



ORIGINAL PAPER

**Various Aspects regarding the Political Migration
Towards the National Renaissance Front: An
Implication of Political Elites Resources Theory**

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Abstract

The article is structured in five different parts. The first part is dedicated to the political context of the appearance of Carol II's single political party – the National Renaissance Front; the second part is a short presentation of the legal framework for the party enrolment. The next section depicts various juridical aspects regarding the enrolment in National Renaissance Front of the former leaders of the traditional parties that were outlawed by the decree from March 30th, 1938. The fourth part represents a detailed presentation of the process of joining NRF by the ex-political members, a special notice being made for those coming from the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants' Party and the Iron Guard. In the last section it is described the way in which the political enrolment of the former politicians influenced the evolution of the National Renaissance Front.

Keywords: *political migration, National Renaissance Front, Carol II, elections, traditional political parties*

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The establishment of the National Renaissance Front

Beginning with the year 1930, the moment that Carol II came to the Romanian throne, the King was attracted by the idea of increasing his political power. He tried to create some coalition governments that could facilitate the access and the control to the executive power; his plan was not successful until the end of the interwar period. Having as a background the increasing of the extremist regimes in Europe (Berstein, Milza, 1998:112), King Carol II decided to apply his own plan.

The opportunity of imposing the regime of monarchic authority was given by the result of the parliamentary elections from December 1937. After these elections, there was no party that obtained a minimum of 40% of the votes, a minimum that could offer them the possibility to impose a government. It was the first time during the interwar period when the party that was authorized to organize the elections could not gain 40% of the votes (Boia, 2002: 90). The results of the elections from December 1937 were: 35,92% – the National Liberal Party; 20,4% – the National Peasants' Party; 15,58% – the Party "Everything for the Country"; 9,15% – the National Christian Party (Scurtu, 2005: 40). These elective results gave king Carol II the opportunity to impose a minority party, led by Octavian Goga (Scurtu, Buzatu, 1999: 334), the representative of the political group from the fourth place in the elections. On the other hand, the percentage that the Iron Guard obtained in these elections was a strong worry for Carol II – this was the highest score that the extremist party obtained in the Romanian social and elective history (Olimid, 2014; Georgescu, 2014; Bărbieru, 2014).

One of the most important political decisions taken by the government led by Octavian Goga was to dissolve the Parliament, on January 18th, 1938, right before its first reunion (Mamina, Scurtu, 1995: 123). After accomplishing this mission, although the king had proposed the prime-minister, it was the monarch himself that replaced Goga, on the basis of a low legitimacy of the new government. An essential moment within the process of establishing the regime of monarchic authority was represented by the coup d'état from 10th/11th of February, 1938. This was the moment when a new government was formed, a government led by the Patriarch Miron Cristea (Nedelea, 1991: 145). The patriarch was named prime minister in order to legitimize the regime of monarchic authority. Among the political measures that were adopted beginning with this period, one can mention: the proclamation of the state of emergency, the censorship, the assignment of new prefects for the counties elected from the military structures (Stoenescu, 2006: 232) and the revocation of the electoral body (Quinlan, 2008: 259).

The next step was the adoption of a new constitution in order to create a general legislative background for the changes imposed by the coup d'état. This new constitution was promulgated on February 27th, 1938 (Vaida Voevod, 1997: 199-210). Three days later, the regime was consolidated by other political measures, among them the decree of dissolving the political parties, on March 30th, 1938 (Scurtu, Otu, 2003: 395).

The legal background of the enrolments in the single political party

The political events of the year 1938 reached a peak on December 16th, when it was created the National Renaissance Front (Rusu, 2001-2002: 404), by the law decree no. 4321. For the authorisation of the royal party it was necessary "a written request from 25 persons, at least 20 of them being former or present ministers" (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 1/1939: 8). Those that signed this request became founding members of the party (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 20/1939-1940: 23). It is very important to underline that the founding members were representatives of the most important traditional political parties.

The request of establishing the single political party was signed as follows: Constantin Angelescu, Mircea Cancicov, Mitiță Constantinescu, Victor Iamandi, Victor Slăvescu, Dumitru Alimănișteanu, Constantin C. Giurescu (as representatives of the former National Liberal Party); Armand Călinescu, Grigore Gafencu, Petre Andrei, Mihail Ralea; G. Ionescu-Sisești, Anibal Teodorescu, N. Vasilescu-Karpen, V. D. Țoni (as representatives of the former National Peasants' Party), G. Ionescu-Sisești, Anibal Teodorescu, N. Vasilescu-Karpen, V. D. Țoni (as representatives of the former National Democratic Party led by Nicolae Iorga); Stan Ghițescu, Nicolae Miclescu, Alexandru Hodoș (as representatives of the former National Christian Party); Gheorghe Grigorovici, Eftimie Gherman, Ion Flueraș (as representaives of the former Social Democratic Party); Sebastian Bornemisa, Viorel Tilea (as representatives of the former Vaida-Voevod' political group) (Dandara, 1985: 90-91).

The party enrolments were done according to the article no. 5 of the law decree that established the National Renaissance Front. This decree mentioned that the members of NRF were obliged to be Romanian citizens and to be at least 21 years old; the military employees and the members of the juridical order were not allowed to be members of the National Renaissance Front. The decree 4321 also mentioned that the royal counsellors legitimately became members of the Front.

On January 5th, 1939, it was published a regulation for establishing the royal political party; the article no. 3 underlined that the enrolment in the National Renaissance Front could be requested by “every Romanian man or woman, that sincerely shares the superior ideals which this organization proposes, that effectively practises one of the employments stipulated in the constitution, that has no juridical record and respect the internal discipline of the Front (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 1/1939: 10). The article no. 4 mentioned that the registration requests had to be hand in at the communal secretary and the approval was given in three months time. The next day after establishing the single political party – December 17th, 1938, 5000 registration requests were handed in.

The registration of the former significant leaders of the traditional political parties in the National Renaissance Front

An important aspect of the registration, closely followed by the authorities, was that of the requests received from the members of the formers political parties, and especially those coming from the National Peasants' Party, the National Liberal Party and the Iron Guard. Immediately after the establishment of the first single political party, different representatives of the political spectrum – from left to right – hurried to show their adherence to the National Renaissance Front. Some of those that joined NRF, such as Armand Călinescu and Gheorghe Tătărescu, were the ones that actually helped the sovereign in organizing the new regime. On the other hand, there were politicians that by this adherence to the Front agreed the regime for the first time.

Between the significant leaders of the National Peasants' Party that asked the registration in the NRF, there can be mentioned – Demostene Botez, C. Vișoianu (Hudiță, 2003: 148), Ernest Ene, Victor Cădere, Virgil Potârcă, Casius Maniu (Dandara, 1985: 94). Some other members came from the National Peasants' Party of Bessarabia – Al. Boldur, Pantelimon Erhan, I. Negrescu, Titus Hotnog, Ștefan Ciobanu (Hudiță, 2003: 160) – or from Iași – I. Plăcișteanu (Hudiță, 2003: 159). “Scoundrels”, “traitors” or “opportunist rotters” are the names that Ioan Hudiță gave them in his diary. For the group from Basarabia a possible explanation comes from Ioan Hudiță's diary – “I am sure that they did not took this step from a total lack of political orientation. In fact, Crihan (one of Ioan

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Huduiță's colleagues) explains that all of them are tired of the opposition and can not resist the temptation to play a political role" (Hudiță, 2003: 160). There were also other representatives of the National Peasants' Party that joined the Front, such as Grigorie Cazacliu (from Basarabia) (SANIC, Fund Direcția Generală a Poliției, file no. 209/1938: 8), I. Răducanu, I. Lugoșianu, V. Beldide and I. Sauciu-Săveanu (Dandara, 1985: 105).

The same situation was recorded for the representatives of the National Liberal Party, who asked the enrolment in new political party; among them, there were former leaders of the liberals that offered to join Carol II's ideas, by signing the registration requests. One can count Aurel Bentoiu, H. Aznavorian, Ion Inculeț, Alexandru Lapedatu, Ion Nistor (Dandara, 1985: 93-94), C. Teodorescu – vice-governor of the National Bank – (Hudiță, 2003: 160), V. Ciurea (Hudiță, 2003: 168), Victor Antonescu – ex-minister and Richard Franasovici – former ambassador of Romania at Warsaw ("România" from January 4th, 1939: 7); as a sign of solidarity with Victor Iamandi, all the national liberal group from Iași joined the National Renaissance Front (Dandara, 1985: 105). The newspaper "Romania" presented the information on January 4th, 1939, in an article titled "The Former Liberals from Iași Joined Together the National Renaissance Front" ("România" from January 4th, 1939: 7).

The registration of the former party members

After the significant leaders of the traditional political parties had joined the National Renaissance Front, the members from all over the country followed their examples, the Romanian authorities being obliged to draw up the lists with the members and to send all the data to the centre. Many documents from the archives underline the interest that the leaders of NRF had for attracting the former representatives of the traditional political parties of Romania. The authorities were interested not only in increasing the number of those that joined the single party, but also had a strong point of view regarding the weakening the local organizations of the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants' Party. This second concern came as a natural consequence of the information according to which some representatives of these two political parties, although theoretically dissolved, still had a big influence on the population, an influence that in some areas was used against the Front.

Although they were not as interesting as the members of NLP an NPP, the other representatives of the Romanian traditional political parties were put under observation. In connection with the political group led by Vaida-Voevod, in a report made by the Inspectorate of Regional Police from Chișinău, dating from December 21st, 1939 it was stated that "Mr. Luca Brândza, lawyer and supporter of Mr. Vaida, after coming back in Bucharest, declared that members of the former party of Mr. Vaida Voevod gave dispositions to support the enrolment in the new Front" (SANIC, Fund Direcția Generală a Poliției, file no. 209/1938: 7). Contrary to the information contained in the police report, it appears that the position of Alexandru Vaida Voevod, was one of rejection of Carol's political party. In this sense Victor Slăvescu noted in his diary on January 23rd, 1939: "Vaida spoke violently against the NRF regime and showed that the enrolments are actually under censorship – not voluntary adherences. The young men that are leading the government today (Călinescu, Ghelmegeanu, Andrei, Ralea, etc.) – wrote Alexandru Vaida Voevod – are those who have dismissed me from the National Peasant's Party for some ideas that they are defending in NRF today. To have a «renaissance front», something must have died? What died when all the old politicians are NRF leaders from

today?” (Slăvescu, 1996: 345). It is interesting that, exactly one year later, on January 23rd, 1940, Alexandru Vaida Voevod became the president of the National Renaissance Front.

The archive documents proof that the NRF leaders were interested in the political background of the new members of the single political party. The prefectures of the Land Olt sent to the central leadership of the Front, a document that included former leaders of various political groups, who had demanded the adherence to the royal political party, until February 12th, 1939. From the Dolj county there were reported 464 people who had been active in the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants' Party, “Georgist” National Liberal Party, the Party “Everything for the Country”, the National Christian Party, People's Party, the National Agrarian Party, as well as in the political groups led by Alexandru Vaida Voevod, A. C. Cuza, Alexandru Averescu or Constantin Argetoianu (SJAN County, Fund Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt, file no. 92/1939: 299-310). The table sent by the Gorj Prefecture contained only 31 persons, but specified that “these are the party leaders who had an intensive activity. The document also includes a significant number of Front members, former members of various political parties, who did not have a leadin position” (SJAN Dolj, Fund Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt, file no. 92/1939: 313). In Mehedinți county, until February 12th, there were registered 57 applications from former members of the traditional political parties (SJAN Dolj, Fund Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt, file no. 92/1939: 327-328), in Vâlcea County – 88 applications (SJAN Dolj, Fund Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt, file no. 92/1939: 345) and in Romanași the requestes were signed by 29 persons, “no former party leader from this county being registered in the National Renaissance Front” (SJAN County, Fund Reziđența Regală a Ținutului Olt, file no. 92/1939: 336).

A great importance was given by the authorities to the enrolment of the former Iron Guards members within the new political party; the legionnaires represented one of the major poles of opposition to the policy pursued by King Carol II, from the beginning of his reign. Influenced by events that took place less than three weeks before the royal party establishment – the assassination of the leader of the legionary movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and 13 other prominent members of this group – many representatives of the Iron Guard filed statements of adherence to the National Renaissance Front.

One of the first collective pledge of allegiance came on December 22nd, 1938 and it was signed by the legionnaires who had their mandatory residence in Vaslui (“Neamul Românesc” from January 4th, 1939: 3). Among those who signed the statement were Radu Demetrescu-Gyr – teacher and publicist; Ion Antoniu – lawyer; Constantin Zopp – teacher; Ion Diaconescu – journalist; Bucur Coriolan – doctor; prof. phd. Petre Antonescu. Although they had signed this statement, Mihail Georgescu from Pitești, Demetrius Gazdaru and Elijah Garneata (from Iasi), sent individual declarations of allegiance to the Ministry of Internal Affairs: Mihail Georgescu (“Neamul Românesc” from January 4th, 1939: 3; Dandara, 1985: 93); Dimitrie Găzdaru (“Neamul Românesc” from January 4th, 1939: 3); Elijah Garneata – (“Neamul Românesc” from January 4th, 1939: 3).

As a result of those letters of obedience sent from Vaslui, other legionaries declared: “The undersigned, having a mandatory residence, currently in the hospital «Gh. Mîrzescu» Brașov, we declare that we join the appeal and the declaration signed by our comrades from the camp Vaslui” (among the signatories there were Nae Ionescu, Stephen Palaghita, Ioan Dobre, V. Petrașcu, Alex. Vergata) (Dandara, 1985: 93; Hudiță, 2003: 160). On December 23rd, 1938, the members of the Iron Gurad, from the prison Chișinău declared their allegiance – “we will listen forever to the cry of our infinite faith in God, Homeland and the King” (“Neamul Românesc” from January 6th, 1939: 3). The newspaper

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“Universul” from January 1st, presented a statement of faith signed by some of the Guard leaders: Virgil Ionescu, Traian Cotigă, Mihail Polihroniade, N. Totu, Bănica Dobre and dr. Paul Craja (Hudiță, 2003: 180). They claimed that “every thought, every desire to make a political act, apart from the will and intentions of Your Majesty, is unknown to us. A King can alleviate suffering and he can cease the despair; therefore we appeal to King’s clemency” (Hudiță, 2003: 180).

Another individual letter of loyalty came from the legionnaire Sima Simulescu, political prisoner from Râmnicu-Sărat, who declared: “By God’s will, the recent events concluded by Corneliu Codreanu’s death put an end to the former legionary movement” (“Neamul Românesc” from January 6th, 1939: 3). The attitude of the Guard leaders was very bad received by the King’s opponents; C. Mihăiescu, disappointed by the confessions made by them in the press, and by the way they asked for King’s forgiveness, wrote: “I haven’t seen such a shame until today, especially from a group of men claiming that they will moralize the life of the country, making it as beautiful as the sun in the sky” (Hudiță, 2003: 171). Referring to the same actions made by the Legionaries, which he considered as a consequence of the threats coming from the leadership of the new party, Constantin Argetoianu made the following characterization: “a regrettable trick made by my friend Călinescu”(Argetoianu, 2003: 31).

On January 1st, 1939 a declaration of 19 students from the Iron Guard, sentenced at Cernăuți, was published in “Romania”: they emphasized that they “give up any political action harmful to the state”. Other 16 students were presented by the newspaper “Neamul românesc”, as the signers of statements of allegiance to the King; four of them wrote: “I promise from this moment on to become a devoted citizen of the laws of the country and to His Majesty, King Carol II” (“Neamul Românesc” from January 6th, 1939: 3). Coming from all over the country and from different leaders of the Iron Guard, the letters from the former legionnaires represented, for the sovereign an important step.

The period December 1938 – February 1939, when it was recorded a significant number of applications (over 3.5 million), was followed by a period of stagnation or, better said, a period of nearly no requests from the citizens. The National Guard commander, the general Petre Georgescu, stated in a report sent to the President of the Council of Ministers, on June 16th, 1939 that “the operation [the NRF enrollment] is almost stopped both in cities and in villages. A new registration is a very rare fact” (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 234/1939: 15-16, 62).

Even getting this “warning” from the General Georgescu, those who were leading the single political party did not take any measure in this regard. The things changed when, on September 21st, 1939, Armand Călinescu was assassinated by legionnaires. On September 23rd, 1939, the King Carol II noted in his diary: “«Je me suis effondré» [I fall] and cried in a terrible nervous breakdown all afternoon. I’m starting to really realize what an enormous loss for me and for this country is the disappearance of this man, a man that I could trust [...] I have rarely felt in the soul and in my mind a sense of so complete vacuum. They say that nobody is indispensable; of course, in most cases this is true, but here’s the exception that proves the rule” (Carol al II-lea, 1997: 229).

After the loss of the most devoted supporter of the royal political party, the Sovereign, who until then used to consult the Prime Minister in the decisions regarding FRN, was forced to effectively lead the single political party. In his diary, on September 24th, King Carol II sketched a difficult situation “beginning with today an era of our history has ended, an era that gave great hopes and on which I could rely that I can do great things, that I have a fruitful era of governance, with a man that, day by day, gained more respect

even from the worst of his enemies. What about tomorrow? What dawns will be opened for me and for the country? For the moment I only see nothingness [...] Today it's a danger both for the regime and for the monarchical idea". In a discussion he had with Gafencu, King Carol II, referring to Armand Călinescu, said – "Noone can replace him" – an expression that reveals in a categorical manner the importance that the politician Armand Călinescu had, for the new regime and also for the royal political party (Gafencu, 1991: 337).

Acting under the impulse of these facts, the Sovereign proposed on September 28th, after the brief and bloody governance of the general George Argeșeanu (Scurtu and Buzatu, 1999: 355-356), a government led by Constantin Argetoianu (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 85-86), in which he created two new ministries, the Organization of the National Renaissance Front, led by Constantin C. Giurescu and the Ministry of Propaganda, which was led by Alexandru Radian (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 87).

On November 24th, 1939, the King Carol II formed a new government led by Gheorghe Tătărescu (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 102-105), one of the politicians who had proved his obedience to the Sovereign. The next day, the new prime minister sent an order to the secretaries of NRF, order that gave a new push to the enrolment campaign: "In order to give the opportunity to enrol in the National Renaissance Front to those who until now did not succeeded, please ask your local town halls and local institutions to give you the NRF enrolment registers, because this action of bringing all the citizens in the National Renaissance Front is henceforth one of your prerogatives" (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 100).

Although it was far from the spectacular results of the first campaign of NRF enrolment, the one launched in the autumn of 1939 increased the number of members of the royal political party through collective adherence, such as those coming from the civilian personnel of the Ministry of Air and Marine (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 100); the National Society of Romanian Orthodox Women from Diciosâmartin, the County Târnava Mică (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 65); Sanitary Direction from Bucharest (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 88, 132-229, 243-244), or individual, as that submitted by the Christian missionary bishop for the Romanians from the unorthodox Western countries – Policarp Morușca (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 40) or the adherence submitted by I. Manolescu Strunga – former minister (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 50, 52). Individual applications also came from many lawyers, teachers, civil servants, but also from former judges or those who had held positions in the army and, at the time, were retired (SANIC, Fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii, file no. 167/1939: 41-49, 53-64, 66-87, 89-131, 230-242, 245-253, 259-311).

Another feature of the policy adopted by the government led by George Tătărescu was that of reconciliation, by which the executive wanted to be more opened to the former political parties, especially the Iron Guard (Sima, 2004). The leader of National Peasants' Party, Iuliu Maniu kept an intransigent position against the royal political body, explaining this new situation, in a letter sent to Constantine Argetoianu, in early November, 1939 (Bruja, 2006: 189).

Inaugurated at the end of 1939, the policy of reconciliation went hand in hand with the new single political party's reorganization strategy and the legal support to these new guidelines within the Front was given by Decree Law for National Renaissance Front

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organization, published on January 20th, 1939 (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 2/1939-1940: 8-26). At the same time with the legislative changes, some changes also occurred in the management of the Front – on January 23rd, Alexandru Vaida Voevod was appointed president of the single political party (Carol al II-lea, 1998: 53), Constantin Giurescu received the function of general secretary, and the first secretaries of the three main professional categories were Victor Moldovan – agriculture and manual labour category, Nicolae Cornăţeanu – commerce and industry and Petre Georgescu – intellectual department (the general Georgescu remained the commander of the National Guard) (Bruja, 2006: 194 ; Alexandrescu, 1998: 123).

Along with the royal political party attempts to reorganise itself, the next step was to attract the representatives of former political groups; the most receptive proved to be Legionnaires (Carol al II-lea, 1998: 72-73, 115, 135, 154, 188, 202-203). In this respect, an interesting document was entitled “The Confession of faith from the ex-members of the former Legionary Movement”, signed by 295 people (SANIC, Fund FRN, file no. 262/1939-1940: 1-2). On April 25th, 1940 it was proposed an amnesty for legionnaires; the legionnaires who emigrated towards the NRF in order to avoid being sent to prison, were thus able to return home (Prost, 2006: 206-207).

Conclusions

As it did not have its own militants, NRF had to recruit members and supporters from among the former politicians, representatives of the traditional political parties. Some of the politicians who migrated to the royal political party made this choice when the National Renaissance Front was established, some of them even signing the written request necessary for the establishment of the first Romanian single political party, became founding members of this political construction. Others politicians asked to join the NRF later, as it was the case of the Legionary Movement representatives, who were massively enrolled in the royal political party after the launching of the reconciliation policy.

This strategy, of attracting politicians that already had been members of the traditional political parties had a downside: most of those enrolled in NRF maintained their own political beliefs and the single political party, although listed as having more than four million members in just a few months of existence, was not fully supported by its own members.

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