great King Ferdinand, because he considered that at his death the country needed a government to ensure without convulsion the succession to the throne and the constitutional respect. We made his wish come true. It was a difficult time when enemies were lurking."

The symbolic geography of medieval Moldavia sustained this "lively" and mobilising history. As in the vojvodal times, the masses rushed in from Hotin, Soroca to Cetatea Albă. The vigorous men from the Mountains of Neamț and other mountain regions, the hard-working free peasants from counties of Moldavia and of the Lower Land had made their way to the Capital of the ancient province, "*leagănul primei uniri, reazemul rezistenței din marele război, orașul reformelor democratice / the cradle of the first union, the resistance support in the Great War, the city of the democratic reforms*". The massive presence of moving verbs was meant to underline one more time the participation and vitality of the gathering. The language imbued with military terms competed with this grandiose image: "*batalioane de cetățeni / battalions of citizens*", "*delegații se îndreaptă în ordine / the delegates made their way in order*"; in the Union Square, the foremost peasants took the floor before the crowd "*masate sub cerul liber pentru a exprima hotărârea de a lupta din rășputeri pentru menținerea ordinii și liniștei; toată lumea aștepta cuvântul de ordine al membrilor guvernului pentru a porni la acțiune / gathered in the open air to express their determination to fight for the order and peace keeping; everybody waited for the government's countersign urging to take action*" etc. Nevertheless, the approach was an invitation to peace, a sign of the Liberal governing order and stability. In democratic societies, the army is an institution that guarantees the fundamental

values. Although the confrontation, along with the invalidation of the National Peasant opposition actions, represented the finality of Liberal manifestation, this manifestation was in fact nothing but a competition of the people's support images, whose addressee was the Regency: "*împotriva plutoanelor și batalioanelor agitatoare ale d-lui Mihalache, noi am mobilizat marea armată a partidului nostru... armata păcii... a ordinii* / against Mr. Mihalache's instigating platoons and battalions, we mobilised our party's great army ... the army of peace ... of order", sustained Vasile P. Sassu, the leader of Constanța county organisation. "*Două partide stau în față în față* / Two parties stay opposite to one another", I. G. Duca also underlined: "*unul care clădește, altul care se ceartă fiindcă aleargă după putere* / one that builds, the other that raws in its run for power". The dichotomy promoted the Liberal speech, the representative of the labour world and progress after a conflict with the National Peasants, disciples of Caragiale's old school, as C. Argetoianu mentioned. The idea of the NPP governing incapability - the Peasant Dr. N. Lupu, allied with the National Liberal Party governing, compared the opposition with a lunatic in need of a strait jacket – justified the Liberal "*postul de veghe* / on guard stance". "*Noi vrem să plecăm dela guvern, dar nu putem, deoarece n-avem pe cine lăsa în loc* / We wish to withdraw from governing, but we can't, because we've got no replacer", snarled C. Argetoianu. "*Ne e frică că trebuie să guvernăm încă mulți ani* / We are afraid that we have to govern for many years", Ion Pillat also suggested.

The stands taken by the Liberal leaders and voiced in the 5 biggest halls in town (Sidoli, Elisabeta, *Sala Societății de Gimnastică și Sport*, sala II, *Sala și curtea Binder*) and in the balcony of a club from the Union Square followed a certain order of the speakers. There is also a hierarchy of the orators, the Liberal ministers always taking the floor by the end – I. G. Duca is the last to take the floor – hence, a certain display of the message with an upward trend in the accusation gravity⁵⁵. It is also a differentiation in the importance of the halls: in "Sidoli" were present the party's and government's personalities (Ion Borcea – on behalf of the Peasant Party Dr. N. Lupu, Mr. Cateli, senator of Bălți, D. Marmeliuc – who greeted the organisations from Bukowine, General Traian Moșoiu – the symbol of heroism in the war for the union, Victor Iamandi, Leonte Moldovanu, the Vice-president of the Senate Tony Iliescu, Ion Pillat, Dr. N. Lupu, I. Th. Florescu, Avram Imbroane, Alexandru Lapedatu – the minister of Cults, Ion Inculeț – the minister of Health, I. Gh. Duca), the reunion being opened and presided by Gheorghe I. Brătianu, the President of the county organisation. In the other venues (attended by speakers such as Ștefan Ioan, George Onose, deputy of Covurlui, Ramiro Savinescu the head of Botoșani organisation, J. Valjean, the Vice-president of the Chamber, N. D. Chirculescu, and others), the meetings were presided by the Vice-presidents of Jassy county organisation, Constantin Toma, Osvald Racoviță, D. Dimitriu, etc.

⁵⁵ Given his talent, the poet Ion Pillat was able to present "*drama campaniei național-țărăniște* / the National Peasant campaign drama" in six acts.

A banquet would end the manifestation, as an illustration of the harmony and political triumph. It was a victory “*a celor ce nu făceau politică, ci slujeau țara* / of those that did not do politics, but served who the country”, of the people with governing expertise, as C. Argetoianu argued. According to the Liberal leaders, Jassy had demonstrated that “*țara nu era cu PNȚ* / the country was not supporting NPP”, as the National Peasants usurpingly pretended. The whole country was supporting the Liberal government and party, because the country wanted peace: this was the final statement in the Liberal message. The failure was excluded given that the Liberal interests were identified with those of the nation. The Liberals represented an army without reservation, and their defeat entailed the defeat of the country. From this perspective, the manner in which the the newspapers of the opposition or the “servile” press had presented the National Liberal meeting by comparing it numerically with the previous Peasant manifestation, seemed to be an impiety, an ordered discrediting. The Liberals could not count more than 3-4,000 National-Peasant participans, including soldiers of fortune that had clandestinely crossed the country borders to enrol in the instigators’ army, a compared to the 30-35,000 leaders that were present at the Liberal meeting. As a strengthening disparity through the appeal to history, the old men of Jassy commented that “*așa o revărsare de popor nu se văzuse nici în vremurile de mobilizare* / such an overflowing of people has never been seen, not even in the times of mobilisation”.

3.3. Administrative pressures upon the press. The campaign against the hostile press represented a peculiar direction of the Liberal response to the contestation of the National Liberal Party governing. Included in the category of “*așa-zisei prese independente* / so called independent press”, of “*anumitei prese* / a certain press”, “*Adevărul*” and “*Dimineața*” newspapers, but also Nae Ionescu’s “*Cuvântul*” or Pamfil Șeicaru’s “*Curentul*” made the object of the constant pressure exerted by the Liberals. Condemned for their past and accused for their present, they had become part of the normative speech developed by the National Liberal Party leaders. The callous accusations made by the party press or the “servile” press (“*Viitorul*”, “*Universul* / The Universe”) against those newspapers did not pursue the essence the anti-Liberal articles or the slandering information, but the qualification of the publication on the whole as unreasonable. Being in the anti-Romanian camp during World War I, the inaugural moment and founder of the new society, the executive directors of those papers were treated as impostors or adventurers, servants of the German or Austrian-Hungarian invaders (registered on “Gunther’s list”)⁵⁶. The accusation of having received funds from Moscow represented the second plan to

⁵⁶ As established by his colleague from “*Universul*”, Emanuel Socor was “*degradat, alungat din armată, condamnat la muncă silnică pentru crimă împotriva Statului* / degraded, discharged from the army, condemned to forced labour for crimes against the State”, Constantin Graur as “*venit la București pe timpul ocupației germane, îmbrăcat în uniformă de ofițer austriac* / comer to Bucharest during the German occupation, dressed in Austrian officer uniform”, Titus Enacovici (from “*Cuvântul*”) as a “*îmbogățit de război* / war prey hunter” (*Anumita presă și fondurile sovietice*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6011, Sunday, March 4, 1928).

annihilate the press of a certain leftist orientation (“*Dimineața*”, “*Adevărul*”). The campaign for the rehabilitation and release of Mihail Bujor, transformed in “*martir al teroarei burheze din România / martyr of the bourgeois terror of Romania*”, the gratuitous dispatch of “*foi / leaflets*” containing revolutionary messages to villages were interpreted by the Liberals as visible signs of national betrayal⁵⁷. The Liberals blamed constantly these daily papers for applying methodically an anti-national programme whose objective was the weakening of the state by denigrating its institutions (Parliament, administration, magistrature, army) and by distorting the social reality (“*mistificarea țării / the mystification of the country*”), which was considered rotten⁵⁸. At any rate, the Liberal approach based on media aimed at immediate political struggle. The Liberals had been bothered mostly by the exploiting image that “*Ardealul este la picioarele d-lui Maniu / Transylvania bowed before Mr. Maniu*”, an image created by the press of Bucharest. For them, the participation to the National Peasant political action distorted facts severely⁵⁹.

In this context, the Liberals maintained the existence of confusion between the freedom of the press and the anarchy, speaking of high moral, political, and social mission of the party information organs⁶⁰. The pressures of National Liberal Party did not transform in simple rhetoric condemnation. Beyond the notorious inter-War tolerance, the censorship was imposed by the Liberals as a “*regretabilă și vremelnică necesitate / regrettable and provisional necessity*”⁶¹: the publication of the “blackmail” newspaper “*Cuvântul*” was suspended for eight days by the Senate (the session of February 16, 1928) de to the obstinate publication of “*știrilor dovedite false și pentru atmosfera de știrbire a autorității guvernului / news that proved to be false and the atmosphere created to prejudice the government’s authority*”⁶². The Journalists’ Union also received a unofficial warning, further to the appointment of Pamfil Șeicaru as president, who had been accused of “joining” this independent structure within the National Peasant Party⁶³.

3.4. The prelude of the separation. The Liberals’ more visible anger towards the modified and unstable political games was also felt at parliamentary level. The vehemence of the National Peasant contestation against the legitimacy of Brătianu government, the language violence and excess of the legislative authority did surprise the Liberals. The sympathy for the Parliament crisis, caused by the

⁵⁷ *Martirul românismului: Bujor! La guvern cu sprijinul Moscovei*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6004, Friday, February 24, 1928; *Anumita presă și fondurile sovietice*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6011, Sunday, March 4, 1928.

⁵⁸ *Presa națională și interesele naționale*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6094, Friday, June 15, 1928.

⁵⁹ *Țara adevărată*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6005, Saturday, February 25, 1928.

⁶⁰ *După demascarea anumitei prese. Legea presei – o necesitate*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6008, Wednesday, February 29, 1928.

⁶¹ *Din consecințele greșelilor politice*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6107, Friday, June 29, 1928.

⁶² *Libertatea presei. Cazul ziarului de șantaj “Cuvântul” la Senat*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6024, Monday, March 19, 1928.

⁶³ “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6102, Sunday, June 24, 1928.

attitude “*de local de mahala / of suburban pub*”, of triviality, “*de surugiu / of coachman*” language used by the Peasant politicians, signified their concern with regard to the political adversity they confronted with in the two Chambers, and that had transformed into hostility and not loyal fight⁶⁴. The dismissal of several National Peasant deputies from the legislative expressed the Liberal greater unavailability in terms of political negotiation as a core democratic mechanism⁶⁵. The siding of the National Peasant Transylvanian deputies with the sanctioned leaders, by leaving jointly the premises⁶⁶, deepened the political crisis. The whole National Peasant parliamentary block withdrew from the National Representation on March 19, a direct consequence of the Regency’s refusal to approve the motion of the party’s meeting in Bucharest handed by Iuliu Maniu on the previous day. The creation of their own parliament, formed with the removed deputies and those party candidates that had been “stolen” at ballots during the elections of 1927, attempted to an extreme extent to illegitimise the power held by the National Liberal Party. The Liberal response demonstrated the irrevocable adversity between the two competing forces and the critical feature of the democratic political culture in the inter-War period. The sedition scenario of petty politics was brought back into discussion by the Liberals. They historicised the moment of their withdrawal from the Parliament, registering it within a sequence of similar events in order to reduce its meaning and consequences and to counterpoise the National Peasant interpretation with reference to the lack of national Representation. I. G. Duca defined the National Peasant boycott within an opposition system; according to the Liberal leader, it was a remake of a previous action from the Budapest legislative framed in the Parliament of the Great and united Romania⁶⁷. The suggestion of new parliamentary elections for the seats of

⁶⁴ In the Chamber session of January 26, 1928, Alexandru Vaida Voevod had declared that “*nu s-a lăsat intimidat de furia tigrilor de la Budapesta, nu se va lăsa bătut de ploșnițele din Vecchiul Regat / [he] was not intimidated by the fury of Budapest tigers, he will not be defeated by the bugs of the Old Kingdom*” (in “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5981, Saturday, January 28, 1928); Mihai Popovici named “the lupiști” as “*excremente ale partidului liberal / defecations of Liberal Party*” (*Violența în politică – arma celor slabi*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5994, Saturday, February 13, 1928); *Eroarea fundamentală a partidului național jărănesc*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6089, Friday, June 8, 1928). The feeling was amplified after the drama in Yugoslavian *Scupcina*. The “*Patria / The Homeland*” newspaper of Cluj asked a rhetoric question with regard to this event: “*ce se va întâmpla la noi când coarda se va rupe? / what will happen here when the rope gets broken?*” (*O sfidare. Amenințări nesăbuite național-jărăniste*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6102, Sunday, June 24, 1928).

⁶⁵ The removal of Pompiliu Ioanițescu, Sever Bocu, Virgil Madgearu and Dr. Aurel Dobrescu for 5-10-30 days from the Chamber’s Disciplinary Commission, in the session of February 10, 1928, and further on a similar step (to exclude for 30 sessions) applied to NPP Vice-president, Alexandru Vaida Voevod, on February 14 (in “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5994, Monday, February 13, 1928); for the National Peasants this measure represented a new challenge (*Miluiții jandarmilor în Parlament provoacă țara*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 98, Sunday, February 12, 1928).

⁶⁶ *O manifestare regionalistă la Cameră*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5997, Friday, February 17, 1928.

⁶⁷ Thus, the fact that the National Peasants withdrew had no importance, as the Liberal leaders affirmed. The Liberals had also withdrawn ten times during the last ten years and they would return for the daily allowance, accusing the National Peasants for not forgetting to sign in the presence

those who had withdrawn and which were to be declared as vacant, according to the regulations of both Chambers, pursued to take the National Peasant Party outside the public space. By not taking part in the hypothetical elections the Liberals would eventually impose an opposition that was convenient to them, “*un curent mai sănătos în viața politică a statului, formațiune care să înțeleagă altfel acțiunea împotriva guvernului* / a healthier trend in the state political life, an organization that would understand the action against the government”⁶⁸.

The speech competition did not offer a winning position to the government, unable to identify itself with the symbols recognised by the entire society as being of political order: the nation, the religion, the constitution. Under the circumstances of the Liberal wearing, the National Peasants undermined the government’s attempts to identify them ultimately with various libellous identities: “communist”, “subversive”, etc. The organisation of the “national assembly”-congress of Alba-Iulia was meant to eliminate the accusation of regionalism.

(to be continued)

Translated from Romanian by Adina Rătoi and Șerban Marin

register in order to cash the 1,000 lei per day, “*bani fără muncă / workless money !*” (*Național-țărăniștii s-au retras iarăși din Parlament*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6026, Wednesday, March 21, 1928; “Viitorul”, XXI, no 5998, Saturday, February 18, 1928); although the Liberals adopted the tone of confrontation, many neutral observers urged on moderation: according to G. Hârsu, editor of “*Parlamentul / The Parliament*” review, although it did not reach the anticipated effects, the National Peasants’ withdrawal from the Parliament affected the Romanian frail democracy, while the unanimity was “*mult mai primejdioasă în efecte posibile decât rezultatul celor mai violente și neparlamentare dezbateri* / much more dangerous in possible effects than the result of the most violent and non-parliamentary debates” (G. Hârsu, *Retragerea opoziției*, “Parlamentul”, I, no 19, Thursday, March 22, 1928, p. 1).

⁶⁸ *Care este situația politică după ultimele evenimente*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6027, Thursday, March 22, 1928.

