

A STRANGE LAW IN COMPLICATED TIMES: RETRACING THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ROMANIAN ELECTORAL REFORM OF MARCH 1926

Adrian-Alexandru HERȚA*

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Abstract: The Romanian Electoral Law of March 1926 embodied a surprising, uncanny, revolutionary, and controversial juridical innovation with a spectacular procedural trajectory. It was not designed to accurately detect and process the voters' will, but to artificially produce comfortable monochrome parliamentary majorities in the Assembly of Deputies. Thus, it had a profoundly inequitable apportionment method. In a broad theoretical landscape, the particular perspective proposed by the present paper is that of reform as a product of its epoch. Therefore, we will try to reconstruct the complex political context of mid-1920s Romania as an essential puzzle piece for understanding some of the elements that determined the emergence of an unprecedented electoral algorithm. Both domestic and foreign policy issues will be discussed from a historical approach that starts with the fundamentals and goes to provide a more in-depth overview of the matter. Herewith, some areas of analysis somewhat undervalued by previous research endeavors will be addressed: the Romanian political thinking in the mid-1920s, the party system internal dynamics, the tumultuous events within the Royal House of Romania, the international relations, as well as the post-World War I evolution of the European political regimes.

Keywords: electoral legislation, extreme Left, extreme Right, interwar Romania, majority prize, National Liberal Party, Royal House of Romania, proportional representation



Rezumat: Legea Electorală românească din martie 1926 a întruchipat o inovație juridică surprinzătoare, stranie, revoluționară și controversată, cu o traiectorie procedurală spectaculoasă. A fost concepută nu pentru a capta și prelucra cu acuratețe voința alegătorilor, ci pentru a produce artificial majorități parlamentare absolute, monocrome în Adunarea Deputaților. A avut, prin urmare, o metodă de repartizare a mandatelor profund inechitabilă. Într-un peisaj teoretic bogat și diversificat, perspectiva inedită pe care prezenta lucrare o propune este aceea de reformă ca produs complex al epocii sale. Așadar, în rândurile ce urmează vom încerca să reconstituim contextul politic complicat al României anilor 1920, ca o piesă de puzzle importantă pentru înțelegerea câtorva dintre elementele care au determinat apariția unei formule electorale

* Teaching assistant, PhD., Faculty of History and Political Sciences, “Ovidius” University of Constanta, Romania. E-mail address: adrian_hertza@yahoo.com.

cum nu a mai fost alta. Vor fi discutate deopotrivă aspecte de politică internă, respectiv externă, într-o abordare istorică ce pornește de la chestiuni particulare și merge către o imagine de ansamblu. Se vor deschide astfel câteva câmpuri de analiză mai degrabă trecute cu vederea de cercetările anterioare: gândirea politică românească la mijlocul anilor 1920, dinamica sistemului de partide, evenimentele tumultuoase din interiorul Casei Regale a României, relațiile internaționale și evoluția de după Primul Război Mondial a regimurilor politice europene.

Cuvinte cheie: Casa Regală a României, extrema stângă, extrema dreaptă, legislație electorală, primă majoritară, Partidul Național Liberal, reprezentare proporțională, România interbelică

I. Introduction

The Romanian Electoral Law of March 1926 embodied a surprising, uncanny, and controversial juridical innovation. It was designed not to accurately reflect and process the voters' will but to automatically produce comfortable majorities in the Assembly of Deputies. According to its atypical formula, if the party ranked first in the elections had obtained at least 40% of votes, it would have automatically gained half of the seats and would have taken part in the proportional distribution of the remaining half, putting together an impressive amount of at least 70% of mandates¹.

As expected, such an out-of-the-ordinary method has been intensely explored and discussed in the interwar and communist periods, as well as in recent years, both by historians and political scientists. As a result, several main theoretical perspectives on the Romanian Electoral Law of 1926 can be highlighted. Probably the most common of these would be that this reform ended an extensive, coherent, and ambitious post-World War I project of administrative reorganization and legislative unification, unilaterally assumed by the puissant National-Liberal Party government of Ion I. C. Brătianu². Another overlapping view on this topic regards the opportune abolishment of the

¹ C. Hamangiu, *Codul general al României. Legi noi de unificare 1922-1926, Vol. XI-XII* (București: Editura «Universala» Alcalay & Co., 1926), 1075-1078.

² Ion Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României Moderne 1922-1926* (București: Editura Științifică și Pedagogică, 1981), 311; Corneliu Ciucanu, „Guvernul I.I.C. Brătianu (19 ianuarie 1922-27 martie 1926) și problematica electorală”, *Zargădava*, no. 13 (2016): 142, 148-150; Dumitru Șandru, „Partidul Național Liberal în perioada interbelică și a celui de al doilea război mondial”, in *Istoria Partidului Național Liberal*, coord. Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner (București: Editura Bic All, 2000), 206-208.

malapropos geographically-mixed electoral system of 1919-1922, consisting of regulations that functioned separately in almost each of the Romanian historical provinces³. Finally, other authors saw in that threshold of 40% of votes that ensured more than two-thirds of the deputy mandates a misuse of executive power, a profoundly unfair solution, and an import of Mussolini's legislation⁴.

A previous study attempted to retrace the entire procedural trajectory of the electoral bill. It evinced that the first formula discussed and approved was a slightly modified model of proportional representation. Then, at one point on the institutional track between the Senate and the Assembly of Deputies, in February 1926, the draft law got stuck for several weeks in a special commission of the ruling National-Liberal Party, where it underwent a spectacular transformation. A truly shocking and revolutionary mandate-distribution algorithm was attached: depending on the highest score at the polls, and without a minimum threshold, the winning competitor would have been guaranteed an impressive quota between 90% and 60% of seats. It is important to note that the final configuration of the Romanian electoral system of 1926 represented a substantially mild version of this inequitable apportionment scheme⁵. In addition, another recent research tried to identify the responsible political

³ Cristian Preda, *România postcomunistă și România interbelică* (București: Editura Meridiane, 2002), 88; Sorin Radu, *Electoratul din România în anii democrației parlamentare (1919-1937)* (Iași: Institutul European, 2004), 35-39, 45; Marcel Ivan, *Evoluția partidelor noastre politice în cifre și grafice 1919-1932. Studiu comparativ al rezultatelor oficiale ale alegerilor pentru Camera Deputaților din anii 1919-1932* (Sibiu: Editura Kraft & Drotleff s.a., 1933), 6; Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României Moderne*, 311.

⁴ Matei Dogan, *Analiza statistică a „democrației parlamentare” din România* (București: Editura Partidului Social-Democrat, 1946), 48; Paul Negulescu, “Les principes de la loi électorale roumaine du 27 mars 1926”, *Revista de drept public* 2, no. 4 (1926): 516; Adrian-Alexandru Herța, „Proiectul Legii Electorale românești din martie 1926 și modelul său, Legea Electorală italiană din decembrie 1923. Țara reală și țara legală”, in *Marea: loc al memoriei și al desfășurărilor geostrategice*, coord. Florin Anghel, Gabriel Stelian Manea, and Metin Omer (Fărgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), 270-273; Radu, *Electoratul din România*, 45; Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismul în România (1930-1940)* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 33-36; Ciucanu, „Guvernul I.I.C. Brătianu”, 158; Vasile Budrigă, *Sistemul electoral din România în anii 1918-1940* (București: Editura Planeta, 1997), 43-44. There are also some ideological views of the communist left on this subject: Mihail Florescu, *Alegerile parlamentare în lumina cifrelor și a faptelor (1918-1937)* (București: Editura Partidului Comunist Român, 1946), 9-13; N. Prisca, *Sistemul electoral în R.P.R.* (București: Editura Științifică, 1965), 37-38.

⁵ Adrian-Alexandru Herța, “Un prestito legale controverso: l'adattamento del metodo Acerbo alla legislazione elettorale romana (febraio-marzo 1926)”, in *Romania e Italia, la cultura della memoria condivisa degli ultimi cento anni. Memoria e identità nel dialogo romeno-italiano: spazi simbolici, aspetti giuridici, storici e filosofici*, coords. Augusto Sinagra and Florin Tudor (Ariccia: Aracne Editrice, 2018), 613-624.

figures behind this controversial idea of a legal tool that generated distorted parliamentary allotments. Three main hypotheses were formulated⁶.

Nevertheless, beyond its creators, estimated effects, sources of inspiration, and successive algebraic hypostases, a juridical creation as strange as the Romanian electoral reform of March 1926 can also be regarded as a product of its times. Therefore, the present contribution aims to describe in detail the political context of this unprecedented law as an underlying puzzle piece for understanding the causes behind its emergence. Both domestic and foreign policy issues will be discussed in an approach that starts from the fundamental elements and goes to provide a more in-depth overview of the matter. Herewith, some fields of analysis somewhat undervalued by previous research will be addressed: the Romanian political thinking in the mid-1920s, the party system internal dynamics, the tumultuous events within the Royal House of Romania, the international relations, and the evolution of the European political regimes in the first interwar years.

II. A New Legal Tool from an Old Epoch

Questionable due to its provisions and non-transparent due to the adoption procedures, the Electoral Law of March 1926 represented the work and the vision of an inflexible monochrome parliamentary majority. Comfortably installed in charge of the government since 1922, the National Liberal Party was, at that time, the oldest and strongest political organization in the country. Its core was composed of a small group of banking, industrial, and state apparatus elites, close to the influential Brătianu family⁷, at its second generation of leaders. It brought together not just intellectuals and theorists, but rather pragmatic specialists with experience in administration, well acquainted with both the legal and underground mechanisms of power: Vintilă Brătianu, I. G. Duca, Alexandru C. Constantinescu, Tancred Constantinescu, Constantin Angelescu⁸. As a whole, they formed a

⁶ Adrian-Alexandru Herța, “Who’s the Author of the Romanian Electoral Law of 1926? Three Hypotheses”, *Analele Universității „Ovidius” din Constanța. Seria Științe Politice* 6 (2017): 25-34.

⁷ Keith Hitchens, *Ionel Brătianu: Romania* (London: Haus Publishing Ltd., 2011), 136-137; Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României Moderne*, 7, 10, 14. Some critical and subjective perspectives of the 1920s: Mihail Manoilescu, „Neoliberalismul în România”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, March 4, 1923; A. Corteanu, „Criza partidului liberal”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, April 8, 1923.

⁸ Fragmentary biographic details in: ***, *Figuri politice și administrative din epoca consolidării* (București: Tipografia România Nouă „Theodor I. Voinea”, 1924); Ion Mamina and Ioan

contoured, rigid, and disciplined pyramidal structure. At its top, the unchallenged dominant figure was Ion I. C. Brătianu⁹.

As president of the National Liberal Party and prime minister of Greater Romania for several terms, Ion I. C. Brătianu acted more like a typical statesman of the pre-World War I Kingdom. Most of his political experience had been gained in a regime in which the electoral system was highly restrictive, and the alternation in power was not done naturally, by the voters' decision, but artificially, through the king's will and administrative constraint¹⁰. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century, topics such as the agrarian reform or the extension of voting rights had arduously entered into the National Liberal Party agenda – almost every time in a moderate setting, without timetables and concrete results, and due to the pressure of external political developments (for example, the peasant riots of the 1890s and 1900s, the impact of wars from the 1910s or the constant advance of other European countries' legislations)¹¹. More than in the intrinsic virtues of the truly representative systems, Ion I. C. Brătianu believed in the missionary role of the political elites to better guide their people in crucial moments, sometimes even against the majority currents. Thus, after 1917, when the principle of universal male suffrage was finally introduced into the Romanian Constitution, the leader of the National Liberal Party had been more concerned with diverting its effects than openly adapting to the new rules of the political

Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți (1916-1938)* (București: Editura Silex, 1996), 127-256. Also a few pieces of information from a critical or subjective perspective: Mihail Manoilescu, *Memorii I* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993): 45-46; Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri, Volumul al VII-lea, Partea a VI-a (1923-1926)* (București: Editura Machiavelli, 1996), 210; ***, „D-I Constantinescu-P.”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, November 4, 1923; ***, „Tancred”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, April 20, 1924; ***, „Ion Th. Florescu”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, May 21, 1922.

⁹ Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu*, 137; Bitoleanu, *Din istoria României Moderne*, 13. Also see different subjective perspectives: I. G. Duca, *Amintiri politice, Vol. III* (München: Colecția „Memorii și mărturii” Jon Dumitru-Verlag, 1982), 230; N. Iorga, *Ce a fost și ce este Constituția României* (București: «Bucovina» I. E. Toroșiu, 1938), 16; Costin I. Sturdza, „I. I. C Brătianu”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, December 25, 1923.

¹⁰ Sorin Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România (1866-1937)* (Iași: Institutul European, 2005), 19-30; Ioan Scurtu and Ion Bulei, *Democrația la români 1866-1938* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1990), 90-95; Dogan, *Analiza statistică*, 8-14.

¹¹ On the agrarian issue see: Mircea Georgescu, *Reforme agrare. Principii și metode în legiurile române și străine* (București: Institutul de Drept Agrar și Economie Agrară din România „Bucovina” I. E. Toroșiu, 1943), 19-24, 46-53; Dietmar Müller, „Conceptul de proprietate în istoria economico-juridică românească”, in *Istoria României prin concepte. Perspective alternative asupra limbajelor social-politice*, eds. Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010), 210-211. Also on the electoral issue see: Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral*, 33-70.

game. To do this, he made extensive use of the hidden institutional instruments he built over the years: connections in the upper spheres of the functionaries' body, influences in the army, and, by far the most efficient among these, a close and privileged relationship with the Crown¹².

Between 1922-1926, with the help of their legislative and executive levers, the Liberals pushed all the other parties into a weak opposition and started to build a new constitutional and administrative frame for the Greater Romania – in a domineering and unilateral manner. The process implied a massive adaptation of the Old Kingdom's political model, centralization, statism, and economic protectionism. Ion I. C. Brătianu intentionally uncoupled this set of reforms from the political and juridical legacy of newly-integrated historical provinces and national minorities' expectations, as he saw almost in every statement in favor of autonomy or regionalism a form of separatism and, implicitly, a danger for the territorial integrity of Romania¹³. At the same time, due to his significant influence over King Ferdinand I, Brătianu soon came to control the actors and frequency of the alternation in power. Thus, he managed to block the access to government of the Romanian National Party or Peasant Party – political groups that he considered unprepared or too radical for such a task – and instead imposed a convenient successor as prime minister: Alexandru Averescu, the president of the Peoples Party, a leader in visible decline¹⁴.

Within Brătianu's plan to manipulate the entire political system behind the appearances of a democratic multiparty competition, the rather undemocratic Electoral Law of March 1926 should have been an important piece, as it seemed to have been designed to provide predictable results. The political context, though, was becoming more and more unpredictable.

¹² Șandru, „Partidul Național Liberal”, 205; Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu*, 135; Corteanu, „Criza partidului liberal”.

¹³ Biblioteca Academiei Române (Romanian Academy Library), Arhiva Ion I. C. Brătianu, mapa II, varia 2; Ion I. C. Brătianu, *Activitatea corpurilor legiuitoare (Parlamentul) și a Guvernului 1922-1926* (București: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale „Ion I. C. Brătianu”, 2020); Daniel Cîțirigă, *Europa Centrală și tentația federalismului: istorie și diplomatie în perioada interbelică* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2015), 269-271; Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu*, 135; Ioan Stanomir, *La Centenar: recitind secolul României Mari* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2018), 52-54.

¹⁴ Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1990), 58; Manoilescu, *Memorii I*, 55; Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu*, 135-147.

III. The Crisis Inside the Royal House of Romania

According to the Italian press, on December 18th, 1925 – the day the Romanian Senate approved its version of the draft electoral law – a mysterious lady arrived at Hôtel de la Ville in Milan. The apartment in which she was accommodated was connected by a hallway to a second apartment. Three days earlier, a foreign gentleman, who had arrived at the wheel of a luxurious car, had also been given accommodation there. That man was Prince Carol, heir to the Romanian throne. The mysterious woman was his mistress, Elena Lupescu¹⁵. This Milanese episode was just a halt on the itinerary of an amorous getaway that included sojourns in Paris and Venice and had profound consequences for the future of the Royal House. From abroad, Carol announced that he was not coming back and irrevocably resigned all his rights and prerogatives as the Crown Prince in favor of his son, Mihai, only four-year-old at that time¹⁶.

Since King Ferdinand's health showed worrisome signs of weakness during 1925¹⁷, this succession crisis created the prospect of a vulnerable Monarchy, with a possible future minor as head of state and a regency. While many politicians expressed their doubt and dissatisfaction with the legal solution found after the departure of Carol and Elena Lupescu¹⁸, there are reasons to assume that Ion I. C. Brătianu saw in this renunciation act an opportunity to exclude a member of the royal family whom he could not control from the equation of power and strengthen his authority over the Crown in the long term¹⁹.

¹⁵ ***, “Càrol di Romania rinunzia al trono dopo un misterioso Colloquio a Milano. Le sfondo romanzesco dell'avvenimento”, *Corriere della Sera*, January 2, 1926; ***, “Il romanzo d'amore del principe Carlo di Romania”, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, January 3, 1926; ***, “Il Dramma sentimentale romeno”, *Corriere della Sera*, January 6, 1926; ***, “Lo scandalo della Corte romana. Carol di Romania diventa il signor Monastireanu”, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, January 7, 1926. This episode was also retraced in a different context in: Adrian-Alexandru Hertza, „Sistemul de repartizare geografică a mandatelor parlamentare stabilit prin Legea Electorală românească din martie 1926”, *Revista Istorică* 23, no. 5-6 (2012): 562.

¹⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României (Romanian National Archives), fond Carol II, dosar I/29, f. 1-8; fond Parlament, dosar 2113/1925-1926, f. 1-60. Also see: Ioan Scurtu, *Crișa dinastică din România (1925 -1930)* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1996), 36-62.

¹⁷ Ștefania Ciubotaru, *Viața cotidiană la curtea regală a României (1914-1947)* (București: Editura Cartex, 2001), 491. Also see: N. Iorga, *Memorii, Vol. V (Agonia regală și regența)* (București: Editura „Națională” S. Ciornei, 1939), 5-8, 20, 31; Elie Miron Cristea, Patriarhul României, *Note ascunse. Însemnări personale (1895-1937)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1999), 97.

¹⁸ Iorga, *Memorii*, 79-90, 93; Iuliu Maniu, *Cauzele prăbușirii fostului regim* (București: 1940), 3; Scurtu, *Crișa dinastică*, 50-53.

¹⁹ Some pros and cons subjective perspectives on this matter: Iorga, *Memorii*, 86-87; Petru Groza, *Adio lumii vechi! Memorii* (București: Editura Compania, 2003), 391; ***, *Memoriile doamnei*

IV. The Ascendence of Violence in Romanian Politics

In Brătianu's view, the real source of concern and discontent related to the situation in Romania was the dual spectre of the party system's fragmentation and radicalization of political thinking and action²⁰.

In the intellectual and publicist circles of the early interwar years, the criticism of the government was more and more often doubled by the preoccupations with finding an authoritarian alternative. As early as 1919, the young journalists Pamfil Șeicaru and Constantin Petrescu wrote in the magazine *Hiena* (Eng: *The Hyaena*) about “a pseudo-constitutional system”, which only improvised democracy. Then, in the mid-1920s, they came to talk about “the suicide of the parties” and Prince Carol in the role of corrective force and providential leader²¹. Also, in an article published in September 1923, S. Șerbescu defined democracy as “a luxury regime for the use of happy people”, which was facing a broad hostile trend on the continent. In this context, he described Benito Mussolini as a “genius” and the most successful outburst of popular discontent of the epoch²². In fact, the portrait of the Italian dictator as the ideal authoritarian statesman was frequently present in the Romanian writings and even political projects of that time. Some used prime minister Ion I. C. Brătianu's oligarchic and bureaucratic centralism as a counter-model²³. However, from the first post-World War I years, the radical visions went beyond the theoretical field, catapulting into political action where they developed violent forms – on both the extreme left and right.

On the Left, the Communist Party of Romania emerged in May 1921 by the detachment of a maximalist and completely subordinated to the Moscow wing of the socialist movement. As a structure, it consisted of an official institutional

Elena Lupescu. Aventura de dragoste cu fostul principe moștenitor Carol. – Destăinuiri senzaționale (București: Tipografia „Reforma Socială”, 1928), 37; Raoul Bossy, *Amitiri din viața diplomatică (1918-1940), Volumul I 1918-1937* (București, Editura Humanitas, 1993), 113-114. Also see: Ion I. C. Brătianu, *Cuvintele unui mare român: Fragmente din discursuri 1914-1927* (București: Editura Mediafax, 2019), 121-122.

²⁰ Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu*, 138.

²¹ Maner, *Parlamentarismul în România*, 86.

²² S. Șerbescu, „Triumful fascismului în Italia”, *Revista Vremii politice, literare și economice*, September 23, 1923.

²³ Georgiana Țăranu, *Nicolae Iorga și Italia lui Mussolini. Studii* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2015), 62-66; Armin Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelului Mihail”: o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional (Second Edition)* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2006), 102-104; Herța, „Proiectul Legii Electorale”, 271-273, 285.

interface, to which was added a previously-established and autonomous network of clandestine groups organized on the Bolshevik model. These underground units were, in fact, terrorist cells. They brought together renegades and revolutionary desperados under military discipline and a code which included sectarianism, secret passwords, pseudonyms, false documents, and conspiratorial housings. They were engaged in planning attacks, sabotage, and espionage. At the end of 1920, they set up a large-scale strike in Bucharest – which should have led to the overthrow of the Monarchy – and a bombing at the Senate. Also, in September 1924, they were involved in the armed incursion of some commando troops from the Soviet Union into Tatar Bunar, a small South Bessarabian fishing village. The reaction of the Romanian authorities against the left-wing extremists was generally prompt and efficient. Periodically, the intelligence and police services vigorously intervened and dismantled these insurrectional groups. As an example, the Tatar Bunar episode resulted in an extensive trial, with about 200 convictions. Also, as a direct consequence, in December 1924, the Brătianu government de facto banned the Communist Party of Romania²⁴.

The use of force was a political practice that the extreme right also resorted to since the beginning of the 1920s. In this case, the ideological roots were anti-Socialism – in the first phase of the movement – and anti-Semitism – as a long-standing attitude. The acts of violence started from certain university student circles and a radical wing of the National Christian Defense League – a Nationalist party founded in March 1923. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, a charismatic young man, law graduate in Jassy, was the primary catalyst and guiding figure of these outbreaks. Thus, in the fall of 1923, deeply dissatisfied with how decision-makers and state institutions handled the minorities issue, Codreanu and some of his comrades planned an impressive series of assassinations. They targeted a minister and several politicians, as well as Jewish community leaders, businessmen, and journalists. Then, after the plot was divulged and most of the plotters were arrested, Ion Moța, one of Codreanu's closest collaborators, found the denouncer and shot him. A few months later, Codreanu would also use a gun. In order to avenge the excessive zeal of law enforcement in investigating some of his adepts, on October 24, 1924, he killed the prefect of the Police, Constantin Manciu, on the steps of the Palace of Justice in Jassi. If the authorities' response had almost always been in line with

²⁴ Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lui tanti Varvara: istorii clandestine* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2005), 20-84; Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005), 61-74.

the magnitude and gravity of the provocation associated with the criminal acts of the extreme left, in the case of the National Christian Defense League members, the institutional mechanisms often malfunctioned. On some occasions, the units subordinated to the Ministry of Interior reacted passively to numerous episodes of street violence, especially those against the Jews. However, due to a general popular feeling of tacit approval, the worst symptoms of this tendency were visible in the justice system: despite the often proven facts, the jurors, when they did not directly decide to acquit the accused, disposed sentences of insignificant duration for Codreanu and most of his brethren²⁵. Thus, interwar Romania evinced its first signs of vulnerability and maladaptation to the 1920s and 1930s impending rise of the extreme right.

Nevertheless, as a recently published document reveals²⁶, there are reasons to consider that the internal threats to the Romanian political regime during the Ion I. C. Brătianu government had both internal and external sources. For example, a “strictly confidential” report, sent in November 1922 by the Directorate of Police and General Security to the head of the Special Security Service (Siguranța), signalled that in the summer of the same year, in one of the neighboring countries, an assassination attempt had been planned. The attackers were members of a Hungarian irredentist organization. Although several prominent politicians were on the list of potential victims, the main target of this criminal plot was the royal couple – Ferdinand I and Marie of Romania. Their assassination was intended, on the one hand, as a form of punishment for the role that the sovereigns had in imposing on Budapest the territorial losses of the Treaty of Trianon (1920) and, on the other hand, as an attempt to destabilize the Bucharest regime and to paralyze its capacity to react in support of the Little Entente allies.

V.A Perspective on the Evolution of the European Political Regimes

In Ion I. C. Brătianu’s view, the international relations dynamics in the mid-1920s were also worrying. The Genoa Conference (April-May 1922), Treaty of

²⁵ Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelului Mihail”*, 96-114; Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier, 1919-1941: Mistica ultranaționalismului* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1993), 47-88; Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea „Căpitanului”* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2017), 66-94.

²⁶ Daniel Cițirigă, „Un atentat care n-a mai avut loc: mișcările radicale ungare împotriva Familiei Regale a României (1922) – Document”, *Analele Dobrogei*, no. 2 (2021): 265-280.

Rapallo (April 1922), London Conference (July-August 1924), and Locarno Pact (October 1925) ushered a period in which the Allies became increasingly concessive to the revisionist agenda of Germany and consequently opened the prospect of growing insecurity of the Central and South-Eastern European national borders²⁷. In response, the Romanian diplomacy of the first interwar years was constantly preoccupied with containing the minatory territorial ambitions of Hungary, the Soviet Union, and Bulgaria through an as solid as possible system of regional alliances²⁸.

Beyond these foreign policy trends, an important point of reference in relation to the emergence of the Electoral Law of March 1926 undoubtedly was the evolution of the European voting and mandate distribution formulas of that time. At the end of the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s, as an expression of the post-World War I general traumas, apprehensions, expectations, and hopes, a relatively new method broadly spread among the political regimes of the continent: proportional representation. Its diffusion was boosted either by mimetic reflexes or the idealistic presumption that the intrinsic values of classical democratic patterns will shape a better and more peaceful world²⁹. Nevertheless, in the first interwar years, the lawmakers often uninspiredly overestimated the theoretical virtues of the forms and overlooked the political, cultural, and social backgrounds or other adjacent adverse effects. Thus, in many cases, the newly-introduced proportional algorithms led to the acute fragmentation of the party systems. Since 1922-1923, under the pressure resulted from the government instability and the rise of the extremes, the Central and South-Eastern European representative regimes began to fail one by one. Consequently, in some countries,

²⁷ Viorica Moisuc, *Premisele izolării politice a României Mari* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1991), 119-216.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 217-289.

²⁹ J. Fischer Williams, “Proportional Representation in Modern Legislation”, *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 3, no. 1 (1921): 86; Paul H. Douglas, “The Necessity for Proportional Representation”, *International Journal of Ethics* 34, no. 1 (October 1923): 12; Agnes Headlam-Morley, *The New Democratic Constitutions of Europe: A Comparative Study of Post-War European Constitutions with Special Reference of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats & Slovenes and the Baltic States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 101-102; Maurizio Griffo and Gaetano Quagliariello, “La rappresentanza proporzionale nella storia d’Italia”, *Ventesimo Secolo* 8, no. 18 (February 2009): 58-59; Adrian-Alexandru Herta, “Erroneous Calculations on the Ruins of Empires: The Failure of the Proportional Representation Method in Central and Southern Europe in 1920s”, in *The Empire. Between Dispute and Nostalgia*, eds. Emanuel Plopeanu, Gabriel Stelian Manea, and Metin Omer (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH, 2021), 161-162; Mark Mazower, *Umbre peste Europa. Democrație și totalitarism în secolul XX* (București: Editura Litera, 2019), 23-26; Philip Morgan, “The First World War and the Challenge to Democracy in Europe”, in *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The Legacy of the First World War*, eds. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 82-86.

the electoral systems were drastically adjusted. Furthermore, in severe crises situations, the democracies collapsed altogether³⁰.

Undoubtedly, between 1922-1926, these phenomena were followed with concern in Bucharest. A synchronization effort was visible. In 1918-1919, Greater Romania partially ascribed to the trend favoring the proportional representation method (the political elites of Transylvania and Bukovina opposed this current and preferred, in a first phase, to reproduce the Austrian majority model of 1907)³¹. Afterwards, the 1926 law became part of the ebbing tendency that followed.

VI. Conclusions

From such a perspective, the electoral system established in March 1926 can be seen both as a product of a continental phenomenon and as an original legal solution to the Romanian political challenges that characterized the mid-1920s. However, beyond this context, the option for such an inequitable formula highlighted two of the fundamental structural problems at the institutional foundation of Greater Romania: the generalized disinterest of the political elites of the Old Kingdom in understanding the country's geographical and historical cleavages in seeking the consensus, and the chronic inability to govern in coalitions.

On a different note, it is not easy to evaluate how authoritative Ion I. C. Brătianu's reflexes were and how his long-term goals looked when he approved this unusual law. The fusion between the Romanian National Party and the Peasants Party in the autumn of 1926 and the sudden death of the leader of the National Liberal Party one year later changed the dynamics and balance of power on the political stage. Nevertheless, the Electoral Law of March 1926 remained in force until 1938.

³⁰ F. A. Hermens, "The Trojan Horse of Democracy", *Social Research* 5, no. 4 (November 1938): 379-423; F. A. Hermens, "P.R. and Democracy", *The Review of Politics* 4, no. 4 (October 1942): 459-488; Headlam-Morley, *The New Democratic Constitutions*, 115-118; Herța, "Erroneous Calculations", 168-171.

³¹ Dogan, *Analiza statistică*, 15-21; Radu, *Electoratul din România*, 15-35; Adrian-Alexandru Herța, „Tradiția ca element de fractură. Construcția celui dintâi sistem electoral al României Mari”, in *Intellectalii politici și politica intelectualilor*, coords. Daniel Citișigă, Georgiana Țăranu, and Adrian-Alexandru Herța (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2016), 378-398; Mihai Ghițulescu, „Alegerile din 1919 din Vechiul Regat. Comentarii juridico-aritmetice”, *Revista Bibliotecii Academiei Române* 4, no. 1 (January-July 2019): 57-71; Mihai Ghițulescu, „Despre Ardealul electoral (1919-1920). Note privind decretul pentru organizarea alegerilor în „Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș””, *Arhiva Moldaviae*, no. 12 (2020): 163-192; Andrei Florin Sora, „Cadrul legislativ”, in *România Mare votează: alegerile parlamentare din 1919 „la firul ierbii”*, coords. Bogdan Murgescu and Andrei Florin Sora (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2019), 36-58.

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