

**INSTITUTIONAL PREMIERE IN INTERWAR ROMANIA:  
THE REGENCY (1927-1930)**

*Lucian Dindirică\**

**Abstract**

The first signs of a serious institutional impasse, an event commonly referred to as the “Crisis of succession”, may be applied between 1918-1919, when Prince Carol, the eldest son and heir of King Ferdinand – who was in love with Ioana (Zizi) Lambrino – was ready to give up his powers as a successor of the Romanian Crown. Although the question of the succession to the throne was governed with great efforts in 1881 by Ferdinand’s appointment as successor to the Crown, the constitutional order of the country knows in the third decade of the last century, an unprecedented stalemate, a result of the Crown Prince Carol’s decision to withdraw from the order of succession. Decision of the Council held in Sinaia, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1925, on the question of giving up the throne would lead to the convening of the two Houses of Parliament for January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926. Patriarch Miron Cristea was to be involved in the major events that have ridden the Romanian political stage in 1925 and 1927, on the occasion of the so-called “dynastic crisis”, as a witness and adviser, and then, with the establishment of the Regency, as a member of it, alongside Prince Nicolae, the younger son of King Ferdinand I and Gheorghe Buzdugan, the President of the High Court of Justice and Cassation.

**Key words:** *Regency, Mihai, Carol II, Miron Cristea, “Dynastic Crisis”*

In 1866, on the Romanian throne comes a foreign Prince – Carol Ludovic of Hohenzollern<sup>1</sup>, of the reigning family of Prussia – and, in 1881, when Romania was proclaimed a Kingdom, the Prince becomes King Carol I. From his marriage to Elisabeta of Wied (1896) resulted only one daughter (1870), Maria, who died, Royal family having no other heirs. According to the Constitution of 1866<sup>2</sup>-dynastic succession was ensured through the male line, in accordance with article no. 83 of the basic law<sup>3</sup>. Thus, on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1881, Prince Ferdinand of Hohenzollern, the nephew of King Carol I, becomes heir to the Romanian Crown. Established in Romania in 1889, Prince Ferdinand married, on December, 29<sup>th</sup> 1892/January, 10<sup>th</sup> 1893, Maria Alexandra Victoria of Edinburgh, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom. The two had six children: Carol (born in 1893), Elisabeta (born in 1894), Mărioara (born in 1900), Nicolae (born in 1907), Ileana (born in 1909) and Mircea (born in 1913).

Antecedents of the “dynastic crisis” can be observed between 1918-1919, when Prince Carol – who was in love with Ioana (Zizi) Lambrino – was on the verge of giving

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\* Assistant Professor, Ph.D., University of Craiova, Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences, no. 13, A.I. Cuza Street, Dolj County, tel. 0040251418515, e-mail: lucian\_dindirica@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup> Son of Charles Anton of Hohenzollern, Governor of the Rhineland.

<sup>2</sup> Voted in Parliament in June 1866 and, in July, enacted by King Carol I.

<sup>3</sup> “*The lack of descendants in male line of His Highness Carol I of Hohenzollern of Sigmaringen, succession will be necessary to continue by the older of his younger brothers or their descendants, built by the rules in the previous article (...)*” according to Gheorghe Sbârna (coord.), *Constituțiile României: studii*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2012, p. 160.

up his powers of heir to the throne of Romania<sup>1</sup>. From this period also dates the conflict between the Prince Carol and the Liberals, in particular, Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu and Barbu Știrbey. They were, in the opinion of the heir Prince, the “profiteers”, both King Ferdinand and Queen Maria leaving themselves to be influenced by them. In fact, speculating his parents’ weaknesses, Carol showed early authoritarian attitudes, dissatisfied by the political influence of the Brătianu family, being eager to increase the powers of the monarch related to the involvement in political life. In fact, as we can observe, the Ionel Brătianu firmness regarding to penalization of unnatural behaviour of the heir to the throne, will deep the conflict between them.

A new stage in the evolution of “dynastic crisis” takes place in the winter of 1925, after the participation of the Crown Prince to the funeral of Queen Mother Alexandra of Great Britain. Leaving London, Carol will travel to Paris to meet up with Elena Lupescu, which he had met in February 1925 and with whom he lived an intrigue which tended to be permanent. The Patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea<sup>2</sup>, note on this occasion in his personal notes: “*In December – being rather tired of the multiple occupation – I went a few days at Sinaia. There I find out that Prince Carol has a love affair with a Jewish, divorced woman named Lupescu-Wolf, a woman of loose morals. Around Christmas it is rumored that Prince Carol does not return from London (where he left for Queen Mothers funeral) and took on the Jewish woman*”<sup>3</sup>.

The two will go, after that, to Venice, wherefrom, on December, 12<sup>th</sup> the same year, Carol will send a letter to his father fold “willingly” the heir rights, and through which he engage not to return to the country for ten years “*without him being called by those in law and also not without the permission of the sovereign*”<sup>4</sup>. By the same occasion, Carol, asked “to be deleted from the ranks of the reigning family of Romania”<sup>5</sup>.

Such a decision, expressed in a definitive and irrevocably tone, have confused not only the Royal Family but also the Romanian political life, being a situation unprecedented in the history of the Constitution of Romania.

Trying to convince him to reconsider the decision to abandon the throne, the Royal Family and Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu agreed to send Paul Angelescu to Venice, with a personal message from King Ferdinand to his son, Carol, by which asks him to return home. The Prince answer is unequivocal: “I will never come back in Romania”<sup>6</sup>.

To find that the heir Prince’s decision is final and to obtain, in this case, a new waiver from him, King Ferdinand I will appoint Constantin Hiott to leave to Italy<sup>7</sup>, on December, 24<sup>th</sup> 1925 (although both Nicolae Iorga and Constantin Argetoianu volunteered to mediate the conflict in the Royal Family). As expected, perhaps under the

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<sup>1</sup> See the course of events in detail: Ioan Scurtu, *Crișă dinastică din România (1925-1930)*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1996, pp. 9-20.

<sup>2</sup> About Patriarch Miron Cristea’s involvement in the events leading up to the establishment of the Regency as well as its role as a member of the Regency: Lucian Dindirică, *Miron Cristea – patriarh, regent și prim-ministru*, Iași, Editura TipoMoldova, 2011, pp. 284-314.

<sup>3</sup> Elie Miron Cristea, *Note ascunse. Însemnări personale (1895-1937)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1999, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Constantin I. Stan, *Regele Ferdinand I “Întregitorul” (1914-1927)*, București, Editura Paideia, 2011, p. 434.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 435.

<sup>7</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

impulse of an ultimatum, Carol had to renew the letter of withdrawal, dated December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1925<sup>1</sup>.

Once knowing this, King Ferdinand will convene, on December, 31<sup>th</sup> a Crown Council where the participants were Government members, heads of Legislative Bodies, former Prime Ministers, heads of political parties, the Chief of the General Headquarters of the Army, President of the High Court of Cassation and the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarch, Miron Cristea. According to contemporary testimonies and to archive documents<sup>2</sup>, on this occasion, King Ferdinand, deeply affected by the decision to be taken, will read the letter of withdrawal of the Crown Prince, requesting the support of those present in order to carry out this difficult task and to take the necessary measures to settle the succession to the throne. As I stated, Patriarch Miron Cristea not only participated in the Council of the Crown, but he expressed his opinion that: *“if will had hope to return to beautiful ... situation of the heir to the throne, we have tried everything. I’ve loved him, I’ve admired him so many times. But if Your Majesty, who, as father, loved him even more, believe that he no longer returns, taking unflinching determination to get the waiver, I cannot do other than obey me loyally high resolutions and to work where will I be able for the peace of the soul; with pain, could not otherwise”*<sup>3</sup>.

Commenting on the Patriarch’s attitude, the historian Nicolae Iorga, also a witness of the event, stated: *“the Metropolitan [Patriarch] speaks softly, ecclesiastical and he is listened with interest. A sudden turn, and who boasted that pardons is declared <<subjected and faithful servant of the King>>”*<sup>4</sup>.

A brief story of what happened during the Council of the Crown is related in the newspaper “The Word” from January, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1926. Referring to the opinion expressed by the Patriarch, the daily newspaper recorded that: *“he declared that the Bible teaches us to forgive people and I, as a servant of the altar, I recommend this. But, since Your Majesty has taken this decision as a parent and as a King, I, as a faithful servant of Your Greatness, I have also the same opinion with Your Majesty, whose uplifting patriotism, we understand, for the interests of the country”*<sup>5</sup>.

After about two hours of discussion and interventions – some of them in a conciliator sense – all participants have ended up accepting the King’s point of view.

According to an eyewitness, someone close to the Royal House, Eugeniu Buhman, the Patriarch has communicated to the Abbot’s Monastery of Sinaia that at the religious service committed from January, 1<sup>st</sup> 1926 no longer to mention the name of Prince Carol in prayers for members of the Royal Family<sup>6</sup>. The Patriarch himself – after his own confessions – on the eve of Epiphany, he did not mention the name of the fallen Prince in his prayers, although he had been asked by Princess Ileana to make remembrance of all members of the Royal Family *“so the absence of Carol not to be noticed”*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Mamina, *Consiliu de Coroană*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1997, pp. 123-131.

<sup>3</sup> Antonie Plămădeală, *Contribuții istorice privind perioada 1918-1939. Elie Miron Cristea. Documente, însemnări și corespondențe*, Sibiu, 1987, p. 373.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Memorii*, vol. IV, Editura Națională S. Ciornei, [s.a.], p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Serviciul Arhivelor Naționale Istoric Centrale, București (Central Historical National Archives Service, hereafter S.A.N.I.C.), Miron Cristea Fund, File 35, f. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Eugeniu Arthur Buhman, *Patru decenii în serviciul Casei Regale a României. Memorii, 1898-1940*, București, Editura Sigma, 2006, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Elie Miron Cristea, Patriarhul României, *Note ascunse...*, p. 102.

The next step after the Council of the Crown from December, 31<sup>st</sup> 1925 was to constitute the convening of both Houses of Parliament for January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926. However, as mentioned in the contemporary testimonies, before that, had occurred, on January, 3<sup>rd</sup> an *intimate meeting* at Sinaia, presided by the King where participated Queen Mary, Princess Elena, Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu, Romanian Patriarch, Miron Cristea and Gheorghe Buzdugan, the President of the High Court of Cassation and Justice.

The purpose of the Council was to approve the draft law regulating the establishment and composition of the Regency succession, whose membership was to be Miron Cristea too, alongside Prince Nicolae, the younger brother of Carol and Gheorghe Buzdugan, the President of the High Court of Cassation and Justice<sup>1</sup>. Referring to the establishment of the Regency and to its members, Lilly Marcou, consecrated in the biography of King Carol II, has to capture accurately the disfunctionality of this institution, saying that “*Prince Nicolae was not interested at all in politics and unwilling to reign*”, and the other two members were “*two old people, no doubt, honourable, but inefficient ... drained and deprived of influence that, through this aspect it stands in relief the will of the Liberal Party to be the only master in control on deck*”<sup>2</sup>.

At the legislatives reunion of the two Houses of Parliament, Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu presented the draft legislation for receiving the surrender of Carol to the throne and proclaiming Prince Mihai, Carol son as heir to the Crown. And because he was minor, the draft legislation have to be presented to the members of the Regency<sup>3</sup>, saying that “*it presents all the necessary characters to give confidence to all, that it will be protected from the passion that may harm the interests of the State. Through their people, by their nature, through their past, they are out of the passion and the struggles that can separate us. By themselves and by the institutions they belonging, they have to be respected by all*”<sup>4</sup>.

After about a month, Carol Caraiman (the new name of the former heir to the Crown) through a letter to the Patriarch of Romania, ensured him and, consequently, the public opinion (he demands to be printed) about the responsibility of the gesture of surrender to the throne: “*I acted according to my will and fully aware of my deed*”<sup>5</sup>.

What was included under the generic name of “*The Act of January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926*” will cause unrest not only in Romanian political life, but even at the level of the Regency.

It starts its activity after the death of King Ferdinand, July, 20<sup>th</sup> 1927<sup>6</sup>, at which time Mihai, aged just six years, became the Constitutional Monarch<sup>1</sup>, Regency reveals its limits

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<sup>1</sup> Different denominations of the newspapers regarding official documents of renunciation to the throne Prince Carol and the issue of succession and the imposition of Regency can be found at S.A.N.I.C., Miron Cristea Fund, File 35, ff. 161-177; see also Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Lilly Marcou, *Regele trădat. Carol al II-lea al României*, București, Editura Corint, 2003, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Sorin Liviu Damean, Dan Claudiu Dănișor, Mihai Ghițulescu, Alexandru Oșca, *Evoluția instituțiilor politice ale statului român din 1859 până astăzi*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2014, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Regele Ferdinand (1914-1927). Activitatea politică*, București, Editura Garamond, [f.a.], p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> S.A.N.I.C., Miron Cristea Fund, File 35, f. 178.

<sup>6</sup> The date is controversial because of the inaccuracies presented in the various reports of the event. Prince Nicole, in his memoirs, indicate the date of July 18<sup>th</sup>, “*the early morning*” – Prințul Nicolae de Hohenzollern, *În umbra coroanei României*, Documente, amintiri și comentarii editate de Gheorghe Buzatu în colaborare cu Stela Cheptea și Sorin Pârvu, Iași, Editura Moldova, 1991, p. 57; Nicolae Iorga, indicate the date of July 19<sup>th</sup> – Constantin I. Stan, *Miron Cristea: o viață – un destin*, București,

in a short time. The deficit of legitimacy and, more importantly, the novelty of such institutional arrangements in the Romanian landscape lacked the Regency out of force and consistency, leaving it as prey to favouring control<sup>2</sup>. Enlightening for the internal weakness in terms of the functioning of the Regency – undermined right from inside, by Prince Nicolae – is the letter sent to Carol, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1929: “The Regency is a filth without authority and with three heads, overwhelming and bad ruling. Big mistake you have made by leaving, but if you weren’t, than it was me. Now let’s see how we can make the best of both worlds”<sup>3</sup>. The death of Gheorghe Buzdugan, an event which occurred on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1929, and his replacement with Constantin Sărățeanu, a close person of Iuliu Maniu, Prime Minister, would finally tip the balance of power in favor of the national – peasants. The designation of a Councilor of the High Court of Cassation instead of the President at the time, Andrei Rădulescu, had been a strong challenge to the principle that led to the composition of the Regency<sup>4</sup>, demonstrating the arbitrariness and, implicitly, the bankruptcy of the institution. Illustrative for the new situation in which was the Regency are impressions of Patriarch Miron Cristea<sup>5</sup>. He proves an extraordinary knowledge of political ways when he claims that “*he [Sărățeanu – n.n.] was at the disposal of the Government. Prince Nicolae had no patience to nothing*”<sup>6</sup>. The Regency falter louder, this modification among members, weakens it rather than strengthen. Rising anger against this hybrid formula that proved unable to exercise the role of referee on the Romanian scene being rightly regarded as an expression of the party system, would pave the way Prince Carol to return to the country.

The Prince’s arrival at Otopeni Airport on the evening of June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1930 and up to his coronation, two days later, the Romanian political scene has witnessed an unprecedented mutation. In turn, the most important political persons have welcomed the return of Carol in Romania, joined him, directly or indirectly, in an effort to take over the throne. Maniu

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Editura Paideia, 2009, p. 295, and in his memoirs, the great historian, write on July 20<sup>th</sup> that “find out through the newspapers the news of the King’s death that I’ve never had the honor to serve it ever” – Nicolae Iorga, *Memorii (Agonia regală și Regența)*, vol. IV, București, Editura Națională S. Giornei, [s.a], p. 234, in contradiction with the official communications of the Romanian authorities. They have announced that the death of the Romanian sovereign occurred at 2.15, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, *ibidem*, note 37. Armand Călinescu recalls also the context of the King’s death: “exactly at the time when validating 2/3 of the mandates of the Chamber that could calculate valid constituted. There were rumours that said the King had died a few days before and that was hidden in order to avoid complications arise from the absence of a legally constituted Parliament” – Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916-1939*, ediție de Al.Gh. Savu, București, Editura Humanitas, 1990, p. 70. Others placed King’s death by 24 hours prior to the official date and time “for political reasons” or “with 34 hours before” – Constantin I. Stan, *op. cit.*, p. 296, nota 739.

<sup>1</sup> “The same day as the announcement of the death of Ferdinand, little Mihai, aged five, was proclaimed King, and the Council of Regents has been presented to the Parliament for the oath”- Lilly Marcou, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Sorin Liviu Damean, Dan Claudiu Dănișor, Mihai Ghițulescu, Alexandru Oșca, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Monarhia în România (1866-1947)*, Iași, Editura Tipomoldova, 2010, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *Criza dinastică din România (1925-1930)*, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> Lucian Dindirică, *Criza dinastică din România. Patriarhul Miron Cristea – membru al Regenței*, în vol. *Stat și societate în Europa*, II, Ionuț Șerban, Lucian Dindirică (coord.), Craiova, Editura Aius, 2010, pp. 390-415.

<sup>6</sup> Elie Miron Cristea, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

Government resignation on June 7<sup>th</sup> and the formation of a new cabinet headed by Gheorghe Gh. Mironescu on the evening of the same day<sup>1</sup> have to rush things, scoring the events like Carol wanted. A day later, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, Patriarch Miron Cristea and Constantin Sărățeanu refused to agree to the annulment of the Act of January 4<sup>th</sup> 1926, posting their resignations of Regency<sup>2</sup>. A few hours later, in front of the National Representative, Prince Carol was proclaimed King, he was named Carol II.

In the context of the dissolution of the Regency and inauguration of a new phase of the Romanian monarchy is worth recalling Nicolae Iorga remarks, during the Crown Council, back in 1925, a remark taking note of waiving the royal rights and prerogatives Carol: “I can’t forget the good heart, or the intelligence of his Royal Highness, or his power to work for the country, or his sense for the needs of the people. And because it happens that I’m a historian, I know that the regencies of the children have always been disastrous for Dynasty and for the country. I do not want to be a prophet, but speaking thus, I saved my soul”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234; Lucian Dindirică, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> Apud Constantin I. Stan, *Regele Ferdinand...*, p. 440.