

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES

PhD THESIS

THE FAR-RIGHT IN ROMANIA:
THEORETICAL APPROACH, MESSAGE, MEMOIRS

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR
PROF.UNIV.DR. NICOLAE PĂUN

PhD STUDENT
ANTOANELA-PAULA MUREȘAN

Cluj-Napoca
2013

Abstract

This study entitled “The far-right in Romania: theoretical approach, message and memoirs” has a major importance in current historiographical research given that the interest in this part of history has evolved a meaning that cannot be challenged.

Thus, in terms of historiographical investigation is very important to identify the origins of this phenomenon that marked the existence of Europe, to observe and analyze the Romanian version of the phenomenon, starting with the Legionary Movement leaders and making an arch over time, reaching those who were imprisoned because they were part of the Movement.

In order to confer a pronounced level of originality and novelty of the paper, our main purpose was to investigate the most relevant data. We must also mention that the research topic was restricted, both spatially and chronologically.

The main objective of this thesis was to analyze and evaluate the contribution of message of far-right leaders and the memoirs of former legionaries to present history in a manner as close to the truth. To achieve this goal, we followed five objectives that corresponded to as many chapters of this thesis.

Primarily the thesis aimed at presenting the main papers on the far-right on the Romanian territory.

Secondly, we undertook a comprehensive investigation of the international context regarding social, political and economic changes in the early twentieth century. The international context of this period proved to be extremely complicated, but in its absence it would be difficult

or impossible to understand the situation of Romania in relation with the other European countries. Certainly, such an analysis provides an overview of social, political and economic transformations.

Thirdly, we identified the above mentioned transformations in Romania, making a lucid analysis of the speech of Legionary Movement leaders. The deep analysis of the Iron Guard discourse attempted to highlight the extent to which the Romanian far-right keeps the international features or it adapted to the Romanian features. The man who left his indelible mark on the Iron Guard movement (L.A.N.C, Archangel Michael's Legion, Iron Guard, and All for the Country Party) was Corneliu Zelea Codreanu – the Captain. An ultranationalist, he was the ideological champion of the far-right. In his vision, the institutions of the state in which he lived were corrupt at all levels. In their turn corrupt, its leaders were interested only in personal gain. There was an abysmal gap between the political – ruling or not- class and the Romanian nation. Codreanu organized his discourse around several key-words: anti-Judaism, anticommunism, pro-Christianity, anti-humanitarianism, anti-petty politics, anti-cosmopolitanism, anti-democracy. The Iron Guard state he wished to establish was to have another type of Romanian citizen. It was high time to fashion a new man. His features would be: discipline, obedience, sacrifice, diligence, and faith in God; a man characterized by deeds not words. As concerns the nation, it should stay pure because any racial mixing leads to annihilation. To be Romanian meant to proudly declare it, to be ready to sacrifice yourself for the country and to have faith with all your heart in Jesus Christ. Among Iron Guard members, death was in fact a metaphysical requirement.

Codreanu persistently asserted that the new man could not be created by a political party. Only a “movement”, a “school” was able to fulfill the Iron Guard aspirations. The education of the masses in this spirit would implicitly lead to the emergence of a new state. His doctrine was rather

grounded on emotion than on reason and the Iron Guard movement did not actually have a political agenda. Their “agenda” was to forge a movement and then to use it to defeat their opponents. In less than 15 years since its emergence, Codreanu’s movement became the third political power in the state. The aforementioned vision was shared by the other Iron Guard members presented in the thesis, Ion Moța, Vasile Marin, Horea Sima, Polihroniade, and Cristescu, and their discourse sounded the same. Irrespective of the fact that their message was written or spoken, their ideas were alike. Therefore, this movement preaching nationalism stuck in religious dogmas and advocating the annihilation of political opposition was a self-devouring movement, inexorably doomed to perish.

Chapter four analyzes the effects of communism instauration in Romania after the Second World War. This chapter proved to be necessary for our scientific work due to the fact that it helped us to better understand the new context of political, social and cultural aspects of the communist regime.

In the last chapter we have undertaken an evaluation of the contribution of the memoir writers to rewrite the history of Communist Romania and we made a comparison with the Russian concentration camp, *The Gulag Archipelago*. In this part of the research we tried to focus on the elements that may provide information on their experience and their universe of expression within the Romanian camp system. Thus, the message of Legionary Movement leaders and the memoirs of the Legionaries will complete historiographical works on the subject by identifying patterns that are found in the analyzed writings.

We examined the writings of Dumitru Banea, Ioan Muntean, Dumitru Bordeianu, Grigore Caraza and the priest Liviu Brânzaș, and chiefly focused on several leitmotifs, patterns recurring in most of their works, revealing their side of the truth: motivation of their testimonies,

arrest, detention centers, diet, physical and psychological pressures, relationship with the prison guards, reeducation, relation to the outside world, the prison as life experience.

Our research was in fact a scrutiny of human condition in a totalitarian regime. Several conclusions could be drawn from the examination of the aforementioned topics: various motivations for bearing witness (some thought it was their duty and honor to publish their memoirs because they were part of the Movement and experienced that period, others believed that giving testimony was a token of love for the future generations of this country); they were arrested because they were members of the Iron Guard, because they pledged allegiance to their country and people, because they were proven so-called anti-Semites or anticommunists; the detention centers were accurately described (for precision we have compared their notes with official sources); in general, starvation was one of the main forms of torture used in the process of reeducation in the communist prisons; beating and corporal punishment were the main *mechanisms of torture* inflicted by the authorities on the detainees (the totalitarian regime pushed the human being toward a very thin line between life and death by repeated beatings; unimaginable physical abuse was accompanied by psychological torture). Consequently, physical and verbal violence was a constant of communist justice, the prison guard was the detainee's key link to the system, and the latter's relation to the outside world was severely controlled and, when necessary, censored by the prison authorities (the detainees could receive packages and letters but the size of the letters, which were actually postcards, was strictly limited, and of the four letters a year the prisoner had the right to receive two were taken by the authorities; most of the books that the detainees were allowed to receive had to agree to party ideology, which meant that their content had to be Marxist). In 1949-1952, reeducation was implemented in communist Romania at the detention center of Pitești. The stake of reeducation was, diabolically, man's *soul*. What the torturers wanted was the prisoner's soul, degraded (first), devastated, and torn apart. By giving up

his inner freedom (the only one left to him), personal convictions and beliefs, with no identity, the detainee became less than an animal. Completely dehumanized, he was no longer able to know who he was. With no moral landmarks, he turned into a tool, became himself a torturer, and found a distorted reason to live in perpetuating the evil in an unending vicious circle of which he was a part. The method employed by the investigators to find out what they wanted was grounded in a sinister logic: after the prisoner was given several rewards, he was deprived of food and, starving, he was ready for “confession”, which the torturers cruelly called “to manifest solidarity”. Some resisted terror, but most of all gave in to a greater or lesser extent under the extreme pressure of the reeducation methods. They fell prey to the methods of torture, to their own fears, and to their own conscience. Denunciation as a weapon was one of the greatest terrors in the newly established world: fear of the people who were close to you, fear of your own beliefs, fear to think. The detainee’s religious beliefs were the most important aspect in prison that helped him overcome his pain. Faith redeems and triumphs.

The Gulag Archipelago, Solzhenitsyn’s book, exposes the attitude of a system towards its citizens during Stalin’s rule, 1923-1953. A comparative analysis of the two systems revealed several illuminating conclusions.

A first difference between the two systems consisted in the fact that people were detained in Romania because of their membership in a political organization, while in the USSR this aspect was irrelevant. In both systems, starvation was one of the most efficient methods of torture. Whether physical or psychological, the aim of these practices was to exterminate the detainees. The representatives of the authority (prison guard, investigator, state attorney, judge) served, either correctly or fanatically, a totalitarian regime. The Russian forced labor camp system developed methods of torture much tougher than the Romanian one. But irrespective of

system, thousands of people were affected by the repressive measures of the two totalitarian regimes.

At the beginning we have defined what left and right means in the political spectrum, then various forms of extremism. In the literature in the field, the political arena is usually viewed from the standpoint of the Left-Right paradigm, terms coined during the French Revolution, initially meaning the physical position in relation to the President. But it is quite difficult to accurately delineate far-right and left ideologies because there is no universally accepted definition.

Starting from Michael Winock's idea that there are four types of left extremism, *Insurrectional Conspiracy*, *Terrorism*, *Revolutionary Party*, and *Mass Revolution*, one may conclude that the far-left evolved gradually, that it was divided, and all those categories had in time generated starting points for the moment when it was established as a political regime in the beginning of the 20th century Russia. Until its implementation in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the left manifested itself only ideologically. The Enlightenment witnessed the blooming of left ideas; its representatives composed works against social inequities, superstitions, religious intolerance. So the 20th century was the moment when it manifested itself in practice, which meant: establishment of political dictatorship and secret police, assassination of opposition leaders, setting up of labor camps, forced collectivization, suppression of individual freedom, violation of freedom of expression and right to property. According to François Furet, the roots of left ideologies were economic, following the rise of the bourgeoisie, and they made early inroads in France and Russia. After World War II, the far-left was "exported" from Russia and legitimated by the establishment of the communist regime in countries like Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic.

As concerns the far-right, the second half of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of right-wing extremism in France with the end of the monarchy. *Action française* is regarded as the first European far-right movement. But the beginning of the 20th century marked the rise of Nazism and fascism in Germany and Italy, far-right ideologies that triumphed in these two countries. One can notice that both Nazism and fascism resorted to the same methods: elimination of political opponents, suppression of freedoms, establishment of secret police, violation of separation of powers, abolition of political parties, complete subordination of the individual to the state, administrative cleansing.

Romania was no stranger to ideological phenomena manifested in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, which arrived in our country in the garb of more or less faithful copies of the European ideas. Such developments bear witness to the persistence of Europe's cultural influence.

Antinomies like „Orient-Occident”, „conservatism - modernism”, „culture and civilization” were to be found chiefly after World War I, when the clash between evolutionism and revolutionism acquired new connotations.

We have attempted at offering a fresh perspective on the topic by focusing on discourse analysis, which was an essential means for identifying the main features of the leaders of the Iron Guard movement. By employing this method, we believe we have opened the way for illuminating comparisons.

Another innovative aspect of our thesis is the examination of the memoirs written by Iron Guard detainees. Such an analysis casts a new light on the presence and nature of their message, stemmed from the years of detention in an oppressive totalitarian system.