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## Article

# King Carol II's Authoritarian Regime as a Precursor of the Communist Totalitarian Regime in Romania

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**Abstract:** The present article seeks to analyse the period 1938-1940, when the Romanian interwar democracy was suspended through the promulgation of the anti-liberal Constitution of 27 February 1938. The Constitution abolished the political parties and trade unions, replacing them with new institutions established according to royal decrees: the royal single party, known as the National Renaissance Front (Frontul Renașterii Naționale, FRN) and corporations of workers and employers, respectively. Starting from that moment, the regime, through its representatives, made recourse to a nationalist rhetoric directed against the democratic parliamentary system. Moreover, a cult of personality of the monarch can be identified in the speeches of the royal corporatist 'parliament', as well as in the doctrine of FRN and the Nation's Party (its successor), but also in the regime's youth organisation, 'The Country's Sentinel' (Straja Țării), whose First Sentinel was the authoritarian monarch himself. Thus, the cult of personality of Carol II represented one of the sources of inspiration for the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and for the leaders of this totalitarian regime.

**Keywords:** Romania; National Renaissance Front; the Country's Sentinel; cult of personality; authoritarian regime; Carol II; corporations

## 1. Introduction

Carol II's cult of personality started to be built beginning with large gatherings on stadiums, where slogans such as 'Carol II, King of Romania', 'The Great Sentinel', 'The Great Patriot' were choreographed with children's bodies. Institutions established later by Nicolae Ceaușescu, like the 'country's falcons' (*șoimii patriei*) and even the pioneers, were actually inspired by Carol II's sentinels. In his childhood, Ceaușescu knew of the existence of the Country's Sentinel (*Straja Țării*). Additionally, ovations such as 'The Country's Redeemer' or 'The Helmsman' also existed during Carol II's reign. The shadow of King Carol II's cult of personality thus haunted the future communist leader. Consequently, when Ceaușescu proposed that he be elected First Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Manea Mănescu uttered the famous phrase identifying him as "the genius helmsman, the most beloved son of the Romanian people, exceptional personality of the contemporary world, militant for the cause of justice and peace, and of socialism. And thus the cult of personality was cultivated in a paroxysmic manner. It was the supererogation of the activists who were courting his favour" – as the historian Ioan Scurtu claimed in an intervention in the newspaper *Jurnalul Național* (The National Journal).<sup>1</sup> The representatives of the Carol II's authoritarian regime were also prone to such hyperbolic exaggerations in their speeches glorifying the monarch.

As of December 1938, all youth between 7 and 21 years of age were automatically enlisted in the Country's Sentinel. The supreme commander of the organisation was the king himself, suggestively titled 'The Great Sentinel'. The slogan of the 'sentinels' was "Faith and Work for King and Country". With the establishment of the Country's Sentinel, the ways in which the 8<sup>th</sup> of June was celebrated

<sup>1</sup> Daniela Cârlea Șontică, *Carol al II-lea l-a inspirat pe Ceaușescu* (Carol II inspired Ceaușescu), available at: <https://m.jurnalul.antena3.ro/vechiul-site/old-site/carol-al-ii-lea-l-a-inspirat-22081.html>, accessed 10 June 2023.

changed, although its meaning did not. The 8<sup>th</sup> of June was the Day of the Restoration, celebrating the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1930, when the Romanian Parliament proclaimed Carol Caraiman as King of Romania under the title of Carol II. The military parades that used to take place in front of Cotroceni Palace were replaced with performances by 'sentinels' on the ANEF Stadium: marches, sporting events, and choreographies. Their main purpose remained the same: to glorify the sovereign and his deeds.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. What Was the Sentinel?

The single youth organisation in Carol II's Romania resembled, in its form, the structure of the Legionary Movement (Romania's interwar fascist movement), as Carol hoped, by enlisting the country's youth in its ranks, to subordinate it. The desired effect was to distance the young from the influence of extreme right ideology. The organisation of youth was of a paramilitary type, but the state's ideological presentation of the Country's Sentinel instead highlighted the fact that "the institution of the sentinel does not seek to provide military training, as this is the prerogative of the pre-military training provided by the institutions of the Army", as an article published in The Encyclopaedia of Romania about the organisation of Romania's youth stated.<sup>3</sup>

The organisation of youth under the Country's Sentinel was further elaborated in The Encyclopaedia of Romania. Through the Decree of 3 October 1937, this was established as a single organisation of Romanian youth, which included the cadres of the previous Office of Education of Romanian Youth (*Oficiul de Educație a Tineretului Român*, OETR), incorporating it under the name of *Straja Țării*, as a grandiose institution that was part of the general organisation of the Romanian state. The Country's Sentinel was led by a command structure consisting of: a) *The Supreme Commander*, His Majesty the King; b) *the Commander of the Country's Sentinel*, named through a high Royal Decree following a proposal of the *Supreme Guiding Council*, who became irreplaceable once appointed. *The Permanent Committee* was also appointed by the Supreme Guiding Council, and consisted of three persons from among its ranks, who formed, in addition to the commander of the Country's Sentinel, its *Consultative Committee*.<sup>4</sup> *The General Headquarters of the Command* consisted of directorates, inspectorates, and services deemed essential to the central administration of all institutions and associations making up *Straja Țării*.<sup>5</sup>

In a memorandum addressed to King Carol II, the Commander of the Country's Sentinel, Major Teofil Sidorovici, discussed different models of youth organisation, talking about his desire not to politicise this youth organisation and showing that this had not been implemented in any of the countries he had analysed. The very presence of Sidorovici at the head of the Sentinel, however, sheds light on the fact that the youth organisation was militarised, by appointing an active officer of the Romanian Army as its leader, just as the military wing of the single party, the National Guard, was also militarised through the presence of another officer at its helm, General Petre Georgescu.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose pursued by the regime through the doctrine underpinning the Sentinel organisation was to create a *new man*, similarly in this respect to legionary and communist ideologies. Through the education of youth, they were meant to become accustomed with "an ordered life, the

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<sup>2</sup> Cătălin Ion, *Cultul personalității în vremea lui Carol al II-lea - Ziua Restaurației* (The Cult of Personality in the Time of Carol II – Restoration Day), available at: <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/cultul-personalitatii-in-vremea-lui-carol-al-ii-lea-ziua-restauratiei>, accessed 10 June 2023.

<sup>3</sup> *Enciclopedia României* (The Encyclopedia of Romania), Vol. II, București: Imprimeria Națională, 1939, p. 489.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>6</sup> *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale* (Central National Historical Archives, henceforth ANIC), Fond Frontul Renașterii Naționale (Fund National Renaissance Front, henceforth FRN), File 6/1939-1940, p. 238.

development of the discipline of the mind and the steeling of bodies".<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, through the education of youth, the 'new regime' also sought to deliver it from the influence of politics. Consequently, Romanian youth had to know how to handle the 'enemy attacks' of *politicianism* (a Romanian term only approximately translatable as 'politicking') and parliamentarism from a young age. Through the care of the *High Founder of the Sentinel*, the instruction of youth was undertaken on the basis of a programme that was based on the teachings of the Church. Just as the Country's Sentinel, the doctrine of the National Renaissance Front (FRN) also had the Church as its fundament, with the single party proclaiming itself to be a spiritual movement. For the Country's Sentinel, the state sought to undertake the instruction of youth in the form of a national education laying the basis of life as a young sentinel, by developing a cult for traditions, for heroic deeds, for the fatherland, the national flag, and the King.<sup>8</sup>

The 'Law for the Organisation of Youth and its Use in Case of Mobilisation' was issued in 1940 and specified that "all youth (boys between 7 and 18 years of age and girls between 7 and 21 years of age) was obliged to serve the Fatherland, under the orders of the Country's Sentinel, [...] its purpose being that of contributing to enhancing the potential of the nation. To this effect, the Country's Sentinel will organise, train, and use this youth, as a function of the age, aptitudes, capacity, and training of each [of them]".<sup>9</sup>

According to this law, Romania's youth were to be used for light work projects: as additional labour in general public works and industrial work requiring limited specialisation, as well as additional labour contributing to fulfilling the plan in agriculture.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, youth would also ensure the necessary personnel for the good functioning of state institutions and of the passive defence structures inside the country. "Youth had the mission of acting as additional labour in sanitary institutions and of contributing to social works and national solidarity".<sup>11</sup>

The General Headquarters of the Country's Sentinel also issued an analytical programme for the training of sentinels to work for the national Telephone Society. For this type of training, "sentinels, preferably from industrial high schools who had certain technical aptitudes" were preferred. At the Telephone Society, female sentinels were trained in different technical matters: for instance, there were "instructions for the operators, the sentinel on duty, on how to *record calls and of the operating procedure*; they also *had to operate a call in the central and to monitor calls when there was no end signal*"<sup>12</sup>. The instruction of rural youth was undertaken at the only telephone in a village, i.e., the one at Town Hall.

Nicolae Iorga, in *The Diary of the Last Years, 1938-1940*, identified the Country's Sentinel as a type of royal *militia*. Thus, "one of the leaders of *Straja Țării* talked about seizing the 'Astra' and the 'League' so as to join them. They are now also issuing a compulsory stamp with the face of Queen Elizabeth, who had nothing to do with them. In fact they are working towards the *King's militia*. Colonel Filitti is asked to accept to become Chief of Staff. The available officers are called. At the head of the Sentinel are men like the crook Strelicovschi, a former abusive director at Sinaia, and another one, from Ardeal, who is burdened by heavy sins. The morality of the camps is in question with such leaders".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 489.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> ANIC, Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri (Fund Presidency of the Council of Ministers, henceforth PCM), File 172/1939, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ANIC, Fund PCM, File 262/1939, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Jurnalul ultimilor ani 1938-1940. Inedit* (The Diary of the Last Years, 1938-1940. Unpublished), București: Editura Humanitas, 2019, p. 139.



The militia of the single party was represented by members of the *Intelligence and Statistical Service*, as well as the *Study Circles*;<sup>14</sup> the idea behind it was inspired by fascism. In Italy, for example, the fascist militia identified itself with religious faith. Emilio Gentile, defining fascism as a political religion, reached the conclusion that “fascists often compared the party to a church or a religious military order”; consequently, “fascism did not hide the fact that its totalitarian policies were intended to create within the political sphere a type of organisation similar to the Catholic Church”.<sup>15</sup>

The Carlist party seized any element that could be of propagandistic benefit to it in order to strengthen the notion of the fatherland. That is why “The National Renaissance Front represented the *Romanian Act of Dacian connaturality of the Monarchic Revolution*”.<sup>16</sup> The wooden language in evidence here is thus not only a relic of the communist era in Romania; instead, we can identify it already in the clichés that made up the bases of the FRN doctrine. The National Renaissance Front, according to its official doctrine, was a party of social revolution. It claimed to be revolutionary in nature. The revolution brought about by the establishment of the new regime was the work of the King, who was considered the regime’s ‘chief revolutionary’ and was proclaimed the supreme head of the single party. The single party was intended to be one that would restore to the homeland the pure and honest spirit that had been seized by the former political parties, thus restoring also the old solidarities: “The FRN wanted to bring together in Parliament a single nation that would be put at the service of a single common goal, namely that of serving the homeland”.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The 1st of May: Source of Inspiration for Carol II and Ceaușescu

According to historian Ioan Scurtu, until Ceaușescu’s coming to power, the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party did not say much about the May Day demonstrations, which had been previously organised during the interwar period by Carol II’s regime. A congress of the corporations was held on 1 May 1939 at Sala Aro, today’s Cinema Patria, where Prime Minister Armand Călinescu and Labour Minister Mihail Ralea were in attendance and delivered speeches. This was followed by a parade in front of the Royal Palace, where the King greeted the cheering crowd. A document drawn up by the *Siguranța* – the interwar intelligence service – mentioned the name of Nicolae Ceaușescu, who had shouted “Long live the Popular Anti-Fascist Front! as the motorcade passed him. And, from this incident, Ceaușescu ended up concluding that this demonstration was a great anti-fascist demonstration, against dictatorship”.<sup>18</sup>

The political speeches of Prime Minister Armand Călinescu at the first congress of the corporations on 1 May 1939 display the same type of rhetoric aimed against the former politicised trade unions as against the former political parties making up the pre-1938 democratic system. The Prime Minister’s rhetorical questions and answers are suggestive: “What has this corporation law achieved for the workers? It has achieved the fact that instead of the divided working class that we had yesterday, today we have a united workforce. Instead of a workforce that yesterday was fighting in the service of political interests, today we have a workforce that works in the service of its professional interests”.<sup>19</sup> This law gave concrete substance to the expectations of the electoral law and

<sup>14</sup> Florin Grecu, *Construcția unui partid unic: Frontul Renașterii Naționale* (The Building of a Single Party: The National Renaissance Front), București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2012, pp. 132-133.

<sup>15</sup> Emilio Gentile, ‘Fascism as Political Religion’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 25(2-3), 1990, p. 239. See also Vlad Gafița, *Originile ideatice ale totalitarismului de dreapta. Repere ale teoriei viral-metamorfice* (The Ideational Origins of Right-Wing Totalitarianism. Reference Points of the Viral-Metamorphic Theory), Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Vlădescu, *Frontul Renașterii Naționale, Originea și Doctrina* (The National Renaissance Front, its Origins and Doctrine), București: Imprimeriile Statului, 1939, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Șontică, *Carol al II-lea l-a inspirat pe Ceaușescu*.

<sup>19</sup> Armand Călinescu, *Noul Regim* (The New Regime), București: Imprimeria Centrală, 1939, p. 148.

the direct requirements of the Constitution. Only those who actually performed a trade, being registered in one of the three Chambers (agriculture and manual labour, commerce and industry, and intellectual occupations) were eligible to register on the electoral lists of the National Renaissance Front.

The corporations were the instrument through which the new regime exercised control over workers and trade unions. Mihail Ralea, Minister of Labour, considered that “with this law, the *Romanian country* is experiencing a *revolution*; at the moment when it establishes a party, the profession becomes the only social means of preventing class struggle and the struggle between individuals, in order to create a common ground of collaboration, achieved through the professional collaboration of the people whose duty is to work and fight”.<sup>20</sup> The law sought a simplification of trade union life by bringing all workers together into a single organisation. In democratic countries, the concentration of trade unions was carried out by the majority confederation; in authoritarian countries, the concentration of trade unions is carried out by the state, Ralea argued. In Italian corporatism, “both federations and national trade unions are grouped into confederations, according to the major branches of the economy: agriculture, commerce, industry, liberal professions, plus credit and insurance. There are two confederations: that of workers and employers and that of the self-employed”.<sup>21</sup> The main activity of the confederations was to ensure the coordination of the member associations.

The King did not want to establish a totalitarian regime, but a militarisation of state institutions was undertaken in the Kingdom of Romania between 1938 and 1940. The regime was intended to be one of order and demanded from its members and legionary sympathisers alike obedience to the King and to the form of organisation of the state. The cult of the ruler existed insofar as the image of the King came to symbolise order and power in the state. Both of these aspects were intended to be respected with the help of the legislation in force, and individuals or organisations that deviated from the official line of the regime and party were subject to reprisals. Accusations of acting against the state order were primarily levelled against the legionaries, who were accused of advocating political assassination and the change of both Romania’s political regime and its system of international alliances.

#### 4. How was the Cult of Personality Enacted in the Royal Parliament?

The affinities of the politician Constantin Argetoianu – member of the National Renaissance Front, senator in the corporatist parliament and President of the Mature Corps of the Senate – for authoritarian and totalitarian structures antedated the establishment of the corporatist parliament. Argetoianu was an admirer of the authoritarian regimes of Italy, Germany, and Portugal, an attitude demonstrated as early as November 1937, when, in an audience with the King, he advocated, as the only solution, “for a totalitarian government, a government of order and authority, a government beyond any elections or club tyranny”.<sup>22</sup>

In his article ‘On the Margin of a Balance Sheet’, Constantin Argetoianu assessed that “in order to defend the country, the new regime had to do in a few months, expensively and hastily, what the

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<sup>20</sup> Mihail Ralea, ‘Lămuriri asupra proiectului de lege pentru recunoaşterea breslelor’ (Clarifications on the Draft Law for the Recognition of Corporations), *Desbaterile parlamentare, Adunarea Deputaţilor* (Parliamentary Debates, Chamber of Deputies), Session of 10 July 1939, *Monitorul Oficial* (The Official Gazette) 10, Bucureşti: Imprimeria Centrală, 1939, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> George P. Alexandrescu, *Corporatismul mussolinian* (Mussolinian Corporatism), Bucureşti: Tipografia Ion C. Văcărescu, 1940, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismul în România (1930-1940)*, Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004, p. 184.

Old Regime had not been able to do, cheaply and slowly, for so many years".<sup>23</sup> The royal dictatorship was seen as a much less costly project than the pre-1938 democratic regime. Argetoianu's pro-dictatorial inclinations were known as early as the 1930s; he was of the opinion that "if the political regime installed in the spring of 1938 was able to bear the fruit it did, in the midst of a Europe shaken to its foundations, if it was able to keep the country's finances and economy intact in almost catastrophic international circumstances, then this is ample proof that *this was the regime we needed!* Let us thank King Carol II once again for giving it to us!"<sup>24</sup>

The Romanian political class did not fully share Argetoianu's opinion. Iuliu Maniu expressed his opposition to the establishment of the new authoritarian regime, as well as to the abolition of political parties and the creation of the single party. Argetoianu's praise of the regime and his acceptance of it was of a personal nature and followed his appointment by King Carol II as a senator and President of the corporatist Senate.

Armand Călinescu, a jurist by profession, disagreed with the definition of the regime as dictatorial. He tried to respond to the contestations regarding the nature of the regime in place since 24 February 1938 and formalised by the Constitution of 27 February 1938. According to him, "instead of demagogic tolerance, which yesterday concealed the sacrifice of state interests in favour of personal ones, we have put authority in the service of the State's interests. Consequently, the restoration of order, the strengthening of the idea of authority, the restoration of the rights of the State was the first task that the new regime had to perform".<sup>25</sup>

The historian Nicolae Iorga was also a critic of the new regime, of the Sentinel of the Country, and of the National Renaissance Front. Thus, in his 1938-1940 diary, Iorga made some intimate notes about what the ministerial monarchy under King Carol II actually represented. On 8 June 1939, the politician and historian noted the following: "very successful 'sentinel' presentations in the morning. [In the] afternoon, very many minorities [i.e., Jews] from the sporting societies 'Macabi' and 'Liedertafel' pass by... The first prize-winner is a boxer. They came from Vadul Crișului, with the girl who gave the King water from the jug to drink, rural gifts".<sup>26</sup>

During the parliamentary debates in the Senate, Nicolae Iorga recalled a letter he had addressed to the President of the Council of Ministers, Armand Călinescu, who had become Prime Minister after the death of Patriarch Miron Cristea, in which he "admires the courage with which he put his life and his whole situation in danger when he undertook the coup d'état, which he would not have been able to undertake".<sup>27</sup> This intervention of the historian Nicolae Iorga suggests that the architect of the coup was not only the King and his camarilla, who had wanted such a regime, but also the political actors who had participated in the 1937 general elections, and who had created a precedent that was previously hard to imagine for any party in government in Romania, namely losing the elections they had organised. On the other hand, in the same parliamentary debates, Nicolae Iorga clarified that he did not share the idea that all "parliamentarians were playing a part in a rigged play", but that the act through which the new regime had been established was a "spontaneous" one. The government

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<sup>23</sup> Constantin Argetoianu, 'Pe marginea unui bilanț' (On the Margin of a Balance Sheet), in *Zece ani de domnie ai M.S. Regelui Carol al II-lea, Organizarea Politică, Juridică și administrativă* (Ten Years of His Majesty King Carol II's Reign. The Political, Juridical, and Administrative Organisation), Vol. I, București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1940, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Armand Călinescu, 'Cuvântare cu privire la rezultatetele noului regim și la convocarea noului parlament' (Speech about the Achievements of the New Regime and the Convocation of the New Parliament), *Dezbaterile parlamentare, Adunarea Deputaților, Session of 28 June 1939, Monitorul Oficial 7*, part III, București: Imprimeria Centrală, 1939, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Iorga, *Jurnalul ultimilor ani, 1938-1940*, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> *Dezbaterile parlamentare, Adunarea Deputaților, Session of 28 June 1939, Monitorul Oficial 7*, part III, p. 9.

was undertaking a revolutionary transformation, one in which the historian was proud to have also participated, “in a coup d’état [...] which brought us here”.<sup>28</sup>

The single party had an armed wing called the National Guard. The role of the “National Guard was to be summoned to maintain close contact with the popular masses, having the duty of guiding, directing, and remedying them at an early stage against agitators who demanded that the people join foreign organisations, contrary to the interests of the country”.<sup>29</sup> Nicolae Iorga, a royal advisor, also expressed his views on the role of the National Guard, considering that “the Front, with its National Guard, is the best thing that can be done for the monarchy, and the Crown must find mobilisation in other forces than that of the masses mobilised by who knows what demagogue. The country supported the Crown through the Front in the first place, but the Crown must rest on a free Parliament”.<sup>30</sup> Nicolae Iorga’s critical attitude towards the regime and the party led by King Carol II can be noted in the historian’s position on the need to rebuild the regime by reviving the institution of the parliament and reintroducing freedom of expression, which had been suspended by the decree that proclaimed the state of siege and that had introduced censorship, among other provisions.

After being elected President of the Chamber and after his speech affirming the freedom of assembly, Iorga noted in his diary that he was informed that his speech had angered the government. When he asked Urdăreanu about the audience he had requested with the King, the latter replied by mentioning his speech, in which “those who wish them harm can see an attack on the Front. Iorga replied that the ‘Front’ can remain a moral support for the King, but not act as a master of Parliament. It is better for the Crown to have a free Parliament than a small group of men who, on the pretext that they serve the King, actually seek to ward him...”.<sup>31</sup> Iorga subsequently told the King that the Parliament is “unconstitutional, but this must be covered between the monarch, responsible to his dynasty and to history, and a Parliament subject to those blows of passion which an entire nation then pays for. The Front was established for a temporary action, it was the recruiting office of national commitments, a sort of assembly of notables, like that of royal France in 1787, which, if it had succeeded, would have obviated the need for the Estates General and hence the Revolution. It is true that in the appointments that were made half were undeserved. The electoral decree, which will be published on 10 May, must give some explanations for this”.<sup>32</sup>

Nicolae Iorga also wrote a letter to Armand Călinescu denouncing the single party, arguing that there can be “only one single party, the nation. If, considering this as a simple electoral office, he would only point out the incompatibility, as his civic duty, it would be acceptable. Thus, rest assured that you are preparing great hardships which violence will not be able to master. After he arrives in Paris, Tătărescu foresees more trouble if ‘a Parliament’ is named with the help of the Front. He would not even take part in its proceedings. He wrote to the King, who is beginning to waver on the issue of the Front. Tătărescu recommends to the King the resumption of parliamentary life and a ‘national ministry’ of respected notables”.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. The cult of Personality as Visible through Clothing

<sup>28</sup> Desbaterile parlamentare, Senatul (The Senate), Session of 9 June 1939, in *Monitorul Oficial* 2, part III, București: Imprimeria Centrală, 1939, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Depunerea jurământului comandanților de Gărzi FRN din Ținutul Bucegi’ (The Swearing of the Oath by FRN Guard Commanders from Bucegi County), *Universul* (The Universe), 56(123), 8 May 1939, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Desbaterile parlamentare, Senatul, Session of 28 June 1939, *Monitorul Oficial* 9, part III, București: Imprimeria Centrală, 1939, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Iorga, *Jurnalul ultimilor ani, 1938-1940*, p. 174.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 172.



The cult of personality was developed along the lines of the one in totalitarian states, with this feature visible even in clothing. With regard to the wearing of the royal uniform in the corporatist parliament, Iorga wrote that the king accepted the uniform in the sense desired by the historian, but he agreed to send him a letter to this effect.<sup>34</sup> Also, he mentioned that “the peasants laugh at the uniforms of the ‘Front’ and women say they would not dress like that for anything in the world”.<sup>35</sup> The uniform, irrespective of its colour or appearance, is an outfit that expresses conformity. Petre Andrei, Minister of National Education in Armand Călinescu’s government, pointed out that “after spending a considerable amount of money on clothing, he now wears the uniform of the Front, of the single party, and the regime seems to expressly want to photograph him in the blue uniform of the National Renaissance Front”.<sup>36</sup>

## 6. The Cult of Personality in the Foreign Press

Laudatory speeches about the new regime were not only provided by the Romanian politicians of the time; they were also to be found in articles in the foreign press paid for by Bucharest. *Le Soir*, a liberal newspaper published in Brussels, quoting the British press, delivered a positive account of the new government’s actions and of the political situation in Romania, stating that “the King has been forced to bring about a change of regime, and we can only support the success of his enterprise, with the hope that he will find an opportunity to establish parliamentary rule as soon as possible”.<sup>37</sup> The article argued that the new authoritarian regime in Romania was not only desired by the political class in the country, but was also welcome and supported by the Allied powers as well, who needed as much stability as possible in the Kingdom of Romania. The relationships between the governments in London and Paris and the royal dictatorship in Romania had been at their best since the very moment when the new regime was established.<sup>38</sup> The press in France and Britain warmly welcomed the coup d’état of February 1938, considering “the personal regime of King Carol II a guarantee that German interference here could not be met with a stronger and more consistent opposition in the future”.<sup>39</sup>

A year after the promulgation of the Constitution that had formalised the regime, bestowing political and legal legitimacy upon it, *Le Soir* recalled the reason for the suspension of the 1923 Constitution and the promulgation of the new one, namely “the confusion of powers in the state, the emergence of collective groups, the disruption of governmental actions, which had paralysed the national effort and progress. Thus, instead of the absolute right of the parties that had fostered danger and violence, public opinion had demanded the application of the principle of collective independence that expressed internal solidarity and allowed the creative categories of the nation to develop their effort towards a national contribution”.<sup>40</sup>

## 7. In Lieu of a Conclusion

Lilly Marcou points out that “*Straja Țării* dates back to 1934, the year in which it was founded, as a youth organisation through which the King wanted to inculcate in young people a taste for patriotic values... the organisation brought together young people from all social classes and allowed them to fraternise, bypassing the closed character of the Romanian society of the 1930s. The same

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> Petre Andrei, *Memorii și istorii* (Memories and Histories), ed. by Sorin Bocancea. Iași: Editura Institutului European, 2022, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> ‘L’état de siege’, *Le Soir* 68, 3 March 1938, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* (Under Three Dictatorships), București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1970, p. 154.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Les résultats sur la nouvelle constitution’, *Le Soir* 59, 28 February 1939, p. 4.

egalitarian spirit also animated the National Renaissance Front, the only political organisation that opened its doors to all citizens and which the vast majority of politicians joined".<sup>41</sup>

Oliver Jens Schmitt notes that "the youth organisation *Straja Țării* is a counter-model of the Legionary Movement and the Legionary Brotherhoods of the Cross, which was intended to mobilise the population in the sense of the 'totalitarian state' envisioned by Carol II".<sup>42</sup> The collaboration between the single party and the single youth organisation was made visible on the occasion of various royal holidays. *Straja Țării* eventually ceased its activity with the establishment of the military regime of General Ion Antonescu, and, on 1 October 1940, the Legionary Movement, having come to form the government, confiscated the assets of the youth organisation. Moreover, what the authoritarian regime under the patronage of King Carol II had tried to do, i.e., to educate the youth of the country in a royalist spirit and against legionary ideas, would be redefined as the legionaries' task, namely to educate and guide the youth of the country in the new Legionary State that had been proclaimed on 14 September 1940. Teofil Sidorovici, the Commander of *Straja Țării*, was accused of embezzling money from the Sentinels' funds and was placed under house arrest; he would later commit suicide. According to Cristian Manolachi, Sidorovici "failed the test of integrity and was unable to justify his considerable fortune to the investigating commissions, and at the moment when he was to be arrested, he ended his life with a bullet".<sup>43</sup>

From a scientific point of view, given the topic under consideration, it should be noted that a specific archival fund about *Straja Țării* does not exist at the National Central Historical Archives in Bucharest. However, certain files about it can be found either in the 'Royal House Fund' or the 'King Carol II Fund'. The novelty of the present research consists also in discovering that the archival fund about *Straja Țării* was managed after 6 September 1940 by the Ministry of the Inventory of Public Assets, and that, presently, certain files are inventoried under the 'Presidency of the Council of Ministers Fund'.

Thus, the single party, the National Renaissance Front, and the youth organisation of the royal authoritarian regime, the Country's Sentinel, were both laboratories of totalitarianism, representing the prelude to the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu (1941-1944).

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<sup>41</sup> Lilly Marcou, *Carol al II-lea al României. Regele trădat* (Carol II of Romania. The Betrayed King), trans. and ed. by Elena Zamfirescu, București: Editura Corint, 2015, p. 312.

<sup>42</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Biserica de stat sau biserică în stat? O istorie a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române 1918-2023* (State Church or Church Within the State? A History of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1918-2023), București: Editura Humanitas, 2023, p. 139.

<sup>43</sup> Cristian Manolachi, *Revolverul Arhanghelului. Mișcarea legionară și mistica asasinatului politic* (The Revolver of the Archangel. The Legionary Movement and the Mysticism of Political Assassination), București: Editura Humanitas, 2023, p. 189.