

## THE PARTY OF THE NATION – KING CAROL II'S LAST ATTEMPT TO MONOPOLIZE THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL LIFE

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### **Abstract**

In the spring of 1940 it became clear to King Carol II that his political construction – the National Renaissance Front – did not receive the support that the King had expected neither from the representatives of the political class, nor from the rest of the citizens. The Sovereign was also concerned with the territorial claims raised by the neighbours of Romania, demands that have been encouraged by Germany, the most powerful military force in Europe at that time. In those circumstances, the King decided to establish the Party of the Nation, labelled as “sole and totalitarian”, in order to attract the members of the Iron Guard and to get the support of Berlin. This party maintained, with few exceptions, the organizing structure and functional regulations of the old one. Unfortunately for King Carol II, the replacement of the National Renaissance Front with the Party of the Nation proved to be another of his political errors and consequently, less than three months after that transformation, the Monarch left the Romanian political life.

**Key words:** *King Carol II, National Renaissance Front, the Party of the Nation, Iron Guard, Territorial Losses*

### **Introduction**

For King Carol II becoming the most influent political leader of Romania was a goal he had since 1930, when he returned to Romania. The Monarch, believing that the only way to dominate the political class was to subordinate it, tried, unsuccessfully, to create coalition governments that he could control easier. His plan could become reality at the end of 1937, when none of the political party that run the election was able to reach 40% of the votes<sup>1</sup>, that could guarantee for that political party the necessary majority to create the government. The sovereign took that opportunity and let the party that obtained only 9.15 % in the election (fourth place) to create the now Council of ministers<sup>2</sup>.

The political instability that Romania was crossing at the beginning of 1938 was speculated by the King, whom, at March 30<sup>th</sup>, gave a decree mentioning that all the traditional political parties had to be dissolved<sup>3</sup>.

### **National Renaissance Front – the royal political party**

On December 16<sup>th</sup>, that same year, King Carol II created his own political party – the National Renaissance Front<sup>4</sup>. This political construction tried to reunite the leaders and

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian Boia, *România, țară de frontieră a Europei*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2002, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX*, București, Editura Paideia, 1999, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România Întregită (1918-1940)*, coord. prof. univ. dr. Ioan Scurtu, secretar dr. Perte Otu, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2003, p. 395.

<sup>4</sup> Serviciul Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale (The Service of Central Historical National Archives of Romania, hereinafter: S.A.N.I.C.), Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 1/1939, f. 8.

also the regular members of the traditional political parties in order to legitimate its existence.

In early 1939, the central structure of the royal political party was established: it was established the Directorate and the National Superior Council of the National Renaissance Front<sup>1</sup> and it was also created the first government of the Front<sup>2</sup>, under the leadership of Miron Cristea, the Patriarch of Romania<sup>3</sup>. The attempt to recruit the representatives of the Orthodox Church was not random and the nominalization of the Patriarch Miron Cristea as prime minister brought to the royal political party the support of one of the most important Romanian state institutions – the Church. In a time when the majority of the Romanian population belonged to the Orthodox confession, and the obedience to the priests was undeniable, the involvement of Orthodox Romanian Church leaders and its priests in the King's political plan<sup>4</sup> gave, at least in theory, the prospects of a rapid development for the N.R.F.. From participation in different festivals staged by the representatives of the single political party<sup>5</sup>, Orthodox priests led a campaign to promote the Romanian single party<sup>6</sup>. With all this support, the Front failed to translate into practice the political ideas of King Carol II.

### **The reorganization of the single political party**

Another characteristic of the royal political party, which worked to its detriment, was the legislative instability manifested throughout the entire existence of the National Renaissance Front. The policy depicted by the founding documents of the N.R.F., complemented by the decree for the establishment of the Front<sup>7</sup> from January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1939, proved to be ineffective. If, at the central level the institutions necessary to coordinate the party's activity have been created in a few months – the Directorate, the National Supreme Council and the N.R.F. Government<sup>8</sup>, the local organizations raised various problems. Among them we mention the lack of communal secretaries, poor communication between local and central institutions<sup>9</sup>, but also a low interest expressed by the representatives of the single political party for the implementation of the instructions coming from the centre<sup>10</sup>.

After the assassination of Armand Călinescu<sup>11</sup>, on September 21<sup>th</sup>, 1939, the National Renaissance Front entered a new stage. By losing one of the most important representatives of the royal political construction, Carol II felt the need to become more

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 10.

<sup>2</sup> "România" from February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 167/1939, f. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 174/1939-1940, f. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, Fund Casa Regală, vol. III. Carol al II-lea, file no. 10/1940, f. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 262/1939-1940, f. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1939, ff. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, Anexă, file no. 2/1939, ff. 21-23; Fund Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, file no. 6/1940, ff. 24-26.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 176/1939, f. 232; file no. 234/1939, f. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, pp. 403-404. Carol al II-lea, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937-1951*, vol. II, 13 martie – 15 decembrie 1939 (Caietele 8-10), București, Editura Scripta, 1997, p. 229.

involved in the reorganization of his political party<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the last months of 1939 and the first half of 1940 were dominated by the attempts to reform the N.R.F.<sup>2</sup>. Less than a year after the creating the single political party, the Sovereign found himself in a the position to start a campaign to reorganize the N.R.F., an action reflected in the establishment of two new ministries – the Ministry of Propaganda and the Ministry of the National Renaissance Front Organization<sup>3</sup>. Both of them had as main purpose to propagate the political principles of N.R.F. and to help their implementation. An important part of that new direction was the openness of the single political party to the former representatives of the traditional political parties, especially the Iron Guard<sup>4</sup>. In theory, the attempt to recruit the Legionnaires was justified by the close relations that they had with the leaders of Germany<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Party of the Nation – “sole and totalitarian”**

The beginning of 1940 brought new changes in the legislation and the organization of the National Renaissance Front<sup>6</sup>. The final makeover of the first single political party from Romania was yet to come. The last attempt to re-organize the royal political creation was on June 21<sup>th</sup>, 1940, when King Carol II issued a law-decree that transformed the National Renaissance Front Royal into the Party of the Nation.<sup>7</sup> The first article of that document described that the Party of the Nation was “sole and totalitarian party”<sup>8</sup>.

To legitimize his actions, King Carol II tried to promote the idea that the road to totalitarianism was the only chance that Romania had to succeed during those troubled times. Starting with June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1940, Horia Sima the leader of the Iron Guard, asked the Legionnaires to join the new political party – “[...] I order to all my comrades and to their friends to join immediately «the Party of the Nation», where, as his loyal soldiers, to serve faithfully and with all their straight the Country and its King”<sup>9</sup>. As expected, the formal leaders of the traditional political parties protested against the new royal political party.<sup>10</sup>

The Party of the Nation would have to operate “under the supreme leadership of His Majesty the King” becoming also similar to “a public institution”<sup>11</sup>. The totalitarian character of the royal political party was depicted in the third article of the low-decree mentioned above: “the Supreme Leader appoints the top forums of the political party that

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Fund Ministerul Propagandei Naționale (Presa Internă), file no. 403/1939, ff. 120-126.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939, ff. 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> Horia Sima, *Sfârșitul unei domnii sângeroase (10 decembrie 1939 – 6 septembrie 1940). Lupta Mișcării Legionare contra regimului Carol II*, Constanța, Editura Metafora, 2004, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Haynes, *Politica României față de Germania între 1936 și 1940*, translated by Cristina Aboboae, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 2/1939-1940, ff. 8-26. Petre Țurlea, *Partidul unui rege: Frontul Renașterii Naționale*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2006, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 2/1939-1940, f. 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi*, București, Editura Politică, 1970, p. 175.

<sup>10</sup> Joachim von Kührenberg *Carol al II-lea și doamna Lupescu*, translated by Liana Fieraru, București, Editura Științifică, 2000, p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Fund Frontul Renașterii Naționale, file no. 2/1939-1940, f. 30.

became the only ones responsible”<sup>1</sup>. Any democratic election for the leaders of the P.N. was thus excluded.

Internally, the leaders and members of the traditional political parties, becoming aware of the seriousness of the international situation and the severity of the repercussions that could have (and has had) on Romania, have given their endorsement on the policy of the Sovereign and, by default, to the Party of the Nation. Among them, Ion Mihalache was an important personality, one of the leaders of the National Peasants' Party, who accepted the position of royal advisor. This late support from some of the Romanian politicians did not counteract the pressures exercised from the outside on the territorial integrity of Romania.

The transition to the Party of the Nation was the last attempt to establish a viable political construction, which actually never reached the popularity level that the King Carol II hoped for. A few days after the act of transforming the National Renaissance Front into the Party of the Nation, Romania's drama began<sup>2</sup>. For the Romanian citizens the Sovereign was responsible for the territorial losses – Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, an important part of Transylvania, and also the Quadrilateral<sup>3</sup>. The King appealed to General Ion Antonescu in order to form a new government. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Carol invested the general with full powers in order to rule Romania; four days later, Ion Antonescu signed the law-decree for abolishing the Party of the Nation.

### **Conclusions**

The last months of existence of the single political party corresponded to the last months of the King's political life. By the Romanian territorial losses from the summer and autumn of 1940, Carol II became responsible for this situation, his abdication, imposed by the new conditions on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1940, causing the abolition of the royal party. Emerged from the Sovereign's desire to dominate the Romanian society, through his own party, the N.R.F. (thereafter P.N.) disappeared from the political scene together with its initiator. Born from an idea of the authoritarian ruler of Romania, who wanted to expand his projected absolute power not only on the Romanian political class, but also on the entire nation, the National Renaissance Front embraced the fate of its creator – without external support and without real internal support, the Party of the Nation leaved the political scene in the fall of 1940.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> Mihaela Ilie, *Re-Scaling Territories and Borders: Regional Claims and Local Powers in Romania in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Period*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue de Science Politiques”, no. 44/2014, Craiova, Universitaria Publishing House, pp. 203-212.

<sup>3</sup> Corneliu Mihail Lungu, Ioana Alexandra Negreanu, *România în jocul Marilor Puteri 1939-1940*, ediția a II-a, București, Editura Curtea Veche, 2003, *passim*.

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