



Anexa nr.6

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ
SCOSAAR

REZUMATUL TEZEI DE ABILITARE

TITLE: “Politics and Society in Romania (1866–1914). The Challenges of Modernization”

Habilitation domain: History

Author: C.S. II dr. LIVIU BRĂTESCU

ABSTRACT

The present habilitation thesis titled “Politics and Society in Romania (1866–1914). The Challenges of Modernization” represents a synthesis of my research carried out over the past two decades, after the defense of my doctoral thesis in 2007. Relying on the findings of the investigations conducted in recent years concerning the field of modern political life, but also on new areas of scientific interest adjacent to political life to which I have recently focused – memory and historical legitimization, civil society – this approach addressed the broader topic of the modernization process of Romanian society, using as indicators the reforms accomplished, the evolution of the political elite, the birth of associationalism, and others. The spatial and temporal framework of this thesis spans the period from the second half of the 19th century, when Carol's reign was established, to the end of the First World War, during which a new sociopolitical paradigm emerged. To the same extent, the space analyzed corresponds to the Old Kingdom, the provinces inhabited by Romanians and located outside the border being mentioned only tangentially, by reference to the connections of political actors or the institutions of the Romanian state with these areas, without proposing a separate analysis of their evolution for methodological reasons.

This work, submitted in order to obtain the title of doctoral supervisor, includes several studies that illustrate an introspection of Romanian political life for the period mentioned above and the emerging transformations, thus continuing the issues addressed in the doctoral thesis, which focused on Romania's foreign policy during the tenure of Ion C. Brătianu. In the years following the attainment of my doctoral degree, I conducted several analyses with the primary objective of identifying the actors involved and the mechanisms they used to achieve various aspects of the modernization process. For a better insight into these aspects, I first followed the manner in which certain leaders acted to outline currents in Romanian politics, highlighting the obstacles they encountered, their capacity to manage them, and the differences in their attitudes during periods when they were in the opposition compared to those in which they became governmental factors. All of the above were among the objectives of my research. The answers I identified to the questions generated by the particularities of this new field of study were also facilitated by several conclusions drawn while drafting my doctoral thesis.

During the research conducted, I sought to answer the question of the extent to which the modernization of Romanian society entailed only a series of legislative and

institutional transformations and changes concerning the economic and social status, or, on the contrary, whether it was a complex phenomenon with multiple defining elements. Evidently, they include the change in strategy adopted by those who constantly engaged in political activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The prominent political leaders from both ideological families successfully carried out their political struggle on two other levels, which are less studied. The first is that of legitimization obtained by invoking and evoking the historical past and bringing various historical figures to the forefront. Secondly, it is worth highlighting an interesting way of referring to the burgeoning Romanian civil society, which over time becomes either an ally or, depending on circumstances, a serious competitor for “supremacy” in the public sphere. The political class in Bucharest succeeds during the timeframe mentioned above, through various means of identifying as a successor of several figures who had already become legendary and through the manner in which it reprises diverse topics originating in civil society, to construct a veritable scenario of the power game through the application of which it ensures its continuity.

Another field of research that allowed me to explore new directions in Romanian political life, as noted above, was the use of historical memory for political legitimization and national construction. I was initially interested in the way in which, during the second half of the 19th century, a competition was outlined between tutelary figures in Romanian history, a symbolic competition carried out primarily through public monuments. The phenomenon may be considered of significant magnitude if we consider its entirety, and this is because political figures encouraged it, attempting, through initiating and managing it in a particular manner, to become its principal beneficiaries. Upon closely examining the developments in this direction during the Old Kingdom, I note that, alongside the heroes of Romanian history, recently deceased political figures also benefit from the same effort to memorialize their personalities.

If we accept this double meaning of the process of erecting as many public monuments as possible (i.e., public legitimization and direct contribution to the development of an identity), we may view the general European picture as a whole. We can thus see that, in fact, through what takes place in the Romanian space in this regard as well, we become integrated into a European trend manifested mainly in the second half of the 19th century. For this reason, in several studies, I attempted to capture the manner in which, in the process of constructing a collective memory and national solidarities, political figures and representatives of civil society take an active part, organizing various

acts of homage by using the image of specific historical figures. Evoking the past and providing models to contemporaries represent, in a real way, another facet of modernization.

Given that the two research directions suggested above and used to discover new realities of the evolution of Romanian political life (i.e., memorialization and Romanian associationalism) are not only very generous from the perspective of the possible approaches but also in terms of the temporal dimension under which they may be examined, I considered it necessary to focus only on some examples, both regarding the elements that help evoking the historical past and its heroes, and regarding the types of civil associations that emerged in the Romanian space after 1866. For this reason, in my texts, I focused on the inauguration of statues featuring tutelary figures in Romanian history, such as Stephen the Great, as well as on the societies and civic associations involved in political life, to which the Romanian political elite contributes to a great extent.

My objectives during the research carried out over the last years included several clear ones, namely: outlining the general atmosphere in which Romanian political life unfolds after 1866, capturing the main existing currents and their leaders, viewed from the perspective of the families into which they are born, the education they receive, and not least, their public commitment, whether reformist or rather conservative. Therefore, two of the studies integrated into this thesis refer to the modern political elite, one of them also offering a concrete case study, dedicated to the political figure of Vasile Lascăr. I was equally interested in highlighting the primary topics of Romanian public debate and the way in which political figures relate to them, as well as those who begin to appear and manifest themselves accordingly in ever greater numbers in civil society, such as universal suffrage and the agrarian question. This fact determined me to include an analysis of the evolution of the agrarian question north of the Danube.

Despite appearances, Romanian political life during the period under consideration is not dominated only by political confrontations or public dissensions that are more or less scrutinized by the press. Beyond the well-known separations, the groupings and regroupings within the major forces, the Romanian political elite is engaged in a genuine debate about the modernization of Romanian society, and the reactions are naturally different. In reality, the major parties face several significant challenges. Some arose from the pressure exerted by a part of Romanian society, whether articulated or not, in various forms of organization aimed at achieving certain socioeconomic transformations. Other challenges arose from the parties' own internal modernization, as a new generation

gradually emerged after independence, one that thought and acted politically differently from the 1848 generation. During the research conducted in this direction, I noticed that the new generation also alters the approach to political struggle. It no longer takes place only in the classical field of electoral campaigns, of the usual contests from the parliamentary rostrum, or through partisan press. A transition is made to another level, namely a symbolic one, in the form of staging a repetitive spectacle with national coverage – the inauguration of statues. Beyond the role they play within another action that we might call the construction of national identity, everything that happens around the implementation of a project, such as the inauguration of a public monument, also becomes a form of public legitimization for those involved in its realization.

The thesis is structured into three parts, in accordance with existing procedural requirements. The first part, “Scientific and Professional Achievements”, comprises six chapters for better coherence. The first chapter refers to the scientific and professional path taken after obtaining the PhD in History in 2007. It includes an introductory section, followed by the presentation of the most relevant research results from recent years. The six included studies fall thematically within the context of the political modernization of Romanian society, yet from different perspectives: those of political actors in the face of the reform process, the new mechanisms of legitimizing the political elite, and the interference with the associative environment, as demonstrated by the studies listed below:

The “Peasant Question” in Romania and Its Facets (mid-19th century–1914). Between Legislative Initiatives and Civic Actions; ‘Shadow’ Reformers of Modern Romania: Vasile Lascăr; Stephen the Great in 1883. An Object of Admiration and Political Disputes; Politics and collective memory at the beginning of the 20th century. The Rediscovery of I. C. Brătianu in 1903; The Political Elite and the Development of the Romanian Associationism. Objectives and Mechanisms (late 19th century and early 20th century); A Life in the Service of a Cause. V. M. Kogălniceanu and His Era. Another chapter of this first part includes, alongside the conclusions of my studies, a description of the professional path of the undersigned, detailing the scientific interests, publications, and projects developed since 2007.

A second part of the thesis, in accordance with the regulations in force, includes a career plan projected for the period after attaining the title of doctoral supervisor in the field of History. To exemplify this principal direction, I have inserted an unpublished study titled *Vintilă C.A. Rosetti. Memory as an Arch between Generations (Destiny and the Political Testament of the 1848 Generation)*. This analysis continues my previous

investigations into the political elite, providing a new perspective on the paradigm shifts within the political class and the emerging mechanisms of the modernization process. Through this study, I have pointed out how the Romanian political class responds to the new economic and social challenges of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the perception and integration of a leader of Romanian civil society who, in order to succeed in his public endeavor, resorts to all possible strategies, including that of invoking and valorizing family heritage. I opted for what is commonly referred to as a case study, which I completed by utilizing sources from the National Archives or the collections held by the National Library's Special Collections Department.

The third part of this work is dedicated to outlining a selective bibliography, which includes essential historiographical contributions regarding the issues of constructing national identity by recovering the past and evoking the tutelary figures of Romanian history, and the establishment of Romanian civil society toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. I have thus included works that address topics of Romanian or international political history, as well as references to historical sources hosted by the National Library, Special Collections, the National Archives of Romania, or the County Archives.