

HINDERING THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN ROMANIA AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE SOCIAL PROTESTS IN THE EARLY 90s

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ABSTRACT:

THE CASE OF ROMANIA - AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 90S – SHOWED A PARTICULARITY AS COMPARED TO THE REST OF POST-COMMUNIST STATES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE CHANGE OF THE TOTALITARIAN COMMUNIST REGIME DID NOT ACHIEVE THE QUIETNESS REQUIRED BY THE DEMOCRATIC CONSTRUCTION. IT IS A PECULIAR CASE IN THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUATION OF THE SOCIAL PROTESTS AGAINST THE NEW PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT (FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTION OF DECEMBER 1989). WE WILL GIVE A CHRONOLOGICAL PRESENTATION OF THE 1990 EVENTS AND WE WILL HIGHLIGHT BOTH THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS BEHIND THESE PROTESTS AND THE WAYS OF AVOIDING THEM.

KEYWORDS: COMMUNISM, DEMOCRATIZATION, DEMOCRACY, ROMANIA, PROTESTS

INTRODUCTION

The new post-communist leaders of Romania demonstrated a well-defined incapacity regarding the comprehension of the rules imposed by a democratic regime, and the consequences were felt by those who manifested against the provisional government.

The events succeeding the Romanian Revolution will give us the opportunity to demonstrate that the new provisional government was not prepared to develop a necessary framework for political pluralism nor to consider the dissatisfaction of its sympathizers. However, we are mentioning that social protests can initially be similar, to a certain extent, to political protests. We are referring to the fact that an anti-government coalition composed of the political parties, the National Christian-Democratic Peasant Party (PNTCD), the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Social Democratic Party (PSDR) was formed in early 1990.

With the tough measures adopted by the new leaders, tens of thousands of people were mobilized. Their repression led to the death of six people and injured 746 others, according to the official data provided by the parliamentary committees of inquiry.

Initially, discontent with the new post-communist government could be noted among the three parties; then, due to the mismanagement of the situation and the uninspired measures, there was a significant mobilization of the citizens who proved to be indignant with the brutality with which the new leaders acted.

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METHODOLOGY

It is natural to ask a few questions about the events going on in the early 1990s in Romania. The discontent that made the anti-governmental protests possible found their roots in the former communist regime, and the hatred accumulated over the years was exposed and directed against new leaders proclaiming themselves democrats.

Thus, it is necessary to create a set of questions from which we can start the discussions:

- 1) Why were the anti-government protests possible?
- 2) Could the actions of the new leaders fall within the typology of democracy?
- 3) Did the protests of the early 1990s create negative effects on the scene of international relations?
- 4) Was there an increase in the process of democratization?

The research methodology used in this study was based on the rigorous examination of bibliographic sources, using the comparison method to obtain the most accurate information, but we did not minimize the importance of studying and analyzing the official documents having been the basis for constituting various analysis reports of the events following the period of the revolution of December 1989. Attention was directed to a clear and coherent study, drawing on the descriptive analysis, the deductive and inductive method, but without minimizing the qualitative hermeneutics researching the different situations.

THEORY

In this article we are focusing on finding the arguments that support or refute the hypothesis that Romania has undergone a slowdown in the process of democratization due to the protests that followed the bloody event of 1989.

We have extensively dealt with the stages of democratization in another article², so here we will only present the chart that describes the stages through which a state is forced to go through in order to establish democracy. It is worth mentioning that in this study we developed a pattern of democratization following the evolution of the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe.

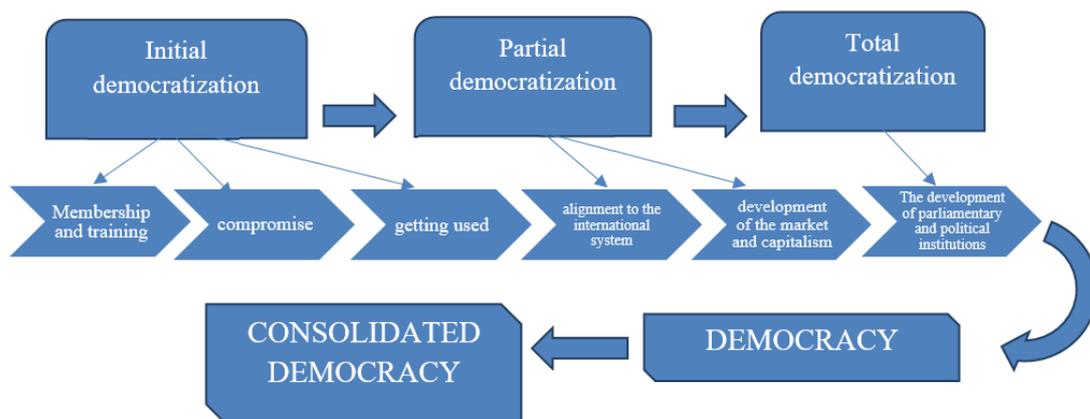


Chart 1. Necessary stages in the democratization of a state³

² Flavius Cristian Mărcău, „Central and Eastern Europe – necessary stages of democracy construction”, Research and Science Today, No. 2(8)/2014, November 2014, 93-102

³ Flavius Cristian Mărcău, *Central and Eastern Europe – necessary stages of democracy construction...*, 99

DISCUSSIONS

The catalyst of the street protests was based on the intentions of the National Salvation Front (FSN) of participating in the first free elections, although its leaders had previously stated they would only consider the organization of the poll. However, on the 31st of December 1989, Silviu Brucan stated in an article published in *Romania Libera* that: "So FSN is entering the electoral battle."⁴ These statements made possible the first anti-governmental events of January the 28th, 1990, held in Victoriei Square in Bucharest by PNTCD, PNL, PSDR, but also others, attended by people dissatisfied with the FSN's decision to enter the electoral race.

In our endeavour, we want to highlight the tendency of slowing down the democratization process of post-communist Romania, resulting from the serious deficiencies of understanding and application of human rights as well as the inability to adjust the provisional government to the measures imposed by a democratic system.

This research is done "in rem", so it is not our priority to nominally determine who were responsible for the repressions of 1990 (although our study is based on the official charges drawn up for the trial of various political characters).

What should be mentioned is that in November 2012 Romania lost the trial in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) initiated by the President of the *December 21, 1989 Association*, regarding the delay of the dossier on the Mineriada. According to the ECHR's decision, "all the evidence in this case indicates the constituent elements of a crime against humanity committed by officials of the Romanian state, including members of the Government and military men with important ranks."⁵ Also, the same court also demanded Romania to reopen the case for the dossier on the Mineriada of June 1990.

1) *The course of events*

Following the announcement made by FSN leaders regarding the election, it attracted the resignation of some of the personalities who had been co-opted to the Front more decoratively in order to speculate their image of anticommunist fighters: this is especially about Doina Cornea and Ana Blandiana, who resigned as a protest against the new decisions of the postcommunist leaders. The decision of the three parties (PNTCD, PNL, PSDR) to organize their first joint political action directed against the provisional government consisted of issuing a joint press release and organizing a protest on the 28th of January, measures which led to a response from CFSN by organizing a countermanifestation to balance to a certain extent the discontent, but also to point out that only a small part of the protesters are against the policies implemented by the governors.⁶

The first violent incidents occurred on the 29th of January following the extension of the anti-governmental demonstrations and the deployment of the first "Mineriada", which resulted in violence due to some people who used bats and chains against their opponents. There is also evidence revealing that there were people equipped with walkie-talkies who dealt with the co-ordination of those who participated in the countermanifestation⁷.

⁴Flavius Cristian Mărcău, „13-15 iunie 1990 – urmare a revoluției din '89”, în volumul de publicări „*Sententia*”, ediția I, (Targu-Jiu:editura Academica Brâncuși, 2010), 253

⁵ <http://www.asociatia21decembrie.ro/2014/09/revista-presei-13/>, accessed at 05.03.2019

⁶ See Catherine Durandin, Zoe Petre, *România post 1989*, (Institutul European, Iași, 2010), 161

⁷ 2007 Indictment, drawn up by the magistrate Viorel Siserman and confirmed by the magistrate-general Dan Voinea of the Military Prosecutors' Section, for bringing to trial the military defendants for killing and injuring some people on the 13th of June, 1990, p. 1

www.mineriada.org/doc/rechizitoriu_chitac.rtf, accessed on 03.07.2015

This is the moment when the first of the three *mineriades* took place, orchestrated by the leaders who wanted to be democrats, but their actions of bringing miners from the Jiu Valley and using them against the demonstrators is a serious violation of the democratic principles. It is incomprehensible nowadays how workers could be used as lawyers, and the institutions designated for the protection of the population to watch indifferently when the miners became aggressive.

Similar incidents occurred on the 18th of February, 1990, on the occasion of a peaceful anti-government demonstration, which was labeled as a *coup d'état* by the provisional head of the state. This time, however, some of the demonstrators acted in a way that was not just peaceful, since they forced their entrance into the Government's headquarters, causing material damage. And on this occasion the troops used for repression were made up of miners coming from the Petroșani basin. This is the second "*Mineriada*" that generated a march organized by the Independent Group for Democracy (GID) on the 25th of February.

Instead of a conciliation of the elites for achieving political stability, the NSF's propaganda apparatus preferred to launch a virulent attack against the other political parties and their leaders. On the 28th of January, a strong disparagement was attempted, offering the audience arguments that outlined the opposition's desire to steal the power. Catherine Durandin and Zoe Petre, in their book *Post- 1989 Romania*, describe the methods by which the propaganda apparatus poisoned the population with slogans to the leaders: "Coposu-the bone gnawer" was a very successful slogan or Doina Cornea's being accused that she wanted to seize entire industries and take them abroad, but without explaining how she could do it. Such poisoning has induced the pro-FSN protesters the idea that those in the opposition want to steal the power from the provisional government and sell the country to foreigners. Here, the slogans were born: "We do not sell our country!", "Down with the foreigners!" And "Down with the sons of the kulaks and legionaries! Down with the landowners!"⁸

The events began to hasten with the start of the electoral campaign on the 25th of March, 1990, and with the desire of discrediting the FSN opponents. After that, opposition rallies took place in order to highlight the authoritarian and undemocratic attitudes of the provisional government as well as pointing to the betrayal of the ideals of the 1989 revolution. Some characters (known or not) spoke to thousands of participants during these demonstrations, but without any positive outcome from the post-communist leaders in the government. The latter did nothing but respond to the miners' union demands for large wage increases with the aim of producing a strong impact on them, but also from the desire to turn them into a maneuvering mass capable of *restoring* quietness⁹.

By the time of the first free elections (May the 20th, 1990), the media did not objectively presented the demonstration in the Square. The presentation was done in a manner that wanted to distort the truth, given the fact that the public was not offered the desiderata and the magnitude of the events, although this manifestation was the longest anti-communist rally in history (52 days). Through this party practice, the slogan "Television is lying the nation!" was reconfirmed.

The presidential election was won by former communist party activist Ion Iliescu (85%), and parliamentary elections were won by the FSN by 66%. As a result of learning the winners enrolled in the electoral race, the events in the University Square began to go away, remaining there only the People's Alliance, the Association of 16-21 December, the Romanian

⁸ Catherine Durandin, Zoe Petre, *România post 1989...*, 166

⁹ 2007 Indictment, 1

Antitotalitarian Group, some of the members of the Association 21 December 1989 and those who had entered the hunger strike.¹⁰

The Mineradiada of June the 13th-15th, 1990, can be fall within the typology of repressions practiced by the totalitarian regime. If during the communist era the repressive measures were led by militia, security or army (except the latter), the post-communist regime in Romania (since the early 1990s) demonstrated a particular capability in managing a potential crisis. Together with the authorities of the state responsible for maintaining public order, the protection of citizens and the rule of law, it was also possible to intervene in a separate category not previously mentioned: *the miners*. Ion Iliescu himself, upon receiving the miners, asked them to intervene for the liberation of the Square¹¹.

Also, the official indictments that concern the Mineradiada dossier contain information that reveal the reality (or at least part of reality) of those days. Magistrate Dan Voinea, who dealt with the case on the events of 13th-15th of June 1990, stated in an interview given to *Adevărul* newspaper (November the 27th, 2006) that: "terrorism was intended (...). It was a terrorist act by involving these forces in a violent action that was not justified by political circumstances. This is precisely the criminal nature of the action - unjustification. They were violent against a group that was not aggressive."¹²

2) Echoes in the Western press and their effect

Western media played a crucial role in the decline of Romania's foreign policy in the early 1990s, and this was due to the repressions organized by the Romanian post-communist government in 1990, pre-eminently emphasizing the repression of the demonstrators in June, the 13th-15th.

The Western countries, through the mass media present on the territory of the Romanian state, observed the events of that period by disseminating images that drew attention to the miners' violence and the fact that the state leaders used the groups of miners to suppress the anti-government protests that drew attention to the authoritarian leadership.

For example, German TV ZDF, while broadcasting films during the Mineradiada, reported the following: "Before these events, President Iliescu accused the government of acting too hesitantly in repressing demonstrations in University Square," and a UK television pointed out the fact that: "*This is how the miners defended the Romanian citizens (while there were images in which the miners were beating mercilessly, different people on the street, including women.) Nobody escaped: old or young, men or women.*"¹³

Mihaela Toader, an expert at the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile, declares that if we were to list a few headlines in the Western press referring to the events of 13th-15th of June 1990, we would understand that Romania was presented as a country with a government that defended itself politically through

¹⁰2007 Indictment, 37

¹¹ Dear miners, I am addressing you, thanking you for the work solidarity response you have given this time too, to our call. The delegation of miners, headed by Mr. Cozma, will go to University Square, which I want you to reoccupy. We have to deal with fascist elements, incited elements, many of them drugged ... (Ion Iliescu, about the Mineradiada in June 90: "Miners deserved thanks. They were solidarity with the capital's population", in the *Adevărul* newspaper, http://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/ion-iliescu-de-mineriada-iunie-90-minerii-meritau-ultumiri-fost-solidari-population-capital-1_54fdd474448e03c0fd64656a/index.html, accessed 05/07/2015

¹² Statement of General-Magistrate Dan Voinea given to journalist Andrei Badin and published in the *Adevărul* newspaper on November 27, 2006 "in the Indictment Report on the fratricide of 13th-15th of June 1990 elaborated by the Association 21 December 1989 in partnership with the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and The Memory of the Romanian Exile, 29.

¹³ Transcript from the video documentary "The Mineradiada of June the 13th-15th 1990"

the use of excessive force and bats. The foreign public opinion was indignant about the course of events and the brutal force which was used, and the first consequence was the delay in concluding the Association Agreement with the European Union until February 1, 1993, compared to the other decommunized states of Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁴

The second consequence is based on the accession of Romania to the Council of Europe. This was possible as a result of *"a difficult process of diplomatic action and internal democratization efforts. While Romania's Central European neighbors entered the Council of Europe from 1990-1991, Bucharest obtained one of the central points of the stage of Romania's coming out of isolation, which was caused by the miners' intervention in University Square in June 1990"*¹⁵.

Also, The State Department of the United States of America gave a statement on the 15th of June, 1990, saying: *"(...) Awaiting the restoration of the process of democratization, the United States decided to end any non-humanitarian aid that could have been granted to Romania. Ambassador Alan Green, who was in Washington this week for consultations, has been instructed to return to Bucharest to communicate to the Romanian leadership the seriousness of our concern about the recent events in Romania."*¹⁶

3) Hindering the process of democratization

Considering the events that occurred, we can say that Romania, due to the defective governance of the early 1990s (especially since 1990), has faced a number of problems. The post-communist governors, instead of enrolling Romania on the path of democratization and going through the stages of this process in order to establish democracy, generated an effect of slowing down the process. When stating these we take into account the compulsory steps for a state in order to be able to establish democracy, namely: 1) establishing affiliation and preparedness; 2) compromise; 3) habit; 4) alignment with the international system; 5) the development of the market and capitalism and 6) the development of parliamentary and political institutions. But as we are talking about for the first year of transition, we can not discuss all the steps we have previously described, but we will summarize the first two and we will point out the negative effects that have made the next ones difficult.

The question from which we have to start is the following: *where did the governors go wrong and how should they have acted?*

We will start from the first stage of democratization, namely the establishment of affiliation and preparedness. This was done to a certain extent (leaving aside those who were not determined) at the beginning of 1990. The population of Romania was politically represented in one of the groups present on the electoral stage. Observing the percentage that the FNS obtained on the 20th of May 20, 1990 elections, we understand that most of them sympathized with this political group.

The problems of the transition process began in the second stage, the compromise, so that the electoral competition that had to sift the best ideas turned into what was a *struggle* between power and opposition. In the case of Romania, the leaders in the provisional government did not prove a sense of compromise, so the arguments of others were not recognized. This led to the Mineriadas of 1990 and to the bloody repression of 13th-15th of

¹⁴ " Mihaela Toader, „Echoes of the Mineriades in the foreign press ”,

http://mineriade.iiccmer.ro/dezbateri/ecoul_mineriadelor_in_presa_straina/, accessed on 06.07.2015

¹⁵ Florin Abraham, *Transformarea României: 1989-2006. Rolul factorilor externi*, (Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2006), 148

¹⁶ Statement of The State Department of The United States of America of the 15th of June 1990, http://www.mineriada.org/Mineriada_Reactii.asp, accesat la 06.07.2015

June 1990. The compromise phase became more difficult to achieve because the leaders of the moment were former Communist rulers who were not accustomed to the idea of having and accepting an opposition.

Romania faced difficulties in the second stage. Without the success of establishing *compromise*, the *knowledge* phase can not be implemented, but the events that achieved momentum in 1990 created an almost perfect socio-political space for instability. The change of Petre Roman's government with that of Stolojan's produced the necessary framework for the *compromise* phase, followed almost immediately by the one of *knowledge*.

Regarding the hindering of the next stages of democratization, the events of 1990 have developed a slowdown in the phase of *alignment to the international system*, and this was due to the negative impact of the Mineriada of the 13th-15th of June 1990 on the international system and the way in which Romania was perceived by the Western countries after these repressions orchestrated by the post-communist government.

Inclusively the stage of *development of the market and capitalism* faced the difficulties coming from the collective mentality, given the attempts of Petre Roman's government to induce the people the idea of selling the country to foreigners, which resulted in the slogan "We do not sell our country!" used in the early 1990s.

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian Revolution of December 1989 created the ideal framework for Communist Romania to replace the totalitarian regime with a democratic one. The events that followed the revolution in 1990 did nothing but hindered the desire to establish political pluralism and democracy.

We noticed how the new postcommunist government, through the measures they adopted, tried to remove any attempt of political opposition - by using a group of workers (miners) to take the opposition parties out of the game. The intention was clear, considering that the miners devastated almost all the parties' headquarters. It is worth mentioning that NSF leaders were involved, through state authorities, in organizing the transport of miners from their working places to the capital of Romania.

There is not a lot of room for interpretation of the events of the 1990s or of the desperate desire of the governors to suppress any form of political opposition. If the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, newly decommunized, resorted to negotiations between the new post-communist political parties in order to define the new way in the democracy of the states, Romania chose, through its governors, not to take into account the views of the opposition and of those dissatisfied with the abusive mode of government.

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