

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

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4. The Assembly

The Liberals found it impossible to ban the gathering. The decision upon the approval, on May 3rd, was marked after long delays and four meetings of the Council of Ministers in a single day (at peace time) by the social experience of C. Argetoianu and Gh. Tătărescu⁶⁹, as well as the analyses made on the situation of Alba-Iulia by the Information B Office. The Note of May 2nd, 1928 expressed the concern for the consequences deriving from this affair, and suggested tact and caution from the authorities. There was the conviction that there would be many people, much prating, and rather dull resolutions for the Government and Regency, but nothing more, and on one condition: that the authorities would please themselves gazing without challenging the mob and the leaders⁷⁰. The exceptional security measures taken by the Government under the guidance of Gh. Tătărescu were meant to isolate the problem from the Liberal perspective so that “*abcesul să crape la Alba-Iulia și puroiul să nu poată curge în afară* / the boil erupts in Alba-Iulia and the pus does not overflow”, according to C. Argetoianu’s stylistic language⁷¹. Considered excessive by the leaders of the National Peasant Party (who spoke of cannon batteries, air squadrons, censorship and the apprehension of journalists who were circulating inaccurate and disturbing news), the measures were partially withdrawn on May 5th, after Iuliu Maniu had taken charge of maintaining order⁷².

The gathering itself did not impress the Romanian political elites, despite the radical statements made and the representation of the Liberal government as

* See “Revista Arhivelor”, 84 (2007), 3-4, p. 203-223.

⁶⁹ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 247; *Politica de negațiune. Manifeste calomnioase și ațățătoare, dar fără program de guvernare*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6061, Saturday, May 5, 1928.

⁷⁰ A.N.I.C., fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 24-25.

⁷¹ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 250; the gathering was watched by Romulus Voinescu, the Director of the General Security (Siguranța Generală) of Bucharest (A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 4).

⁷² I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 93; the Government warned the foreign correspondents to give only the official presentation of the gathering in Alba-Iulia and not biased news. The reason of this prohibition was represented by the “*apărarea statului român împotriva unor acțiuni de atingea prestigiul și interesele vitale... / defence of the Romanian State against actions that would bring offence to its prestige and vital interests...*”; by the honesty and not the censoring of the press, argued the Liberals (in *Restabilirea unor fapte. Campania de ponegrire a României*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6070, Wednesday, May 16, 1928).

“*dușman al poporului / enemy of the people*”. Iorga described it as a completely old-fashioned action, “*o periculoasă arlechinadă / a dangerous harlequinade*”, or a political parade⁷³. The mob, the scenic display, the motion forwarded to the Regency, the timid attempt to overthrow the Government by a march to “*blăstămata capitală a regătenilor / the damned capital of the regăteni*”⁷⁴ that was transformed into an appeal to Tătărescu for transportation means to take them home⁷⁵, were enclosed in the scenarios projected by the Government. In a letter addressed to the foreign *chargés d'affaires* that was meant to serve for propaganda material with the view to fight against those correspondents who had accredited the idea that in Romania “a revolution” had taken place, I. G. Duca declared that everything had limited to a motion written in violent terms, but otherwise similar to the previous resolutions of the NPP⁷⁶. The novelty resided in the pledge requested by a priest to the participants to fight in all the cities and villages restlessly and at all cost against the “illegitimate” Government, asking God “*să le dea puterea de a birui și a forma o Românie nouă, liberă, mamă ocrotitoare pentru toții fiii țării / to give them the strength to win and form a new and free Romania, a protective mother for her sons*”. The discursive Messianism and the potential consequences of the sacramental gesture within a traditional society explain the fury of the Liberals and, in particular, that of the Minister of Cults, the Transylvanian Alexandru Lepedatu, to deliver the participants from oath by the Holly Synod⁷⁷.

The Carol question, although real based on his attempt to reach the country, is only a minor aspect in the context of the Alba-Iulia gathering, an additional means

⁷³ N. Iorga, *O viață...*, p. 721; the gathering of Alba-Iulia was presented in the same dramatic terms by Grigore Trancu-Iași, and its “failure”: “*un mare fiasco / a great fiasco*” (Gr. Trancu-Iași, *op. cit.*, p. 54). However, Joseph Roucek was fascinated by the political shape of the event. Joseph S. Roucek, *Contemporary Roumania and Her Problems. A Study in Modern Nationalism*, Stanford University, California-London-[Oxford], 1932, p. 117).

⁷⁴ N. Iorga, *România contemporană...*, p. 363.

⁷⁵ I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁷⁶ The interviews and statements of I. G. Duca in “*Giornale d'Italia*”, “*Le Temps*”, “*Neue Freie Presse*” of Vienna, cf. “*Viitorul*”, XXI, nos 6074 and 6075 on Monday and Tuesday, May 21-22, 1928; see also A.N.I.C., fond Ministerul Propagandei și Informațiilor, file 44, p. 25 *apud* M. Rusenescu, I. Saizu, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

⁷⁷ A. Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 83; *Sf. Sinod condamnă hotărât introducerea Bisericii în luptele politice. Jurământul de la Alba-Iulia este declarat nul iar preoții care și-au uitat datoria vor fi pedepsiți*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6085, Monday, June 4, 1928. Gh. Tătărescu, the Sub-Secretary of State of Internal Affairs, sent in June 1928 a circular letter to all the Prefects from Transylvania requesting them to inform the population by massive publicity, oral propaganda, or press and newsprints of the official press release made by the Holly Synod to annul the pledge extorted in Alba-Iulia by “*câțiva preoți agitatori / a few propagandist priests*” otherwise sent to trial, and the deliverance of the believers from the oath “*smuls prin mijloace nepermise / extorted by unlawful means*” (A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 134). In their turn, the National Peasants gathered upon Maniu’s decision against the Metropolitan Bălan, who had denied the execution of the penalties applied by the Synod to the priests receiving the oath of Alba-Iulia (*Note of June 14, 1928, A.N.I.C., fond familia Brătianu, file 468, p. 115*).

of pressure on the political factors planned by the Liberals. Transformed into a main issue by the Liberals after the end of the event in order to enhance their authority, it gained impressive verbal shapes such as that of Carol, who was willing to negotiate the amendment of the treaties with Hungary in exchange for support for his return to the country⁷⁸. The obvious aim was to alienate the former heir to the Crown of Romania from the public opinion. The Liberals made a clear connection between Carol's action and the Congress of Alba-Iulia, while the National Peasants' was rather ambiguous. Even Armand Călinescu seemed surprised by the Government's position in his "Memoirs"⁷⁹. In addition, the "Reports" made by the Security Service seemed to approach the two aspects of the gathering differently after the event⁸⁰.

5. The outcome

Repeatedly informing of the imminent fall of the Liberal Government, the National Peasant Party was faced with difficulties shortly after the May 1928 events; many Peasant leaders, including Ion Mihalache, manifested dissatisfaction with the dénouement of the reunion and the modest results of the Assembly of Alba-Iulia: the Government had not been overthrown and the Regency had not been impressed⁸¹.

⁷⁸ *A acțiunea fostului prinț Carol pentru revizuirea tratatelor*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6065, Wednesday, May 9, 1928; *După uneltirile dela Londra. Cine este aventurierul Barbu Ionescu*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6081, Wednesday, May 30, 1928; *Trădarea fostului prinț Carol*, "Glasul Ardealului", II, no 20, Sunday, May 20, 1928, p. 1 (the trivial language addressed to Carol who "was known" to "trăiește o viață destrăbălată cu jidanca lui și cu alte femei stricate de prin crășmele Parisului / be living in debauchery with his Jew woman and other sluts in Paris's taverns"; a "om păcătos / wretched man" who made a deal with Maniu, Rothemere and Budapest so that with the help of the Hungarians he would secretly return to the country to oust his son from the throne and "make a queen of his Jew": in exchange for support, he had pledged in writing that once on the throne he would restore Transylvania to Hungary"); *Machinațiunile Ex-prințului Carol*, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2663, Thursday, May 9, 1928, p. 1; *Încercările fostului prinț Carol*, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2665, Friday, May 12, 1928, p. 3; *Complotul ex-prințului Carol*, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2667, Wednesday, May 16, 1928, p. 1; *Aventura ex-prințului Carol*, "Glasul Bucovinei", XI, no 2668, Thursday, May 17, 1928, p. 1; see also Iorga, *România contemporană...*, p. 363, who considers the Liberal accusations as the utmost surreal news, most certainly impressive, "exploatarea cu dibăcie / the skilful exploitation" of the Prince's statement, "mediocră ca fond și ca formă / mediocre in essence and form"; Mihail Manoilescu is much more trenchant, judging the Liberal deed as vile going so far as to make the press write that "prințul trebuia să se oprească în drumul său la Budapesta, pentru ca să-și asigure concursul ungarilor, pe baza revizuirii granițelor de la Trianon / the Prince had to make a stop in Budapest on his journey to get the Hungarians' assistance based on the Trianon border modification" (in *Memorii*, I (ed. Valeriu Dinu), Bucharest, 1993, p. 182-183).

⁷⁹ A. Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁸⁰ A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 104; see, for example, *Darea de seamă din 28 Maiu 1928 a Serviciului Special de Siguranță Ploiești*, which examines the latest main events (the reunion of Alba-Iulia, the adventure of Ex-Prince Carol, the stabilisation) and the position of the political parties and other social forces in this matter.

⁸¹ A.N.I.C., fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 46; *Dezorientarea. Neînțelegeri în conducerea partidului național-țărănesc*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6067, Sunday, May 13, 1928.

The editorial office of the officious “Dreptatea” was in deep silence, still waiting for “ceva tare / something hot”, at least an ultimatum addressed to the Regency⁸². The idea that Maniu had only wished to open up the eyes of the Regency in the matter of the people of Transylvania and the resentment of the Liberals induced by the local organisations of the National Peasant Party were regarded by many observers as a compensation of the Alba-Iulia failure⁸³. The change of tactics was inevitable, from the great gatherings in the provinces to the minor but continuous agitation⁸⁴.

The Liberals appeared to have benefited from the reunion of Alba-Iulia, given the relative discredit suffered by the National Peasants. The Party newspapers express their joy in headlines on the “*eșecul lamentabil și ridicul al agitațiilor național-țărăniște* / deplorable and ridiculous failure of the National Peasant agitations”, or the “*revoluționarii care cer 50 % reducere pe CFR... / revolutionaries asking for a 50% cut of the train tickets...*”⁸⁵. The cartoons of Iuliu Maniu riding a wooden horse, wearing a paper helmet (with “*Dreptatea / Justice*” written on it), and holding a wooden sword while being pushed by Mihalache and the bridles held by the Vaida Voevod (with the caption: “*Victoria de la Alba Iulia: Marșul d-lor Maniu, Vaida și Mihalache spre București / The Victory of Alba-Iulia: The March of Maniu, Vaida, and Mihalache to Bucharest*”), were in the Liberal opinion the expression of the ridicule the National Peasants had appealed to. It had been “the scrawny’s Sunday” (“*Duminica slăbănogului*”) in the folk calendar. The masses could gather in a great movement of a national or social character, but they would not waste their energy in an electoral agitation, argued the Liberals⁸⁶. The alleged winners replied to the Peasant speech with a description of the moment in epic terms: the Alba-Iulia gathering represented “*paroxismul încordării și momentul culminant al manifestării forțelor populare* / the utmost tension and climax in the manifestation of the popular forces”. Everything ended and concentrated in Alba-Iulia. There was nothing else beyond it⁸⁷. The National Peasant Party had shown its weakness. The masses had become the victims of the National Peasant “*farce*”, “*jucate în tovărășia comuniștilor și în aplauzele Budapestei și Moscovei* / staged in the company of the Communists and applauded by Budapest and Moscow”. In the Liberal projection, the Transylvanian peasants, allured with demagogic promises, were left in hunger and

⁸² A.N.I.C., fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 37.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, file 112, p. 49, 50, 50v.

⁸⁵ “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6064, Tuesday, May 8, 1928; the Ilfov Party officious presented the Alba-Iulia events as an attempt of “*revoluție cu bâta în cărușă și cu entuziasmul în căciulă* / revolution with sticks in the wagon and enthusiasm in the hat (“*Liberalul*”, Ilfov, III, no 5, May 15, 1928); see also *Alba-Iulia – un nou eșec național-țărănist*, “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2661, Tuesday, May 8, 1928, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Vr., *După marea adunare “Alba Iulia”*, “*Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală*”, I, no 12, May 10, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *O superioară producție a politicii de negațiune*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6065, Wednesday, May 9, 1928.

weariness to wander on the roads, while the illustrious “were feasting” or driving cars⁸⁸. Meanwhile, the Liberals wished to describe the gathering in different figures, speaking of only 35-40,000 participants⁸⁹.

The Government congratulates itself, in turn, for the minimum outcome of the event. Vintilă Brătianu was pleased that this reunion put an end to the “revolution myth”⁹⁰. “The notes [...] on the state of being of different social classes” made by the Securitate Service showed that the commotion created around the Assembly of Alba-Iulia and the planned “visit” of Prince Carol had faded rather fast, although a great deal of the population was expecting a change in the economic system. Only the peasants from Transylvania who had sent representatives to the meeting were affected by the speeches, urges and the oath made, although they were disappointed in the lack of practical results of this event, which they had hoped would fulfil all their needs⁹¹. Gh. Tătărescu was able to declare though that Transylvania wished to

⁸⁸ *Epilogul farsei dela 6 Maiu*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6067, Sunday, May 13, 1928; Vasile Oprea, *A avut un singur rezultat*, “Glasul Bucovinei”, XI, no 2662, Wednesday, May 9, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Adevăratele proporții ale întrunirii dela Alba-Iulia. Declarațiunile d-lui N. D. Chirculescu, fost ministru al muncii*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6066, Thursday, May 10, 1928; a “Jesuit” analysis of the Liberals considered the National Peasant representation in the gathering as insignificant – the 40,000 participants being a minor part of the 3.5 million voters in Great Romania (including the county of Alba), in *Ce-a reprezentat numericește întrunirea dela Alba Iulia*, “Viitorul”, XXI, no 6064, Tuesday, May 8, 1928. Another Liberal officious insisted on a certain circular letter of Boilă that was urging their supporters to forge the number of participants (Vr., *După marea adunare “Alba Iulia”*, “Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală”, I, no 12, May 10, 1928, p. 1). See also *Adunarea dela Alba-Iulia*, “Glasul Ardealului”, II, no 19, Sunday, May 13, 1928, p. 1 and *Drumul rătăcirii*, “Glasul Ardealului”, II, no 20, Sunday, May 20, 1928, p. 1, where the number of participants had been calculated according to the surface of the site at 15-20,000 people the most.

⁹⁰ Comforted by the outcome of the gathering, I. G. Duca declared to a representative of “Rador” that “*nu există fără mai pacinică și doritoare de muncă decât România, și știm în plus că nu există nici o problemă socială gravă care să poată servi ca bază a unei agitații revoluționare care să poată servi ca bază unei agitații revoluționare. Există evident o opoziție nerăbdătoare să vină la putere, dar agitațiile ei sunt cu totul de suprafață. Alba-Iulia în aceste condiții nu putea fi decât ceea ce a fost, adică o întrunire mai mult sau mai puțin numeroasă, terminată printr-o moțiune mai mult sau mai puțin violentă. Evenimentele au confirmat în totul prevederile guvernului. România continuă opera de organizare și progrese / there is no country more peaceful and work-loving than Romania, and I wasn’t aware of any serious social problem to underpin a revolutionary agitation. There is, in fact, an opposition anxious to take over power, but such agitations are merely superficial. Given these circumstances, Alba-Iulia couldn’t be but what it was, i.e. a reunion more or less numerous, terminated by a motion more or less violent. These events confirmed entirely the Government’s projections. Romania continues its organisation and development work” (cf. *Declarațiile d-lui ministru Duca despre Alba-Iulia*, “Glasul Bucovinei”, XI, no 2662, Wednesday, May 9, 1928, p. 1).*

⁹¹ A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 196-201, *Referat. Despre starea de spirit a populației din regiunile Brașov, Sibiu-Timișoara și Cluj, despre rapoartele primite dela Inspectoratele Generale respective* (see also the reports of the General Police and Security Inspectorate of the Brașov Region, Ibidem, f. 209-212, Deva Security Service, Ibidem, f. 218; Lugoj Special Security Service, Ibidem, f. 222-223v.; etc.). In some villages such as Gurgău and

participate in this constructive work⁹². Certain uproar took place in Valea Jiului, a region with strong socialist influences. The coal miners from Lupeni and Vulcan, attendees of the gathering in Alba Iulia, affected by the speeches concerning their role in a future governing, (“*că vor stăpâni alături de țărani / that they will rule jointly with the peasants*”) resorted to violence. They refused to recognise the legal celebration of May 10, choosing to work on this day with the permission of the management that wished to avoid any measure meant to animate spirits. The lack of defined results in the post-Alba Iulia period and lack of authority from the union leaders generated the enhancement of local tensions, but also of social and political movements (the Liberals spoke of the “rebellion of May 28”). The intervention of the Internal Affairs Sub-State Secretary, Gheorghe Tătărescu, managed to appease the conflict⁹³.

The Liberals thought they had the Government’s cover. In a meeting of Bucharest and Ilfov Liberal leaders held on May 19, the Prime-Minister strongly recommended to continue organise and consolidate the State, “*potrivit cerințelor sale democratice, de ordine, de progres și de înfrățire socială / based on its democratic, order, development, and social twinning requirements*”. At the same time, he also gave a warning to those who “*vor încerca pentru interese și nerăbdări de partid să tulbure mersul liniștit al țării / will try to disturb the country’s peaceful advancement guided by interests and Party anxieties*”⁹⁴. According to the Liberals, the National Peasant Party was no longer popular, fact proved by their defeat in the partial communal elections of Arad⁹⁵, in the elections for senator vacancies in the College of

Pietroasa, the peasants returned from Alba Iulia had forced the drummer to gather the people before the village-hall to announce them that the Liberal government had collapsed, and Iuliu Maniu took over the power; information that mobilised the villagers to replace the local authorities (notary, mayor, sylviculturist) and start a political uprising, yelling “*jos burjuii / down with the bourgeoisie!*”, which eventually ended with the gendarmerie’s intervention (*Isprăvi urâte*, in “*Glasul Ardealului*”, II, no 21, Sunday, May 27, 1928, p. 3).

⁹² “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6155, Saturday, August 25, 1928.

⁹³ *După Alba Iulia. Ce s-a petrecut în Valea Jiului*, “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6130, Friday, July 27, 1928; in reply to the interview by the Sub-State Secretary Gh. Tătărescu, Pompiliu Ionițescu declared for “*Dreptatea*” (*Adevărul asupra faptelor din Valea Jiului*, II, no 236, Sunday, July 29, 1928) that “*Republica Diamantului Negru dela Jiu / The republic of the Black Diamond from Jiu*” was the sheer fantasy of the Security agents. According to the Peasant political man, expressions such as “*Communism*” or “*Hungarian irredentist*” were obsolete clichés attempting to throw contempt against the National Peasant Party, which had presumably instigated to uprising. The action of the military Justice, present in Petroșani with no reason, represented some sort of political vengeance, the strike being caused by work conditions. Meanwhile, Maniu was concerned of what was happening in Valea Jiului and requested Hațieganu from Cluj to go to Lupeni and do whatever necessary to calm the spirits (*Note of May 17, 1928*, in A.N.I.C, fond familia Brătianu, file 468, p. 54).

⁹⁴ “*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6073, Sunday, May 20, 1928; see also *D-I Vintilă Brătianu către organizațiunile Partidului Național-Liberal din întreaga țară*, “*Glasul Bucovinei*”, XI, no 2671, Sunday, May 20, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁵ The Liberals had won 4,108 votes against the 786 votes of the NNP (and the People’s Party) or

the Agricultural Chambers of Ilfov (where the National Peasants supported the representative of the People's Party, Constantin Garoflid), or in the regional elections of Prahova⁹⁶. The aggressive campaign against Carol was also a sign of the Liberal self-confidence.

The Liberal negation was still valid, regardless of the radical shift in the "independent" press language, which no longer requested the immediate withdrawal of the Government under revolution sanction, but a transition type of government (eventually led by N. Iorga)⁹⁷. Other competitors claimed power from the order and peace platform, considering the "failure" of Alba-Iulia. General Averescu⁹⁸ and Nicolae Iorga – the latter believed to have been more justified since "*averescanii erau slugile liberalilor / Averescu's supporters were the Liberals' servants*"⁹⁹ – attempted to take initiative in criticising the Liberal Party for "*guverna împotriva țării / governing against the country*". "*Moștenirea liberală / The Liberal heritage*",

the 962 votes of the Labour Bloc (in *O legendă și o cutezanță. "Națiunea" d-lui Maniu*, "Viitorul" XXI, no 6153, Wednesday, August 22, 1928).

⁹⁶ The National Liberal Party had obtained in these elections 18,000 votes, the Liberal splinter party 5,300 votes, while the National Peasant Party 14,600 votes (*Dezastrul electoral dela Prahova al PNT*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6197, Friday, October 12, 1928).

⁹⁷ Cf. "Viitorul", XXI, no 6087, Thursday, June 7, 1928. One of the Regency members is believed to have told a foreign journalist that he was more and more certain that Brătianu's successor could not be Maniu and that the Government crisis management solution could be either a National Government or a Iorga-Averescu transition Government (A.N.I.C., Fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 137).

⁹⁸ In order to demonstrate Alexandru Averescu's position (and also that of his supporters) with regard to the Alba Iulia assembly and the events that followed, the most reliable source is the brochure *Limpezirea unei situațiuni. Alba-Iulia de abis. Articole publicate în ziarul „Îndreptarea”. Numerele: 107, 108 și 109 din Marți 15, Mercuri 16 și Joi 17 Mai 1928*, published in Bucharest during those very days of 1928 by the printing house of the "Ziua" newspaper. Also see the *Note* of November 22, 1928, by the Averescu Directorate Committee concerning Averescu's appointment with the Regency; when he requested that the people would re-take the lead of the country, given the NPP's opposition politics; the High Regency had replied that it would consider the matter impartially in due time (A.N.I.C., fond familia Brătianu, file 112/1928, p. 16). The meeting displayed the Averescan conformism, their wish to take part in the Liberal political power game; although Averescu had requested the immediate withdrawal of the Liberal Party from power, as a solution to avoid political radicalism, he would later on agree that the Vintilă Brătianu Government should stay until the loan closure; he also rejected Ioan Petrovici's accusation that "*Îndreptarea*" was more concerned with violently attacking the National Peasants than fighting against the Liberals, depicting the National Peasants' campaign as "*dezmațată / debauched*" and unfavourable for the country. Nevertheless, he and Iorga showed availability in attending the celebration of the Dobroudja semi-centennial in Constanța (*Ibidem*, p. 20).

⁹⁹ A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3, p. 66-67 and 104: *Serviciul Special de Siguranță Ploiești. Notă. Dare de seamă. 28 Maiu 1928*; Grigore Trancu-Iași stated that "*între un guvern care a adus atâtea nenorociri și acest amalgam [n. n., național-țărăniștii] stăm ca o rezervă a zilelor grele pe care țara le va avea / between a Government that brought so much damage and this mixture [emphasis mine, the National Peasants] we stand like a reserve for the hard days the country will go through*" (Gr. Trancu-Iași, *op. cit.*, p. 51).

as Iorga used to call it, opened perspectives to everyone, the governing Party itself often recommending what action to follow in order to prevent Iuliu Maniu's political group to take over power¹⁰⁰. The Liberals were totally aware that they would leave office at a certain point and argued that "*un partid ori cât de puternic și oricâte servicii ar aduce țării nu poate governa neconținut / a Party, no matter how strong and how many services would bring to the country, it cannot rule forever*". But the leaders wished to keep the power system, the regulation of the governing succession based on a constructive tradition and a set of requirements. In their opinion, the Parties that created a "*operă negativă și turbulentă / negative and chaotic work*", had no "*atitudini clare în chestia constituțională / clear positions in the constitutional affair*", and knew nothing of the previous governments' actions, were not supposed to come to power¹⁰¹.

In the autumn of 1928, the Liberal Government was not faced with situations of power legitimacy to be shaken by impressive demonstrations. The attempt to assign an alternative Romania to the "official" Liberal one, through the working-sessions of a body made of National Peasant MPs convened within the extraordinary session of the Parliament (related to passing bills on foreign loans), failed to have an impact on the public. The Liberal press caricatured the opposition's demonstration organised at the Sidoli circus (previously, the National Peasants MPs had met in the ball-room of the journalists' union) describing it as "*exhibiții vesele de vară / cheerful summer exhibitions*", "*parlamentul lui Cațavencu / Cațavencu's parliament*", a consolation for the deceived partisans after the failure of the "overthrow campaign", and at a different level, a sabotage of the loan contracting through the country's defamation¹⁰². The National Peasant opposition seemed to

¹⁰⁰ N. Iorga, *Istoria românilor...*, X, p. 477; Idem, *O viață...*, p. 730, and a great extent the Liberal newspapers, which did not however call themselves Party newspapers, would give way to rumours whispered in coffee houses on the coming to power of a potential Averescu Government; the meeting of the General and Vintilă Brătianu on the occasion of Kishinev celebration nourished this information in coffee houses (Chilon, *Satisfacție generală*, "Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală", I, no 13, May 17, 1928, p. 1), in the autumn of 1928, the Liberals announced the indisputable installation of an Iorga Office, "*deși guvernul nu avea nici un motiv să plece / although the Government had no reason to leave*", "Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală", I, no 32, September 27, 1928, p. 1).

¹⁰¹ *Partidele de opoziție se ceartă pentru o succesiune care nu e deschisă*, "Viitorul", XXI, no. 6072, Saturday, May 19, 1928.

¹⁰² The National Peasants accused the exaggerate taxation policy during the debates in their own parliament, but also the destruction of the local autonomy, the Government's autocracy, the police state, the economic brigandage politics, etc. (*Național-țărăniștii continuă seria vovedilurilor*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6082, Friday, June 1, 1928); the brochure *Les Débats du Parlement National-Paysan réuni à Bucarest les 26 et 27 Juillet 1928*, 64 p., published in Paris and financed by the businessman Kira Kirschen, illustrates, as the Liberals confirmed, the activity of this National Peasant "representation". They had taken very seriously the legitimacy of the reunion, a circular letter by I. G. Duca (Minister of Interior) to the Prefects in the country requesting them to prevent the National Peasant delegates from convening their representatives in the Parliament (through a counter-propaganda action supported by all their political friends) and instructing the gendarmerie

have missed the moment of change, although the nature of the problems the Romanian society was facing had not changed.

I believe there is a direct connection between this final moment and the Assembly of Alba-Iulia of May 1928, regardless of the ironic descriptions of the event as “*mare succes, fără consecințe importante pentru viitor / a great success with no future important consequences*”¹⁰³. Restrained to the objective taken overtly by the participants in the gathering from the “city of the Unification”, the immediate overthrow of the Liberal Government, the Alba-Iulia action was in fact unsuccessful. Beyond this conclusion, the demonstration was one of the most efficient means to prove the tremendous popular support the NPP enjoyed in the spring of 1928. Virgil Madgearu showed that soon after Alba-Iulia “*scopul nostru a fost atins. Am demonstrat Regenței că suntem singurul partid popular cu adânci rădăcini în masele populare și simpatizați de marele public care așteaptă de la noi îndreptarea stării mizerabile de azi. Străinătății i-am dovedit că suntem un partid puternic, de ordine și iubit de Țară / our objective was attained. We confirmed to the Regency that we are the only popular Party deeply rooted in the masses and preferred by the great public that expects from us the improvement of the current degrading state. We proved abroad that we are a strong Party that supports order and is loved by the Country*”¹⁰⁴. In the fight between the political decision-makers, the assembly and its inherent ritual displayed the Government’s conquest claims; at the same time, appealing to a symbolic space and remembering past events were meant to determine and eventually prevented the conflict. In a political exposé at the National Peasant Party club in Bucharest, the Secretary General declared that in Alba-Iulia “*se trăsese un semnal de alarmă împotriva războiului civil / a warning signal had been pulled against civil war*” as a means to change the political order¹⁰⁵. Moreover, the National Peasants had managed in the view of many internal and international observers to remove that image of Royalists and promoters of an anti-national fight that the Liberals had oversaturated the public space with¹⁰⁶.

and police to monitor the National Peasant agents and thwart their actions: those who were making propaganda in view to elect the delegates had to be arrested and sent to trial for public order offences, and the documents related to this propaganda were to be confiscated (*Circulară din 2 iunie 1928*, in A.N.I.C., fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, file 3/1928, p. 131).

¹⁰³ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁴ A.N.I.C., fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 40-41; the German press presented in a similar manner the course of the events, A.N.I.C., fond Familia Brătianu, file 111, Ministerul Afacerilor Străine, Direcțiunea Presei și Informațiilor (May 14, 1928), p. 9; late after these events (in 1945), a National Peasant leader from Sibiu, Petre Drăghici, stated that “*urmare a acestei adunări populare guvernul reacționar-oligarhic a fost înlocuit de un guvern național-țărănesc / further to this popular assembly, the reactionary-oligarchic Government was replaced by a National Peasant Government*” (Petre Drăghici, *Repriviri politice (1918-1944)*, Sibiu, 1945, p. 7).

¹⁰⁵ *Expozeul politic al D-lui Virgil Madgearu*, “Dreptatea”, II, no 209, Thursday, June 28, 1928.

¹⁰⁶ In a letter sent to Duca from San Remo on May 8 1928, Titulescu appreciated the fact that the Government had authorised the organisation of the Alba-Iulia gathering, but also the order in which everything had taken place, to the surprise of foreign expectations; “*oricât de mare ar fi violența*

Wishing to be engraved in their contemporaries' memory as an independent institution, the constitutional factor could no longer transcend the popularity of a political body. "*Ceea ce-și îngăduia regele Ferdinand nu-și putea permite Regența, obligată fiind să înlăture bănuiala că n-ar fi decât o creație a Partidului Liberal / What King Ferdinand indulged could not be afforded by the Regency, obliged to remove the suspicion of being a mere design of the Liberal Party*", argued Pamfil Șeicaru, who sympathised with the National Peasants¹⁰⁷. The political actors, particularly I. G. Duca at the time of the Liberal opposition, acknowledged the substance of a political force: the National Peasant popularity could not be compared with the mental contagiousness or the spontaneous popularity of General Averescu¹⁰⁸. The consequences were therefore multiple. The assembly of Alba-Iulia, as a demonstration, had its own autonomy compared with the NPP power takeover, and especially with the Royal crisis. The National Peasants tended to impose a different **opposition politics** approach, based on rather democratic practices, where the succession to power was no longer negotiated off the stage. In the Romanian modern political system the elections were not decisive, but the personal or personalised relation (which could enclose the assessment of the governance and political value) that each political structure established with the constitutional factor. The great confidence of King Ferdinand in Ionel Brătianu illustrates the above mentioned statement. In 1928, this power ratio faced essential changes, popularity becoming an oppression element for the Regency as it was concerned with promoting the image of power arbitrator. The Liberals' attempts to prescribe rules for access to power had failed in face of this new mechanism sustained by the National Peasant leaders as means of opposition. This fact is even more obvious as the other political competitors took over these means; Nicolae Iorga, a devoted elitist conservative, did not promote the brutal access of masses on the political theatre¹⁰⁹. On November 4,

noastră ca Guvern [...], opoziția a ținut să declare că unirea Transilvaniei cu patria mamă este pe vecie / no matter how great our Government's violence is [...], the opposition wished to declare for ever the union of Transylvania with the mother country"; "[...] *cu toate divergențele interne când e vorba de România bate în noi toți una și aceeași inimă / [...]* despite all internal differences, when it comes for Romania, there is one single heart pounding in our chests" (A.N.I.C., Fond Casa Regală – Regență, Mihai, file 41/1928, p. 32).

¹⁰⁷ P. Șeicaru, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁹ N. Iorga wrote maliciously (in one of the "*Neamul românesc*" issues, May 1928) on the public appeal abuse and the success of all political reunions, in the country. "*Oricâte se vor mai face, vor reuși. Orice partid poate să cheme lumea și va veni. Tocmai de aceea întrunirile n-au nici o valoare / No matter what they do, they will succeed. Any Party can call the people and the people will join. That is why such meetings have no value*", he concluded, discovering value only in that idea required by that specific epoch and in that man able to emphasise it (apud *Situația partidul național-tărănesc se agravează*, "Viitorul", XXI, no 6070, Wednesday, May 16, 1928). Iorga preserved his consistency in this matter since, after the failure of his own governing, he stated in the assembly of the Executive Committee of the Nationalist Democratic Party (of April 7, 1933) that he no longer "*încredere în așa-numitele întruniri publice / trusted the alleged public*

1928 he revealed his wish to come to power, rejoicing at “*strălucita adunare de la sala Dacia / the brilliant assembly from Dacia room*” that had been provided with 4 platforms for the speakers and attended by 5,000 people. “*Și e vorba numai de trei județe / And there were only three counties*”, he added incidentally¹¹⁰. “*Masele vor avea un cuvânt hotărâtor în viața noastră politică de acum înainte / The masses will have a decisive word in our political life hereinafter*”, declared Dr. N. Lupu in November 1928, saying further that this should have nonetheless happened ten years before¹¹¹.

At the time of Alba-Iulia gathering, Iulia Maniu and the National Peasant leaders rejected unanimously the old power system in favour of a new more democratic change to their advantage. The old system of succession in a limited space, cautioned by the Liberals by “*lăsarea altcuiva la guvernare într-o formă nepericuloasă / allowing a non-dangerous type of governance*”¹¹² was a means to maintain control over political life.

Gheorghe Tătărescu’s allegation of March 1928 that “*veți fi succesorii noștri la putere. De ce vreți să creați precedente care vor putea fi o dată și pentru dumneavoastră neplăcute / you will be our successors to power. Why do you want to create precedents that may be unpleasant for you too?*”¹¹³, foresaw the Liberal

gatherings” made of onlookers “*care vin la toată lumea fără deosebire / who come see anybody with no distinction*”: according to the great historian, we missed a public opinion, considering the weakness of our political forces, the lack of ideas and ideals, of adhesions focused only on interest. Iorga compared the public reunions with “tragedies” organised by the political Parties with the same audience (Nicolae Iorga, *Cuvântarea ținută la Întrunirea Comitetului executiv al Partidului Naționalist-Democrat de la 7 Aprilie 1933 * Cuvântarea de la Senat asupra Pactului cu Geneva * Cuvântarea de la Senat asupra proiectului de conversiune*, Bucharest, 1933, p. 3-4).

¹¹⁰ Idem, *Memorii*..., p. 312.

¹¹¹ Mihail Polihroniade, *De vorbă cu d-l Doctor Lupu*, “*Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală*”, I, no 40, November 22, 1928, p. 4.

¹¹² I. Ciupercă, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

¹¹³ “*Adevărul*”, 41, no 13575, March 20, 1928 apud I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 90. Highly speculated by the press, Tătărescu returned, arguing that the true meaning of his statement determined the negative response by the High Regency to meet 1,000 Party members (“*Viitorul*”, XXI, no 6026, Wednesday, March 21, 1928). After the Alba-Iulia Assembly, it appears that I. G. Duca made a new proposition to the National Peasants related to the regular succession to power, in the sense that the power should be handed over peacefully to the NPP; attending a reunion in Kishinev, the local leaders of the Party directed by Iuliu Maniu rejected after long discussions any offer made by the Liberals and waited confidently the day of their coming to power as an agreement with the Liberals meant the abjuration the National Peasant principles and propaganda, which would be disregarded by the great masses and lead to the loss of political partisans (Note of June 13 of the Security Department regarding an NPP reunion in Kishinev, in A.N.I.C., fond Brătianu, file 468, p. 111); in fact, the National Peasant leaders tried to remain untouchable to these “*cântece de sirenă / mermaid songs*” of the Liberals, suspecting Stere, in agreement with Prince Știrbei (who had visited him on several occasions) and Dr. N. Lupu, of preparing a split within the National Peasant Party, which would eventually serve to a camouflaged Government, schemed by the Liberal Party. Few National Peasant MPs were suspected to have had amicable and frequent relations with the distinguished Liberal members; it was the case of Sever Dan, accused of meeting Tătărescu rather

political reply to the National Peasant action of changing the foundations of the political system. In the animation of that moment, the essence of these words passed unnoticed by the National Peasants, and equally by other political actors. The radical reaction and the Messianic statements in support of the revolution and later on of the Maniu governing (1928-1930), based on popularity, forced the leaders to build different foundations for the Party and to form a genuine strong opposition. The decision-making system in a limited space had ended. The National Peasants had imposed a new political model, while the Liberals had to adjust to it in order to survive using the opponents' principles.

They were the ones to transform this meeting show into a power acquiring mechanism. The memory of a different campaign of the People's Party from 1924, and the meeting at the *Arenele Romane* could be brought into discussion. The ritual has this function of structuring perceptions and suggests certain interpretations of the experience¹¹⁴. The people gathering supported the democratic means of changing the power actors, which had been insufficiently developed in the 20s. Alexandru Vaida Voevod defined the overthrowing Liberal action of 1933 as a plagiarism of the National Peasant campaign of 1928¹¹⁵. Beyond the accusation, there was the recognition of a power politics practice, the institutionalisation of political change in society.

In 1930, the situation had escalated in relation with that of 1928, the National Peasants facing a totally opposite situation now. The National Peasant Party had been depleted by the economic crisis during its governing and by the mistakes made, while the Liberals were close to power. The Maniu Office was facing the constant pressure of the Liberal demonstrations organised throughout the country, where people requested his resignation and free elections. The Liberal Congress of May 1930 had gathered in Bucharest tens of thousands of citizens (according to the most authentic testimonies) so as to enhance in the eyes of the Regency the effort made by the Liberal leaders, and to make proof of the electoral force of the Party. It is difficult to assess the real popularity of the Liberals at the beginning of 1930, when they were overtly claiming power. The Party reorganisation based on the universal suffrage was far from ending, as Gheorghe Tătărescu admitted himself in a memoir addressed to the leadership of the Liberal body in September 1929¹¹⁶. Using slogans coined by the National Peasants such as "overthrowing campaign", "illegitimate government", same expressions, same practices; the National Liberal Party leaders

often (*Ibidem*, p. 113-114). Maniu himself had requested to the prominent Party member to avoid be seen with officials (Note of October 22, 1928 A.N.I.C., fond familia Brătianu, file 112/1928, p. 16).

¹¹⁴ D. Kertzer, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹¹⁵ *Dela 1928 la 1933*, "Viitorul", XXV, no 7737, Friday, November 3, 1933.

¹¹⁶ Documents held by A.N.I.C., fond I. G. Duca: *Memoriu referitor la acțiunea și reorganizarea Partidului Național Liberal*, in A.N.I.C., fond I. G. Duca, file 76/[1929], p. 2-14; the document signed by Gheorghe Tătărescu is dated September 1929; see also a second document (*Ibidem*, p. 15-25).

created the **reality** of popularity, and thus promoted their own claim to govern, based on their previous governing experience, their leaders' recognised ability, the expertise of Party members, the new platform, etc. Grigore Iunian, a prominent member of the National Peasant Party, envisaged, in this context, the cooperation among Parties¹¹⁷, while Grigore Gafencu suggested an agreement with the National Liberal Party, "*pentru a ne înlocui după un oarecare timp / so as to replace us after a while*"¹¹⁸. According to many political analysts, the potential agreement between the Liberals and the National Peasants conveyed great stability to the system. Ștefan Zeletin's attempt to give the People's Party the role of Conservative Party had in the pre-War political system¹¹⁹ ended with the propelling of the National Peasant Party on the public stage and the reconfiguration of the bipolar power. According to Norbert Elias, two forces in conflict undergo a civilisation process¹²⁰. Towards 1930, the Liberals and National Peasants had given up to negating each other. The Liberals had taken the first steps, through Gheorghe Tătărescu and I. G. Duca, in early 1927 – 1928, despite their strong negation by the National Peasant Party. After two years, it was the National Peasants' turn to suggest an agreement with the National Liberal Party. The potential cooperation between the two Parties was criticised by Nicolae Iorga as a form of petty politics, "*un non varietur capabil de a strânge într-o sacră ligă de exploatare succesivă cele două mari armate ale cluburilor / a non varietur capable of gathering in one sacred league of successive exploitation the two great armies of the clubs*"¹²¹. This inclination of establishing agreements between the great Romanian inter-war Parties was enhanced during the following years as they were part of the anti-authoritarian platform that King Carol II had sent them to¹²². The

¹¹⁷ Grigore Gafencu, *Însemnări politice. 1929-1939* (ed. Stelian Neagoe), Bucharest, 1991, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹¹⁹ See *Partidul Poporului. Program*, annex to Ștefan Zeletin, *Burghezia română. Originea și rolul ei istoric (1925) * Neoliberalismul. Studii asupra istoriei și politicii burgheziei române (1927)*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 495-496.

¹²⁰ Norbert Elias, *Procesul civilizării. Cercetări sociogenetice și psihogenetice*, II: *Transformări ale societății. Schița unei teorii a civilizării* (transl. Monica-Măria Aldea), Iași, 2002, p. 278.

¹²¹ N. Iorga, *Doi ani de restaurație. Ce a fost, ce am vrut, ce am putut*, în *România contemporană*, p. 409.

¹²² Although the Liberals were reluctant at first when Vaida requested an agreement of the Parties in January 1931. The Liberals remembered that the National Peasant Party had resented the involvement in the governing towards 1928, manifesting the attitude of "*celui care singur seamănă fericirea / one can sow happiness alone*", denouncing the others as "*dușmani ai intereselor populare / enemies of the popular interests*", and announcing internal revolution since nothing was good; the Liberals could not eliminate the power aspect they had been pursuing during the last years, lacking the courage of having an agreement, but using the future time with reference to the civilised political fight (of ideas) and to continuance in the view of preserving the great interests of the country (Vladimir Donescu, *Acordul partidelor*, "Vremea. Politică-Socială-Culturală", IV, no 160, January 18, 1931, p. 1). But in November 1933, the imminent coming to power of the Liberals made Virgil Potârcă meet Victor Slăvescu (on "neutral ground", in the house of Eng. Aurel Pleșoianu) to discuss the manner by which the new Government would allow the National Peasant leaders to join the Parliament at the future elections. Virgil Potârcă designated those leaders

royal restoration of June 1930 put an end to this ritual of power which characterised only the transition period of the Regency in modern Romania, searching for new political legitimacy principles.

Translated from Romanian by Adina Răţoi

somehow omitting Virgil Madgearu, which caused Victor Slăvescu's protest, who wanted the National Peasant economist to enter the Chamber and "confront" him during the debates. The Liberal was willing not to candidate on top of the NLP list in Galaţi and enjoyed Madgearu's withdrawal [Victor Slăvescu, *Note și însemnări zilnice*, I: *Octombrie 1923-1 ianuarie 1938* (ed. Georgeta Penelea-Filitti), Bucharest, 1996, p. 67]. In October 1933, Armand Călinescu had a discussion with Dr. Blumenfeld (Scrutator) who was concerned with extremist movements; the only solution the National Peasant politician had was the reconciliation of the two great political parties (NPP and NLP) in the view of developing a normal state policy; it was in the state's interest that the two Parties worked on the normalisation of their relations; Duca comprehended this type of policy, revealing to Dr. Blumenfeld that although he knew he would be brought to power, he was first interested in ensuring himself they would not cross over him; he was not rushing to come to power (A. Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 187).