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<b>Author:</b>	Adrian Eugen PREDA

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## THE ROMANIAN INTERWAR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. A NEOINSTITUTIONALIST ANALYSIS

Adrian Eugen PREDA<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT:

*THIS PAPER IS DEVOTED TO A NEOINSTITUTIONALIST ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS FROM THE INTERWAR ROMANIA, MORE EXACTLY BETWEEN 1918 AND 1938. EVEN THOUGH ROMANIA HAD AN INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN FORMAL TERMS, THE POLITICAL PRACTICE OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL ELITES WAS NOT DEMOCRATIC. THE QUESTION OF THE PAPER IS THAT: GIVEN THE FORMAL DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER, DO THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS FROM 1918-1938 PASS THE TEST OF INCLUSIVENESS? IN FACT, THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE PAPER IS THAT THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS BETWEEN 1918-1938 DO NOT PASS THE TEST OF DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER, BECAUSE THEY HAD AN EXTRACTIVE CHARACTER. THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ADOPTED IN THIS PAPER COMES FROM DARON ACEMOGLU AND JAMES A. ROBINSON, AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL ECONOMICS. THE CONCLUSION OF THIS PAPER IS THAT THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS FROM THE INTERWAR PERIOD WERE DEMOCRATIC (INCLUSIVE) AT A FORMAL LEVEL, BUT EXTRACTIVE AT AN INFORMAL LEVEL.*

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**KEY WORDS:** EXTRACTIVE INSTITUTIONS, INTERWAR ROMANIA, POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the political institutional model of Romania between 1918 (as the year of unification and creation of Great Romania) and 1938 (when King Charles II inaugurated his personal dictatorship regime) from the perspective of the new institutionalist theoretical model, as delivered by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. There is a widespread opinion that the political regime from interwar Romania is a model for the present, especially after the Communist regime, seen as a tragic period in the Romanian political and economic history. The interwar Romania is seen as a golden era, both for political and economic reasons. The Romanian political institutions between 1918-1938 are seen as a model of democracy, which is deemed to be an institutional framework worth to be followed<sup>2</sup>. In recent years, the political (and economic) performances of the interwar

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<sup>1</sup> PhD, Institute of Global and Regional Studies, ‘Constantin Brâncuși’ University of Târgu Jiu, Romania, preda\_adrian\_eugen@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> The level of knowledge regarding the attitudes of the Romanian population regarding the political and economic performances of interwar Romania is low. In this case, it can be taken into account the study on

Romania – as well as the Romanian modernity as a whole, from 1860s up to the eve of the Second World War – were put under analysis<sup>3</sup>, from historical or sociological-anthropological perspective. From the historical perspective I can mention Gheorghe Iacob<sup>4</sup>, Lucian Boia<sup>5</sup>, whose book *De ce este România altfel? (Why is Romania different?)* sparked a debate in the intellectual realm from Romania and reactions, materialized in the book coordinated by Vintilă Mihăilescu<sup>6</sup> – *De ce este România altfel?: avaturile excepționalismului românesc (Why is Romania different?: avatars of Romanian exceptionalism)*. A critical eye on the Romanian interwar period was devoted by Bogdan Murgescu<sup>7</sup> from a historical perspective, while Lazăr Vlăsceanu and Marian-Gabriel Hâncean offered a sociological perspective to the issue of modernization of Romania<sup>8</sup>, as Adrian Miroiu<sup>9</sup> devoted an analysis of the history of Romanian institutions, deeming them as an *escape from competition*<sup>10</sup>, from an institutionalist perspective. Since Romania adopted a sum of democratic institutions, such as universal vote, a new constitution in 1923 which granted many rights and freedoms and proclaimed the separation of powers, while a multiparty system was functioning until 1938, it can be affirmed that the Romanian political institutions from the interwar period were inclusive. Therefore, the research question emerges: Given the formal democratic character, do the Romanian political institutions from 1918-1938 pass the test of inclusiveness? Following the model of inclusive and extractive political and economic institutions (with focus only for political institutions), as proposed by Acemoglu and Robinson, the hypothesis of this paper is that the interwar Romanian political institutions were extractive.

### **METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW AND PLAN OF THE PAPER**

From a methodological point of view, this research is based on a qualitative perspective. In order to analyse the Romanian political institutions in the interwar period, this research will make use on the case study method, taking into account historical data, collected through the content analysis of the social documents research technique. The data which are to be taken into account regard primary sources related to the interwar period in Romania, programmatic documents (the 1923 Constitution), legislative acts, memoirs, press articles and testimonies from important Romanian political figures from the period. As secondary sources, the research takes into account political analyses and evaluations regarding the interwar political life.

The article is planned in the following manner. In the first part, I will offer a discussion regarding the theoretical framework provided by new institutionalism, with focus on the theoretical perspective provided by Acemoglu and Robinson. The second part of the article is reserved for a presentation of the Romanian internal political landscape between 1918-1938. The third part of the paper is devoted to the analysis of the Romanian political

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preconceptions regarding the 1918-1940 period by Bogdan Murgescu. See Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)* (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 212-214

<sup>3</sup> Cătălin Peptan, A plea for intelligence analysis, *Annals of the „Constantin Brancuși” of Târgu-Jiu*, Letter and Social Science/Nr 1/2021, pp. 91-104

<sup>4</sup> *România de la 1859 la 1939. Împliniri și limite ale modernizării* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> *De ce este România altfel?* (București: Humanitas, 2012), 43-53

<sup>6</sup> *De ce este România altfel?: avaturile excepționalismului românesc* (Iași: Polirom, 2017)

<sup>7</sup> Murgescu, *România și Europa ...*, chap. III

<sup>8</sup> *Modernitatea românească* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2014)

<sup>9</sup> *Fuga de competiție: o perspectivă instituțională asupra societății românești* (Iași: Polirom, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Miroiu, *Fuga de competiție*, 20

institutions between 1918-1938, from the perspective of Acemoglu and Robinson. The final part of this article is reserved for conclusions and discussions.

### THE INSTITUTIONALIST MODEL OF ACEMOGLU AND ROBINSON

This part is reserved for a brief presentation of the institutionalist perspective, with focus on the theoretical framework on new institutional economics, provided by Acemoglu and Robinson. The new institutional economics framework has its roots in the works of Ronald H. Coase<sup>11</sup>, where he criticized the classical economics' claim that the economic system regulates itself, arguing that a planification of economic activity is needed<sup>12</sup> and that the firms that damage the others can find a common ground, irrespective of the decision a judge<sup>13</sup>. Oliver E. Williamson argued that new institutional economics is concerned on the effect of formal rules (constitution, rules of the government) or property rights, together with contractual relations governmental institutions<sup>14</sup>. Douglass C. North regarded institutions as "the rules of the game", that "define the way the game is played", with organizations as the participants<sup>15</sup>. According to North, institutions are a human creation to determine social interaction by constraints between individuals<sup>16</sup>, while Adrian Miroiu defined institutions as "a network of norms, rules (formal and informal) which shape the interaction between humans"<sup>17</sup>.

For Acemoglu and Robinson, the difference between states in terms of wealth comes from the various institutional arrangements adopted in society, to regulate the economy and motivate people<sup>18</sup>. Acemoglu and Robinson define two great categories of institutions, economic institutions and political institutions. The economic institutions are separated into two subgroups, inclusive and extractive. Inclusive economic institutions stimulate the economic activity, which are based on economic freedom, involving most of the population in economic activities, according to individual talents, abilities and choices. Inclusive economic institutions are crucial for technology and quality education, as factors favourable to economic growth. The extractive economic institutions are in contrast with the inclusive, as the property rights are not guaranteed (or private property is non-existent), the laws are one-sided, while the state does not provide public services to stimulate economic growth. In essence, the economic extractive institutions are designed to extract the wealth from a part of a society in favour of another<sup>19</sup>.

In the same fashion, the political institutions are divided in inclusive and extractive. According to Acemoglu and Robinson, the political institutions, as rules of the game and

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald H. Coase, "The Nature of the Firm," *Economica* 4 (1937), accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2626876>; Ronald H. Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics* 3 (1960), accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/files/file/coase-problem.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Coase, "The Nature of the Firm", 387

<sup>13</sup> Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost", 8-10

<sup>14</sup> Oliver E. Williamson, "The New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead," *Journal of Economic Literature*, 38 (2000): 598-600, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2565421.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Douglass C. North, "Institutions and the Performance of Economies Over Time," in *Handbook of New Institutional Economics*, ed. C. M' enard and M. M. Shirley (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 22

<sup>16</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Miroiu, *Fuga de competiție...*, 17

<sup>18</sup> Daron Acemoglu; James A. Robinson, *De ce eșuează națiunile: originile puterii, ale prosperității și sărăciei*, trans. from English to Romanian by Anca Simitopol (București: Litera, 2020), 106

<sup>19</sup> Acemoglu; Robinson, *De ce eșuează națiunile...*, 107-114

regulator factors, determine the distribution of power in society, resulting the ruling power and governmental attributions. The political institutions are absolutist if the holder of the power in society is an elite powerful minority, who uses its power to create extractive political institutions. In contrast, the political institutions are pluralist when the power is widely distributed in society to various groups and is put under restrictions. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that pluralism and inclusive economic institutions are interlinked, but it is very important the presence of a centralized and strong state to exert its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The state needs to enforce a minimum level of law and regulation to back economic operation and public safety. The inclusive political institutions are given by the combination of an enough level of centralization and pluralism, otherwise, when at least one of these conditions are not present, this type of institutions is extractive, where the power is reserved for a minority group, with few barriers in exerting it. This minority group usually favour extractive economic institutions on the expense of the larger society<sup>20</sup>.

Although very insightful, the perspective offered by Acemoglu and Robinson was not bypassed by critics, as David R. Henderson argued that their book *Why Nations Fail* has some flaws in economic history, demonstrating some unfamiliarity of the authors with the 20<sup>th</sup> century economic thought, they were inconsistent regarding governmental centralization as a mean of success, while they argue that in the Medieval Europe economic success was backed by a weak monarchical authority<sup>21</sup>. For Jared Diamond, the role of the institutions is not enough to explain the economic success, arguing that the climate and available natural resources are important too<sup>22</sup>. According to Jeffrey D. Sachs, the focus on Acemoglu and Robinson solely on internal politics is insufficient to explain economic success and argues that technology, geopolitics and natural resources have their influence<sup>23</sup>. Anther critic, Maximiliano Korstanje argued that *Why Nations Fail* is ethnocentric and assumes the Western superiority<sup>24</sup>, thus promoting stereotypes to back the dependency of the centre to periphery<sup>25</sup>.

### **ROMANIAN INTERNAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE BETWEEN 1918-1938**

In 1918 the First World War ended, with Romania on the winning coalition, represented by the Entente, against the Central Powers. In October-November 1918, the

<sup>20</sup> Acemoglu; Robinson, *De ce eşuează națiunile...*, 115-117

<sup>21</sup> David Henderson, "The Wealth - and Poverty - of Nations," review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Regulation*, Spring 2013, 74-75, [https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/regulation/2013/3/v36n1-13\\_4.pdf#page=11](https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/regulation/2013/3/v36n1-13_4.pdf#page=11)

<sup>22</sup> Jared Diamond, "What Makes Countries Rich or Poor," review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *The New York Review*, June 7, 2012, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/06/07/what-makes-countries-rich-or-poor/>

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, "Government, Geography, and Growth: The True Drivers of Economic Development, Review Essay," review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 5, September-October 2012, 143, [http://flash.lakeheadu.ca/~mshannon/Why-Nations-Fail\\_Sachs-Review.pdf](http://flash.lakeheadu.ca/~mshannon/Why-Nations-Fail_Sachs-Review.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Maximiliano Korstanje, "A Radical Critique on the Book *Why Nations Fail*," review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Journal of International and Global Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2015, 98, [https://www.academia.edu/12358941/A\\_RADICAL\\_CRITIQUE\\_ON\\_THE\\_BOOK\\_WHY\\_NATIONS\\_FAIL?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/12358941/A_RADICAL_CRITIQUE_ON_THE_BOOK_WHY_NATIONS_FAIL?auto=download)

<sup>25</sup> Maximiliano Korstanje, "Exploring the contradictions of why the Nations Fail. The Dark Side of Capitalism," review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies*, August 2015, 1, [http://2m1wji4fi7mw252rpnmo25u6.wengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/11/Korstanje\\_CERS\\_7.pdf](http://2m1wji4fi7mw252rpnmo25u6.wengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/11/Korstanje_CERS_7.pdf);



Austro-Hungarian Empire – which comprised territories inhabited by ethnic Romanians – and the Romanian population from the regions of Transylvania, Maramureș, Banat and Crișana (named Ardeal in the remainder of this paper) opted for a unification with Romania, which also gained Bessarabia and Bukovina before. As a result, in 1918 Romania became a medium-sized country in Europe, with 295.049 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of over 18 million in 1930<sup>26</sup>. As a form of government, after 1918, up until 1947, Romania remained a constitutional monarchy, with liberal democratic institutions. In 1923 a new Constitution was issued, proclaiming a wide range of rights and freedoms and based the political regime on the principle of separated powers<sup>27</sup>. After the unification, the Romanian political environment was enriched by a new political party, coming from Ardeal, in the name of the Romanian National Party (RNP). As the political landscape was infused with leaders from Ardeal – Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, a leader of the RNP became prime-minister in 1919, a conflict emerged between the old political elites with the centre at the capital of Bucharest and the new elites with their origins in Ardeal<sup>28</sup>.

Even though, in theory, the Romanian political institutions were designed as democratic, in practice, the political life was marked by numerous irregularities. Compared to the present day, when the general practice in a liberal democracy – monarchy or republic – is to designate the government from the political party or alliance that forms the majority after the elections, in interwar Romania the practice was different. According to the 1923 Constitution, the king appointed a political figure from a party to form the government and organize the elections<sup>29</sup>. The political party designated by the king to organize the elections was almost every time the winner. This situation resulted in contrasting results, where the same party, designated to organize the elections, obtained a vast legislative majority, while at the next tour of elections, organized by another party, the former party was about to lose the elections with low percentage<sup>30</sup>. The electoral law adopted in 1926 stipulated that the party which obtained 40% from the votes gain parliamentary majority, while other political parties were in minority<sup>31</sup>. The motivation behind the adoption of the 1926 electoral law resided in the strong parliamentary support needed by the government, as the law gave half of the votes to the majority party, while the other half was shared between the majority party and the others<sup>32</sup>. The main aim of the 1926 electoral law was to produce electoral stability by offering a large majority, but failed to produce such an effect, as the average duration of a government was low – between 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1930 (when Charles II came to throne) and 1937, there were 14 governments, with a rate of incumbency of 227 days<sup>33</sup>. The electoral law from 1926 was vehemently contested by the representatives of the RNP and Peasants' Party (PP), based on the arguments that will favour the government party<sup>34</sup>. The political life from the interwar

<sup>26</sup> Iacob, *România de la 1859 la 1939...*, 26-27

<sup>27</sup> See *Constituția României din 1923*, available at [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htm\\_act\\_text?id=1517](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1517)

<sup>28</sup> See Bogdan Murgescu; Andrei Florin Sora, "Consecințele alegerilor (noiembrie 1919 – martie 1920)," in *România Mare votează: alegerile parlamentare din 1919 „la firul ierbii”*, coord. Bogdan Murgescu, Andrei Florin Sora (Iași: Polirom, 2019). For the Romanian political elite from Ardeal, see Alexandru Nicolaescu; Sorin Radu, "The Parliamentary Elite of the Romanian National Party (1919-1926)," in *Studia Universitatis Cibisensis*. Series Historica, 9 (2012): 211-239

<sup>29</sup> *Constituția României din 1923*, Chap. III, Art 93.

<sup>30</sup> Cristian Preda, *Rumânii fericiți. Vot și putere de la 1831 până în prezent* (Iași: Polirom, 2011), 163

<sup>31</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria contemporană a României* (București: Editura Fundației Europa de Măine, 2007), 23-24

<sup>32</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*, ed. a II-a revăzută și adăugită, vol. II, Ferdinand (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 162

<sup>33</sup> Preda, *Rumânii fericiți...*, 166

<sup>34</sup> Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi...*, 162

period was marked by political instability, as 33 cabinets were incumbent between 1918-1940, with only two longer governments, assured by the National Liberal Party (NLP), between 1922-1926 and 1934-1937, with 14 governments in force for few days or weeks. Moreover, in only 20 years, there were organized 11 parliamentary elections<sup>35</sup>.

The institutional design of the elections paved the way for numerous disruptions and violence in the electoral campaigns, as the government made efforts to gain the majority in the parliament. As an example, the 1937 parliamentary elections were described by Constantin Argetoianu in his memoirs as marked by violence (with dead and wounded people), arrests and intimidations of the opposition<sup>36</sup>, as well as censorship, fraud obstructions made by the government in the efforts to obtain majority<sup>37</sup>. In fact, the electoral disruptions marked the interwar elections from Romania from the very beginning, as the elections from March 1922, organized by Brătianu government were condemned by the NRP and PP as a major fraud to favour the governmental party, with the state apparatus as accomplice, while the law enforcement forces obstructed the vote from the territories favourable to the opposition parties<sup>38</sup>. Although the Transylvanian elites from the newly unified provinces proposed the implementation of universal vote for both men and women over 21 years<sup>39</sup>, the Romanian government from Bucharest introduced the universal vote only for men, as the 1866 Constitution was reformed in this aspect, together with an agrarian reform, in 1917<sup>40</sup>. At the first parliamentary elections from the unified Romania, from November 1919, the right to vote was granted for men over 21 years for the Deputies Chamber, while the vote for the Senate was reserved for men over 40 years<sup>41</sup>.

As Bogdan Bucur affirmed, all interwar cabinets governed in an abusive fashion, with extraordinary measures and state of necessity<sup>42</sup>. Among the measures – that became current practice - used by the successive interwar governments there can be mentioned prolonged and abusive declared curfew, press censorship, government by decree-laws and repression measures, motivated by the need to defend the state against permanent threats to national safety<sup>43</sup>. If the mainstream political parties were part of the political system, the extremist parties, such as the Communist Party from Romania (CPfR) (far left) or the Legionary Movement (LM) (far right) were severely repressed by the government.

After some Soviet-backed terrorist attacks targeting public institutions, such as the Senate (8 December 1920) or the National Theatre from Chişinău (November 1920), or after the affiliation of CPfR to Comintern, the Romanian government adopted repressive measures, some of them illegal, such as arresting the Communist activists under the pretext of representing a threat to the national security. Other repressive episodes were the arrests

<sup>35</sup> Bogdan Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări în România interbelică*, cuv. înainte Ioan-Aurel Pop, cuv. înapoi Hans-Christian Maner (Bucureşti: RAO Distribuţie, 2019), 168

<sup>36</sup> Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, volumul III, 1 iulie – 31 decembrie 1937, ediție de Stelian Neagoe (Bucureşti: Editura Machiavelli, 2001), 292-294

<sup>37</sup> Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice...*, 298.

<sup>38</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 136

<sup>39</sup> Alba Iulia resolution from 1 December 1918 apud Bogdan Murgescu and Andrei Florin Sora, "Contextul politic," in *România Mare votează: alegerile parlamentare din 1919 „la firul ierbii”*, coord. Bogdan Murgescu, Andrei Florin Sora (Iaşi: Polirom, 2019), 23

<sup>40</sup> Keith Hitchens, *România: 1866-1947*, trans. from Eng. George G. Potra, Delia Răzdolescu, 4th ed. (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2013), 308

<sup>41</sup> Bogdan Murgescu and Andrei Florin Sora, "Introducere," in *România Mare votează: alegerile parlamentare din 1919 „la firul ierbii”*, coord. Bogdan Murgescu, Andrei Florin Sora (Iaşi: Polirom, 2019), 13

<sup>42</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 138-139

<sup>43</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 139-142

performed at the National Conference of the Communist Youth from 1925, brutal repression with army and gendarmerie of the protests from the Jiu Valley from 1929, or the armed intervention against the strike from the railways Grivița Workshops in 1933<sup>44</sup>. As a rule, the repression targeted ordinary people or deputies, as Communist supporters, with the Interior Ministry as the main body in charge of physical elimination<sup>45</sup>. After these waves of repression, the CPfR, which campaigned for the dismemberment of Romania, was outlawed in 1924 by the Romanian government, under the reason that the party was an instrument of Soviet influence<sup>46</sup>.

The LM was the other extremist political party that faced massive repressive measures taken by the government. As political practice, the preferred mean of the LM was violence, directed against the Jews and some political figures, as well as a method to be heard by the masses<sup>47</sup>. The LM tried to take part in the elections, but had to confront the opposing force of the Romanian governments. In 1931, the LM participated to elections under the name of the Iron Guard (IG) and obtained 1,05% of the votes<sup>48</sup>. After six years, at the 1937 elections, the LM – which candidate under the name of All for the Country party (partidul Total Pentru Țară) - obtained 15,58% of the votes<sup>49</sup>, becoming the third political party in the country<sup>50</sup>. Given its extremist character, the LM was banned by I.G. Duca prime-minister in 1933<sup>51</sup> and in 1938 was repressed by the interior minister Armand Călinescu<sup>52</sup>, while its leader, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu was assassinated at the command of King Charles II in the same year<sup>53</sup>. As a reaction to the governmental repression, the LM assassinated important political figures, as I.G. Duca in 1933 and Armand Călinescu în 1939, as incumbent prime-ministers, as well as Nicolae Iorga, leading intellectual and former prime-minister, in 1940<sup>54</sup>.

Another problem that was present in the interwar Romanian political landscape was the discrimination of the Jews. In fact, this anti-Semitic position was part of a larger nationalist discourse adopted by the Romanian mainstream political elites. Aside from the LM, some important political figures from the main parties had discriminatory discourse against the Jews. On the occasion of 1937 parliamentary elections, some prominent political figures expressed their anti-Semitic sentiments, as appeared in some press materials. The economist and later foreign minister, Mihail Manoilescu, in a press article published in July 1937, expressed anti-Semitic ideas and advanced the idea of Romanization, a process only possible to be made by revolutionary means, within a totalitarian regime, with single party and economic corporations<sup>55</sup>. The poet and leader of the National Christian Party (NCP), Octavian Goga, maintained in November 1937 that there was a danger of Jewish infiltration

<sup>44</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 130-134

<sup>45</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 133

<sup>46</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communism: Paradox and Degeneration* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 5

<sup>47</sup> Traian Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier: Un fascism românesc*, trans. from Fr. by Simona Modreanu (Chișinău: Cartier, 2019), 67

<sup>48</sup> Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier...*, 79

<sup>49</sup> According to Eugen Cristescu, the chief of the intelligence services of Romania between 1940-1944, the LM obtained 300.000 more votes than the official number of 478,368, as the Interior Minister defrauded the elections – Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier...*, 162

<sup>50</sup> Ion Bulei, *O istorie a românilor*, third revised edition (București: Meronia, 2007), 161

<sup>51</sup> Hitchins, *România: 1866-1947...*, 453

<sup>52</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: ascensiunea și decăderea „Căpitanului”*, trans. from Ger. by Wilhelm Tauwinkl, (București: Humanitas, 2017), 298

<sup>53</sup> Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu...*, 314-315

<sup>54</sup> Bulei, *O istorie a românilor*, 161.

<sup>55</sup> Buna Vestire, “Ce nu vor și ce nu pot partidele,” July 3, 1937, 1 & 3



in press and literature, while the Jews were seen as destroyers of Romanian creation and aspirations. In response, Goga demanded the expulsion of 500.000 Jews and a ban on their newspapers<sup>56</sup>. In December 1937, after he was appointed as prime-minister, Goga had a newspaper declaration where he adopted the slogan “Romania of the Romanians”, where he supported the affirmation of the Romanian element<sup>57</sup>. Nicolae Iorga, historian and former prime-minister, affirmed in December 1937 that the Romanian nation is entitled to dominate the others that gained preeminence, claiming subordination of the foreigners who enter in Romania<sup>58</sup>.

The Romanian public administration between 1918-1938 is another aspect of relevance. In the provinces from the Old Kingdom (Romania before 1916), as well as in the newly united provinces, there were still present some local administrative conflicts between the modern forms of administration and the old customary ones, where traditional, archaic forms of regional self-rule contested the central government. In Vrancea, Argeş, Năsăud counties or Făgăraş Country were present examples of local self-government, where forms of executive and legislative bodies were in force, comprising elder people from the village, who were responsible of administering the public property (such as forests) or to enforce order on the territories under their administration<sup>59</sup>. In the newly united provinces, Bessarabia, Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina, which were under Russian, Austrian and Hungarian administration before 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, were present some conflicts between the new Romanian administration and reminiscences from the old administrations. In some villages from Bessarabia, the people – who declared themselves Moldovans, not Romanians - were loyal to the old Russian administration, while Romania, seen as a foreign country, imposed taxes compulsory education and conscription, in contrast with Czarist Russia, which exercised a lower extent of administrative control, a situation that was aggravated by an abusive economic or administrative behaviour of the Romanian administration, as well as political inconsistency<sup>60</sup>. In Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina, there were localities where the public affairs were better under the former Austro-Hungarian administration than Romanian, with multiple irregularities, illegalities of the local administration and abuses perpetrated, completed by legislative ambiguity, after the 1918 unification, facts that determined some people from the newly united provinces to regret the former Austro-Hungarian administration. In fact, some people from the former Austro-Hungarian provinces were nostalgic for the former administrative predictability and order<sup>61</sup>.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS BETWEEN 1918-1938**

The data taken into account in this research show that interwar Romania had all the formal ingredients of a democratic regime. Romania between 1918-1938 had a constitution adopted in 1923. According to the 1923 Constitution, the state was organized on the principle of the separation of powers. The legislative branch was represented by the king and the bicameral parliament, the executive branch by the king who exerted power with a designated

<sup>56</sup> Universul, “Marea manifestație a partidului național-creștin la Târgoviște,” November 6, 1937, 13

<sup>57</sup> Universul, „Declarațiile d-lui prim-ministru Octavian Goga,” December 31, 1937, 11

<sup>58</sup> Viitorul, ”D-l profesor Iorga despre situația politică de astăzi. Alături de Rege și tradiția monarhică. Împotriva politicii de conspirație și de negațiune. Pentru continuarea guvernării d-lui Gh. Tatarescu,” December 7, 1937, III

<sup>59</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 333-343

<sup>60</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 374-386

<sup>61</sup> Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări...*, 386-411

government, while the judicial branch was assured by the Court of Cassation and Justice and by judicial instances. Moreover, a sum of rights and freedoms were mentioned as guaranteed in the Constitution, such as: equality before the law and between sexes, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly or equality in terms of ethnicity<sup>62</sup>. Universal vote was present, even though only for men over 21 years. The political life was very animated, as a lot of political parties were present and competed in elections. The very often elections assured the alternation of parties in government.

In formal terms, the political regime from Romania between 1918-1938 seemed to be designed in a pure democratic fashion. In the same fashion, it can be argued that, in formal terms, the USSR Constitution from 1936 granted a wide range of rights and freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, speech, press, assembly, free large street demonstrations, inviolability of the person and his home<sup>63</sup>. In terms of the rules of the game, the Romanian institutional framework was designed in an inclusive manner. Even though the Soviet constitution from 1936 granted multiple rights and freedoms, similar with a constitution from a democratic state of that time, informally, the Soviet society had to suffer from a repressive state, that took decisions contrary to the constitutional principles. In the remainder of the sub-chapter, I will demonstrate that in the interwar so-called democratic regime from Romania there was also present a mismatch between the constitutional-legal principles and political practice.

At first sight, it can be argued that the political institutions designed in Romania between 1918 and 1938 were pluralist. In analysing the political institutions, I will start with an overlook on the political power, how it was exerted and concentrated. Apparently, the political power seemed to be widely distributed in society. Although the institutional setting fixed periodical elections, the people was called to vote on numerous occasions, as the political life was very unstable, with short-lived governments, at a low rate of incumbency. The unstable political life indicates an institutional incapacity of the political system to maintain in power a four-year government, with two exceptions, between 1922-1926 and 1934-1937. Beside coming to power, the elections can be regarded as occasions for the political elites to remain in power or consolidate their position in the state. As I have mentioned above, the electoral processes between 1918-1938 were marked by corruption and abuse from the government, which was appointed by the king to organize the election. The 1926 electoral law was designed to produce a more stable political system, by giving an artificial majority to the winning coalition which obtained minimum 40% of the votes. In fact, the 1926 electoral law created political instability and restrained the power to a parliamentary majority, which, by the mechanism of the law, retained much more seats than votes. Therefore, the winning coalition was overrepresented, while the other parties were underrepresented in the parliament. Another aspect regards the fact that the universal vote was reserved only for men over 21 years, which from the start excludes a large part of the population from the electoral process, namely the women.

In the attempt to assure a majority to the winning coalition, the 1926 electoral law has some features of an absolutist type of institution, as by its mechanism, created an artificial power to the winning coalition in the parliament. At informal level, in their objective to win the elections, the political parties made use of the state apparatus in an abusive manner, as the elections were marked by obstructions of the opposition forces, violence, arrests and

<sup>62</sup> *Constituția României din 1923*, available at [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htm\\_act\\_text?id=1517](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1517)

<sup>63</sup> *Constitution of the USSR*, adopted in December 1936, Chapter X, Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Citizens, available at <https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons04.html>

intimidations, censorship and fraud. Thus, the 1926 electoral law, by its functioning logic and mechanism, determined an institutional setting which falls in the criteria of absolutist political institutions, which was boosted by informal violence perpetrated by the state authorities in their efforts to win the elections. Elaborating on the logic of Acemoglu and Robinson, in the interwar elections, to appoint the government before the elections, with the responsibility to organize the electoral process in its own interest, is problematic, as the process and electoral result were reversed – the structure of the parliament and the government were not a result of popular will, but a result of the king's decision and governmental efforts to alter the results of the elections.

Beside the exercise of power in the process of winning the elections, the other face of the use of power by the governmental elites was the mere administration and government of the state. In their exercise of power, the governing elites used, as current practices, abuse, extraordinary measures, state of necessity, censorship, curfew, political repression or decree-laws. In their motivation of the need to defend the state, the elites in power repressed the CPfR and LM, with measures at the limit of the law. The state was not designed to serve the interests of the large part of society or to function in equal terms for every citizen. In fact, the state, with its law enforcement bodies, was an instrument in the hands of a political elite, which alternated to government after small periods of time. In real terms, in interwar Romania, the governmental power was not widely distributed in the society and was subject to few restrictions from the great majority of the citizens. Another aspect of relevance is the discriminatory discourse of the Jewish people that came from some important mainstream political figures, who regarded the Jews as inferior to Romanians. In terms of Acemoglu and Robinson, the political power was restrained to an elite which alternated to power for short periods of time. Even though in formal terms, the Romanian institutions were designed as pluralist, the informal practices adopted by the governing political elites were absolutist. I can argue that the formal pluralist institutions were doubled by other informal absolutist institutional practices that became institutionalized behaviour throughout the interwar period.

Another aspect regarding the performance of the Romanian political institutions is related to the degree of centralization of the state. The political elites used the state institutions in order to repress the opposition and to alter the results of the elections to obtain favourable results. From this point of view, it can be argued that the state institutions were sufficiently centralized to serve the interests of the elites. On the other hand, there are the example of self-government communities with own forms of legislative and executive bodies, responsible with order enforcement or public property administration. Moreover, there are the examples of poor administration delivered by the state institutions, doubled with administrative economic and political abuse from the Romanian authorities in the newly united provinces that were under Russian or Austro-Hungarian administration before 1918. As I have mentioned above, in these provinces were some people who ended up regretting the former Czarist and Austro-Hungarian administrations, which offered predictability and organization. In this case, it can be argued that the Romanian state was deficient in terms of centralization, in fact, was not fully centralized, as the loyalty of some parts of the population to the state was not assured. Therefore, regarding the criterion of the centralization of the state is not fulfilled, even though the political elites used the state institutions to obtain political advantages and repress the opposition.

## **CONCLUSION**

Even though the political landscape of interwar Romania in the period under analysis, namely 1918-1938, was designed as pluralist, with democratic institutions adopted at a

formal level, the practices of the political elites demonstrated a contrary way of conducting the public and political affairs. The style of governing adopted by the Romanian political elites at an informal level involved the use of the state to serve their interests, especially of remaining in power. The 1926 electoral law was designed to produce an artificial majority, while the electoral bonus forced the parties to make all the legal and illegal efforts to win the elections and to remain in power. Moreover, the appointment of the government to organize the elections was contrary to the normal practice of forming a cabinet after the parliamentary elections, from the party or coalition that formed the majority. Usually, the government that organized the elections was the winner and had the state apparatus at its disposal, for abusive and illegal practices. The elimination of the political opposition – if needed with illegal practices – was another practice of the mainstream political elites. In this instance, the examples of the outlawing the Legionary Movement and the Communist Party from Romania are relevant, while their members were put under repression by the state. Therefore, the criterion of pluralism for political institutions was not met in Romania between 1918-1938.

The Romanian state from the interwar period suffered in terms of centralization. If the political elites used the state to repress the opposition and to influence the elections, there were some regions in Romania which were not fully loyal to the Romanian state. In the Old Kingdom we had some self-governed villages and regions, with their own legislative and executive bodies, while in the newly united provinces of Ardeal, Bukovina or Bessarabia some people expressed their nostalgia for the former Russian and Austro-Hungarian administrations, which were more predictable or organized, as was the case of Austria-Hungary. In this respect, I consider that there are enough arguments to confirm the hypothesis that the political institutions from Romania between 1918-1938 were extractive in their nature, especially in informal terms. In fact, in interwar Romania there was an inclusive institutional political surface, with democratic institutions on paper, while on the other side, the political elites functioned in their practice following an informal extractive institutional setting.

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