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PhD THESIS

DIMENSIONS OF POPULISM IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

- SUMMARY -

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Introduction

Beyond taking into account the normative and ideological projections regarding populism that have become more prominent in the last half century, as well as the empirical analyzes oriented to its phenomenal manifestations (populism as movement, as ideology, as political regime, populism represented at the level of parties or organizations that show their influence on the political stage, populism as attitude, populism as expectation identifiable in the social body field, discursive populism or populism crystallized in the political steps of some leaders, all of these "representative" figures), the present paper aims to circumscribe the latter's presence in contemporary Romania. Using populism in the sense of an analytical tool, our research aims to identify how the presence of its elements in the Romanian society, on different dimensions, has affected, over time, the development and consolidation of a democratic political system. Focusing on the *dimensions of populism in contemporary Romania*, the conjecture we hold is that, at the level of the fundamental pillars of the post-communist Romanian society - the *political*, the *intellectual* and the *media* pillar - an populist ideological projection can be identified (present in different degrees, of course, from one political leader to another, from one party organization to another, from one media institution to another and from one intellectual group to another), which has substantially affected the evolution of the democratization process. Superimposing the deficit originated in the absence of a democratic tradition which the Romanian society inherited from the pre-communism, the alternating (when dominant, when recessive) presence of populism has determined, until now, a delay in the process of developing and consolidating the democratic regime. Basically, we argue that, after a stage of liberalization marked by violence, over which, to a certain extent, the one of the transition has overlapped, Romania has not yet succeeded in ensuring the pragmatic-institutional functionality of a consolidated democracy. Identifiable, first of all, at the political level of the post-communist social space, this situation favored populism, becoming, from an ideological perspective, an undeniable presence in the discursive, party-electoral, media and even intellectual atmosphere of the very recent past. Therefore, we consider that, especially in the last decade, coming out of the strictly political framework, populism is present both in the media and in certain manifestations of public intellectuals. Therefore, we aim to highlight during the research the way in which the populism in contemporary Romania manifested itself from a political, intellectual and media angle, in an attempt to identify and understand the causes that have generated negative effects of

democratization, as well as the reasons for which the Romanian political life does not qualify as an authentic democracy.

Given this direction of the investigation, we intend to draw the main political-ideological landmarks of populism, placing the *political dimension* of this phenomenon in the context of the democratization process, later one trying to present an analysis regarding the formation of the post-communist elite and political class, political parties and relevant leaders, in order to focus subsequently on *intellectual populism* and *media populism*. In other words, we are trying to detect the manner in which populism (which we circumscribe as an ideology characterized by *trans-doctrinarism*, *processualism* and *democratic anti-proceduralism*) has imposed itself as a push factor on the democratization process. Asserting that it indicates the main dysfunctions of the Romanian democracy (described as such, as we intend to argue, illegitimately) populism is, in our opinion, one of the essential causes of the configuration of a dysfunctional democracy, a true mark of the type of society we now have. That is, a *populist society*, dependent on the temptation of easily identifiable authoritarianism in its evolution from the last century. With regard to the latter, a simple mathematical calculation indicates that, for the hundred years between 1918 and 2018, for 52 years the Romanian society has experienced three authoritarian regimes (1938-1945) and a totalitarian regime (1945- 1989), and for 48 years (1918-1938 and 1990-2018) deficient forms of a democratic regime. Starting from this "schematization" of what represents the contemporary history of the Romanian society, *the main objective* of our investigation aims to outline an explanatory and comprehensive framework for the democratic dysfunctions of our political system, which we place in direct connection with a certain type of cultural-political mindset construction, to the achievement of which, over the last century, a whole series of politicians, representative intellectuals from the Romanian public space and the media institutions have contributed. *The central hypothesis* that we have in mind at the beginning of our research is that, if the establishment of a strong social attachment to the democratic values was and continues to be a difficult one in the Romanian society, the essential cause of this situation is the temptation exercised by a specific form of populism, having authoritarian veils, whose "structures of opportunity" have been consolidated over time against the backdrop of a structural mannerism that has as its core a strong ethno-nationalism and a paternalistic-dependent political culture, whose main elements are anti-individualism, anti-democracy and providentialism.

We intend to verify the sustainability of this hypothesis through an interdisciplinary analysis, but oriented mainly from the perspective of political science, highlighting the coordinates of political populism, those of the intellectual populism and, respectively, those of the media

populism, considered to be intersecting dimensions that are mutually reinforcing one another, by drawing and reinforcing, through specific forms of manifestation, dominant or recessive under temporal relation, the framework of a populist society.

From a *methodological* point of view, the present research involves both a normative and an empirical approach. From a normative perspective, we propose an incursion which will highlight the elements of the populist phenomenon, as identified by the researchers, and which will allow, at the same time, the configuration of a conceptual identity of populism, in the ideological sense of the term. In this direction, we consider that, first of all, a genealogical approach is needed, in the idea of defining the paths that populism has evolved, in its different forms of manifestation. We do not follow an approach with historical valences, but one that points to the referential aspects of a political phenomenon that we consider to be marked by an extraordinary social and historical adaptability. From this point of view, we opt for a contextual orientation analysis, which will allow to underline the *radial character* of populism. The task we undertake, therefore, is to review the causes of the occurrence of the phenomenon and to argue that the political reality described by the concept used to express it is one that is constantly "reinventing" itself, from a social-historical context to another. There are, of course, certain elements that fundamentally mark populism, regardless of the manner and context in which it manifests itself, as there is, of course, the always invoked relationship with "the people". This "ideological fetishism", however, does not belong exclusively to populism, since the ideologies of democracy, as well as those of totalitarianism, do not hesitate to claim their call to the people. The suggestion we introduce, from this perspective, refers to the fact that we are dealing with a "foldable" phenomenon on the existing political-social frameworks at a certain historical moment, a phenomenon that, while preserving certain land elements, adapts them to the present reality, at the same time projecting a *polemical interpretation* of this reality. We consider that, for this reason, the genealogical approach is able to emphasize the maintenance of the populist "instrumental" from the moment of its 19th century manifestations and to the forms that populism is currently manifesting. In trying to apply this normative and analytical projection on populism on contemporary Romanian society, we will consider a particular treatment of each of the three announced dimensions, by highlighting the specific coordinates to political, intellectual and media populism. From this point of view, we will use tools such as comparative analysis (to highlight how the political elite was formed in Romanian post-communism), case study (to illustrate an intellectual pattern of populism specific to the Romanian society, but also the existence of an alternative model) and discourse analysis (both in the cases of politicians, public intellectuals and

journalists, respectively). Other tools that we put into work in the context of this paper come from research areas complementary to that of political science, such as sociology of intellectuals or media analysis. In regard to this issue, we consider that the methodological approach we propose is one that is capable of highlighting, from a scientific point of view, aspects that, until now, have not occupied the foreground in the researches allocated to populism in Romania, the majority being concentrated, exclusively, on political populism. We consider that this can be one of the elements of originality of this work, interested in highlighting the manner in which the most visible and impactful form of populism, namely the political one, is enhanced by the intellectual and journalistic manifestations of populism. Another element of originality is given, in our opinion, by the fact that the evolution of the Romanian political system during the last century, from the moment of the institutional formalization of the modern Romanian state and to the one of fulfilling three decades since the exit from totalitarianism is analyzed from the perspective of populism and its various forms of manifestation, identifiable on each of the dimensions mentioned here. During the research, we will add to these the working definitions we propose, the identification of certain sub-types of political populism, of the intellectual and the media one (without, however, being able to cover them all in the context of the present work), as well as providing explanatory models for the three dimensions of populism in contemporary Romania.

Chapter I. Ideological-political landmarks in the analysis of populism

In the first chapter of the paper we try to show that the analytical reconsideration of populism is relevant to the political theory as it operates on two different levels: empirically we can use an instrument to explain the forms of manifestation of current politics (among which populism itself, with its multiple facets, represents one), and in the normative aspect we can use a tool which can help us understand why the dysfunctions visible in the contemporary democracies favor the emergence of ideological projections of populism. To achieve this goal, we propose a different way of conceptual articulation of the ideology in general, relying on its positive meaning, and later on we focus on the particular ideologies, including populism. Thus, we use conceptual analysis and textual interpretation proper to normative political theory to be able to capture both the characteristics that formally bring populism closer to established ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism or socialism, and those that make it a distinct particular ideology. Not accidentally, the first chapter of the paper follows this heuristic path: in the first section we discuss the conceptual relationship between *ideology and*

populism, in the second we stage the arguments in favor of the *positive reconsideration of the ideology*, in the third we suggest the possible conditions for the *analytical reconsideration of populism*, so that in the last section we can characterize populism definitively by referring to what we consider to be its *trans-doctrinal status*, a status that gives populism a *procedural aspect*, which allows its ideological flexibility and the extraordinary capacity for contextual adaptation. All of this allows us to define populism as a *particular ideology of a trans-doctrinal aspect, assumed or not at the party level, which projects a political-social space of Manichean orientation, in the name of a unilateral definition of the "people", which it opposes to the representatives of institutionalized politics (so-called "elite") and which aims to regain "sovereignty" under the conditions of economic, social, political and organizational adaptability of a procedural nature*. Starting from the combination of the two concepts - *ideology* and *populism* - in the light of the negative meanings assigned to them, we aim to bring to the attention a theoretical-political perspective whose suggestion is not to support the "positivity" of the populist phenomenon or of the term that it expresses it, but its recovery precisely in the interest of the foundation of democracy, a process which we know today is a matter that pertains to every aspect of daily life in a democratic society. Taking into account, on the other hand, the positive reconsideration of the ideology, we approached populism as a specific type of social construction of reality, realized through an attempt of "equivalence", in the name of "the people", of the importance of some demands made in social space, by appealing to "popular subjectivity" and by establishing an "internal border" between "us" and "others". Thus articulated from an ideological perspective, we have shown, following Ernesto Laclau, that populism becomes synonymous with politics itself. In order to capture the components of populism, we have argued that it has a minimal ideological resource, beyond his various forms of empirical manifestation. However, this ideological resource does not have its own doctrinal core. We have specified, in this sense, that the ideological core of populism is a cross-doctrinal one, which means that, in its case, things are not the same as those of the structured ideologies of modernity, liberalism, conservatism and socialism, which had, *ab initio*, a doctrinal corpus that has manifested itself with importance both in the field of political theory and in that of economic theory. Modern ideologies translate into the meaning of the public the complex ideas contained in their own doctrines and, in addition, they exhibit - and today, as in the past - the programmatic, actionable character. Populism also plays a role of a "translator" from an ideological perspective, except that, unlike structured ideologies, it does not have its own doctrine. In other words, behind its minimal ideological core there isn't a "populist doctrine", understood in terms in which we understand liberal, conservative or,

respectively, socialist doctrines, but an ideological mix consisting of elements taken from these doctrines, according to social, economic, cultural-political or organizational context. From this point of view, we have emphasized that *populism is a cross-doctrinal and procedural ideology*. Populism has a trans-doctrinal character because, on the one hand, it lacks, as we have already mentioned, its own doctrinal body, which is not the case for established ideologies; on the other hand, populism can, to the same extent as it takes on doctrinal elements specific to other ideologies, to align to the value core of the latter. In this direction, the idea we have set forth was that the taking of elements typical for other ideologies can make populism compatible with any other ideology, in the context of the existence of certain "structures of opportunity". In such a situation and depending on the factors of social, cultural-political, economic or organizational nature existing in a given community, we can deal with either an *ideological recalibration effect*, either an *ideological imitation effect*. In the first case, the other existing ideologies within the social framework are reconfigured both at the level of the axiological core and at the level of the discursive horizon of their representatives, whether we are talking about leaders or political organizations, so that they can respond to the challenges involved by the presence of populist ideology. In the second case, a representation of the symbolic elements typical to the populist ideology can be taken over by the representatives of the other ideologies, also at the structural, attitudinal or discursive level; this takeover opens up to the populist ideology the gates of access to the public market of the respective community on other channels, sometimes much more credible, than those available when the other ideologies recalibrate themselves. Taking over doctrinal aspects that do not belong to them in an original way, "juggling" with the utopian-mythological elements existing at the level of the social imaginary of any community and adapting itself, when it has the opportunity, to the ideological context of a given society, populism is in a permanent process of self-constitution, a process that can take different forms, depending not only on the spatial or temporal coordinates, but also on the social, cultural-political, economic or organizational ones. From this point of view, we consider that populism can be subordinated, as a particular ideology, to its own analysis of an *integrated theory of ideology*, highlighting not only its political characteristics (normative or empirical in nature), but also those of socio-anthropological nature, epistemological or discursive, so that subsequent research can aspire to the goal of in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

Starting from these theoretical assumptions made in the context of the first chapter of this work, we set out to apply such an understanding of populism, of its identifiable forms of manifestation in contemporary Romania, from the formal constitution of the modern

Romanian state to the present. From this point of view, we considered that relevant for our analysis is the hypostasis of populism from a political, intellectual and media point of view, so we tried to identify the main characteristics of the three dimensions of populism in the Romanian society, considering that they are interconnected and that they are mutually reinforcing one another, through the virtue of the existence, in the social field, of a structural Manichaeism, having as its core the ethnic nationalism and on which a political culture of paternalistic-dependent orientation has crystallized, whose main elements are anti-individualism, anti-democracy and providentialism. We have argued that, within this specific framework of a populist society, characterized by the lack of a democratic tradition and the temptation of authoritarianism, the establishment and development of an authentic democracy were marked by difficulties and dysfunctions, a fact that can be observed in both pre-communism and post-communism times. In both historical periods, both the political elites and the representative leaders, as well as public intellectuals or journalists exhibited, in varying degrees from one case to another, populist-oriented behaviors and attitudes were not at all favorable to the articulation of a democratic public and political space. The effects are, as we have tried to demonstrate, noticeable in the present also.

Chapter II. Coordinates of political populism

In the second chapter of the research we intend to highlight the importance of some landmarks for an analysis of the Romanian political populism that will allow emphasizing the temptation of the authoritarianism existing in our political culture and in the social practice subsumed therein. From our point of view, it is a political culture *symbolically* and not *instrumentally* oriented, which allows the reproduction of a tradition of the democratic deficit, which has as its basis a structural Manichaeism whose core is a particular type of nationalism, namely that of ethnic orientation. The benchmarks we are considering aim to highlight the impact of this type of political culture on the level of parties and their leaders in post-communism, from the perspective of articulating the political life, values, attitudes and behaviors carried out in the public space during the democratization process. In this regard, we are dealing, in the first section of the chapter, with the manner in which it was generated and the way in which the political elite of the Romanian post-communism evolved, considering two directions: its contribution to the democratization process and the way in which it influenced the functioning of the institutional mechanisms necessary for a democratic architecture. For a better understanding of the situation we call for a comparative analysis,

reflecting the evolution of the post-communist system, from the perspective of the formation of elites, the democratization process and the establishment of institutional mechanisms, in Romania and Bulgaria. We consider that, from a certain perspective, the Romanian populism is somehow "atypical" or "deviant", in the sense that it has evolved, mainly, *within* the political system, being "traditionally" embedded in the social structure. More precisely, in spite of the transition from one type of regime to another, from that of pre-communist "democratic mimicry" to post-communist totalitarianism and, hence, to the fragile post-communist democracy, it found itself in the Manichaeic construction of the reality promoted by the main representatives of the political class of the different periods of time, following the pattern "we" versus "them" and, always, "on behalf of the people", the latter being, most often, signified in an ethnic sense. In the post-communist period, the representatives of the political elite manifested subtypes of this populism, when they did not combine them. Thus, some leaders relied on "opportunity populism", whether they were holders of political power or were in opposition, while others promoted "anti-system populism". If the first ones invented entities by reference to presenting themselves as "rescuers" (talking, for example, about the "new world order", such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor, about the "wicked system", such as Traian Basescu, or about the "parallel state", such as Liviu Dragnea), the others tried to become actors of the existing political system by negative positioning against it (and some also succeeded for a short period of time, illustrative being the case of businessman George Becali, respectively that of journalist Dan Diaconescu). At higher or lower doses, the public discourses, attitudes and behaviors of these leaders reproduced on the political stage the essential elements of the paternalistic-dependent political culture, namely collectivism, orientation against democratic procedures and authoritarian temptation, as well as providentialism.

These are the reasons why, in the second section of this chapter, what concerns us is to evaluate the general framework in which the Romanian political class evolved into post-communism time, taking into consideration the articulation of the political pluralism, the configuration of the parties and their ideological orientations, as well as how they recovered a populist tradition that represents a cultural-political link between pre-communism, communism and post-communism. Continuing the analysis, the third section of the second chapter includes the concern for presenting the process of recruiting and training the political leaders in the Romanian post-communism, insisting on their populist temptation to personalize the political life, which determined, from our point of view, the outlining of their status as "locomotives" for the political projects they animated, having more or less electoral

success. We consider that all the problems dealt with during the chapter offer the possibility of presenting an integrated vision, so as to allow both explanations regarding the coordinates of the political populism in contemporary Romania and a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. In this regard, we have shown that, based on the cleavage of "communists" - "anti-communists" and of the overlapping, "autochthonists" - "pro-western", the political camps quickly became post-communist, generating contradictory public discourses, marked by a logic of permanent conflict, an agonizing logic that the society had to passively receive, most of the citizens not being, in the background of a precarious civic education, affected by totalitarianism, having the awareness of the necessity of political involvement. In this context, the process of creating the new political class of post-communism was unfolding, a class whose members did not have, in their great majority, the benchmarks of democratic politics, being neither willing nor listening to the few voices - and inaudible in general awkwardness - belonging to personalities who began to assert themselves as public intellectuals. In fact, most of them related themselves to the props of the imaginary and idealized "interwar democracies", contributing, only at an unconsciously level, to the generation of intellectual resources for the post-communist environment of populism. In their turn, as part of civil society, the mass media have succeeded in working in favor of democratization and to some extent mold the elements of public and political discourse in a democratic sense, without, however, granting a particular attention to the role of citizens' participation in the process of democracy building. Starting from such a reality, we tried to sketch the trajectory of the post-communist political class in the context of pluralism, to highlight the positioning of political parties from the perspective of the ideological orientations observable in the Romanian space, to then explain how their inheritance was recovered at their level, which surpassed the temporal and political regime limitations, as well as the status differentials of those involved in a process of reconstruction of the contemporary Romanian society, which promised, at one point, that it would succeed in joining the path of a consolidated democracy. As such, we reproduced the manner in which the elements of populism have been displayed in the post-communist political space by both the representatives of power and those of the opposition, both by the strongly institutionalized parties, some purportedly democratic, as well as by those who designed consciously populist-nationalist programs. We have considered that, in different forms, each of them has made its mark on the evolution of Romanian post-communism, either by practicing a "democratic mimicry", either by feeding certain collective fears in order to be able to instrument them in an electoral manner, either by establishing imaginary borders of "us" - "them" and thus polarizing the society, or by contributing to the

democratization of the society either, on the contrary, by hindering it. What we found is that, from one period to another, almost all political parties and most of their leaders have resorted, in a dominant or at least diffused form, to discursive and action elements specific to the populist register. And, even though the analysis of populism represents, in contemporary Romania, a problem of little interest, it is no less true that populism, especially in its ethnic-nationalist form, has subsisted in the collective mind of our society, even if only in a recessive form. The tendency to become dominant in the public space could be recorded especially in the last decade of post-communism, the main signal being given from the political class when the discourse and the decisions taken in the name of the "people" were combined with another element that we can consider it defining for the Romanian society, namely the Manichaeism one. At the same time, we have argued that the path of our modernity illustrates that the difficulty of establishing a democratic tradition has been doubled by the presence - in political, intellectual and media discourse - of a particular form of nationalism which, in many cases, has acquired xenophobic and anti-Semitic accent. In contrast to the type of nationalism that evolved, starting in 1780, in the western-European space, one of *civic* character, in Romania, as in the neighboring countries, the favorite form of nationalism had an *ethnic* fiber fabric. Ethnonationalism manifested itself in a moderate formula when, for example, it set out to identify the profile of the "national human being" (an abstraction with myth-metaphysical, obviously of fantasy), but also had extreme sideslips, especially when it was combined with anti-Semitism or orthodoxy, or both at the same time. Put in the mirror with the exceptionalism that constitutes the backbone of this form of tribal nationalism, the image of otherness was designed, from this perspective, in order to justify all the failures of the Romanian society. Ethnonationalism crossed the second half of the nineteenth century and broke into violent form in the interwar period, to be restored to the formula of national Stalinism in the second half of the twentieth century, being reinvigorated immediately after 1989 and resized in a "sovereignty" formula a few years after Romania's integration into the European Union. Regarding its discursive and attitudinal presence in the post-communist period, we have noticed that this formula of "nativist populism", as the political scientist Michael Shafir called it, initially had a marginal coloration, systemically installed at party level through vectors such as the Party of National Unity of Romanians (PUNR) and the Party of Great Romania (PRM) in the first decade of the democratization process (being combined with xenophobia and anti-Semitism), experienced a period of recession from the perspective of poignancy in the second decade of the transition and in the context of the European integration process, tending to regain ground - this time including in the area of mainstream

parties, as is the case of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) - over the last few years. The re-establishment of the mythological context of nationalism, including that of the extreme right, meant, after 1989, both the discursive continuity of the national-communist trivial statements, as well as the revision of those specific to the inter-war right extremism. What is interesting is that both the "democratizers", usually politicians and public intellectuals who supported the Western orientation of Romania, as well as the marginal heirs of the ethno-nationalist tradition of fascist orientation, have become - albeit in different ways - the captives of the idea that the interwar can be recovered in the meaning of a founding moment of post-communism. Basically, against the backdrop of axiological and ideological confusion from the beginning of the post-communist transition, both categories contributed to shaping a founding myth for a society that, coming out of totalitarianism, did not know where it was headed. And for the first, and for the others, the founding moment was no longer the "revolutionary" - considered to have been "seized" by the representatives of the new power - but was in the need to re-establish a historical link between the still-undeserved present and a "glorious" historical past, whose natural course had been broken in 1945. Thus was born the mythology of *interwar pre-communism*, a narrative that received political significance thanks to the specific speech of the representatives of the "historical parties", while being ethically valued both by the representatives of the newly established civic-intellectual mainstream, as well as - in another register - by the vectors of extreme nationalism. Of course, the recovery of the interwar, either in the idea of a "paradise" of democracy and culture, or in that of the "national rebirth" under the flame of royal fascism, legionary or towards Antonescu, can be interpreted as a product of a mechanism of historical compensation. Although understandable from a socio-psychological perspective, this vision does not cancel the fact that the interwar itself was a period that involved political and social attitudes of totalitarian extraction, even though the latter did not have the impact of their own communist dictatorship, nevertheless manifesting themselves in social practice by implementing the temptation of authoritarianism. Coming back to present, we consider that the necessary historical recovery has not benefited from honesty, at the level of the public space, on the political, intellectual and media dimensions (other, therefore, than the academic dimension, even though there are some "historical thinking schools" tributary to ethnonationalism) (*id est* critical spirit), but it was made on a mythological background to the consolidation to which all the great mythical complexes identified by Raoul Girardet contributed. In this game competed, only apparently paradoxically, the form of tribal nationalism, with orthodox-fascist accents, from interwar and national-communism visible *in nuce* in the Gheorghiu-Dej era, after the withdrawal of Soviet

troops in 1958, and promoted by the national regime of Stalinism of Ceausescu between 1965 and 1989. At the political level, in the first phase of the post-communist transition, xenophobic nationalism was formally instituted through the emergence of parties such as PUNR (initially the National Union Party of Romanians in Transylvania) and PRM (Great Romania Party). In a diluted form, the ideological elements of national Stalinism were, however, also found in the case of the Democratic Front of National Salvation (FDSN), which later became the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), today the PSD (Social Democrat Party). Also explained by the entry into the political space of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), the existence of the first two political groups mentioned above represented, during more than two decades, a permanent contamination of our public space by appeal to hate speech and incitement to violence specific to extremism. As a leading party, PRM managed, in the context of the 2000 presidential elections, to propel Corneliu Vadim Tudor in the second round. Especially after 2004, both groups experienced a major process of deconstructing the electoral capital, becoming, in time, insignificant. This does not mean, however, that discursive manifestations of extreme orientation were gone. On the one hand, they have been diluted in the form of populism, being taken over, in different degrees and accents, by both political parties and meteoric structures, such as the People's Party-Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD), the New Generation Party - Christian Democrat (PNG-CD), the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR), the Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L) or the People's Movement Party (PMP), as well as by the established parties (such as the PSD or the National Liberal Party). On the other hand, we have noticed that extremist manifestations, in the racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic direction, are found in a formal non-institutionalized environment, such as that of groups claiming to be legionary or those of orthodox origin, which are developing dangerously in the direction of religious fundamentalism. Present especially in the virtual environment, they are also various small groups or characters whose manifestations often gain accents, such as those that the writer Dan Alexe calls "Dacia lovers" or as, for example, the actor Dan Puric, has become a kind of "guru" of a kind of mystical Romanianism that is encouraged by the media and that combines the narodnicism with the religious nominalism, resulting in a neo-Legionary discursive mixture. We have also pointed out that, although less visible, there is a left-wing populism in Romania, whose resuscitation has become noticeable especially in the last decade, with the configuration of groups of intellectuals interested especially in economic and social subjects and which are not ideally found in party programs that assume their socialist or social-democratic identity. The two types of extremism, the most prominent of the right, the

narrowest of the left, having formal or informal presence and varying degrees of manifestation, meet today, diluted by reference to their origins, in the ideological intersection of populism.

To this populism, which manifests itself, from an economic perspective, respectively a nationalist one, on the left-right ideological axis (and not only at the level of institutionalized parties) could be added, in recent years, what the political scientist Michael Shafir identifies as "anti-corruption populism", circumscribed especially in the area of those who assume the role of "directors of conscience" of civil society, being supported by opposition parties, such as PNL and the Union Save Romania (USR), and claiming their legitimacy through reference to the anti-government protests caused by the assault on the judiciary and the values of the rule of law triggered by the coalition formed by PSD and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE, detached from the PNL) immediately after winning the legislative elections in December 2016. It is debatable, however, from our point of view, if the reaction of the civil society towards this assault can still be addressed in the area of populist manifestations, beyond the attempt of parties such as PNL and USR to capitalize on elections, in the perspective of future election cycles (presidential in 2019, local and parliamentary in 2020), by taking and transmitting legitimate messages of the protesters to the government coalition. We have found that today, only apparently paradoxically, the main vehicle of political populism is PSD, the ruling party of the government coalition, which won the parliamentary elections in 2016, and against the background of a significant absenteeism at the polls, with a score that they had never achieved since its establishment in 1990: 45.47% in the Chamber of Deputies and 45.67% in the Senate. The temptation of authoritarianism manifested by this party, since its establishment, as the National Salvation Front (FSN), subsequently becoming the Democratic Front of National Salvation (FDSN), the Social Democracy Party of Romania (PDSR) and, finally, PSD has been a constant in the post-communist period, being reinforced every time the formation was in government, alone or, most often, in coalition formulas. To the national-communism inherited from the Romanian Communist Party has been added permanently, the formula of economic populism, and this combination was assumed openly in the context of the 2014 presidential campaign, when the president of the party was Victor Ponta. Despite its membership in the Socialist International and the European Socialist Party, both within the campaign for the 2016 legislatures, coordinated by the new party president, Liviu Dragnea, and after winning them, PSD aggressively exhibited a nationalist, xenophobic and anti-European, which culminated in 2018 with a clear cooling of relations with the institutional structures of the European Union from a

governmental perspective and with those of the European socialists from a party perspective. Of course, the analysis of the evolution of a party cannot be summarized in the analysis of the discourse that it, through its leaders, promotes, in order to be able to categorize it as populist. What is noteworthy, however, in the case of PSD evolution from 2014 to the present is not only that the discourse of its leaders has become a predominantly populist and "sovereign" with xenophobic accents, but also that the policies applied at the governmental level are of a profound populist extraction. In other words, we consider that the displacement of the PSD in the area of national populism is one that tends to consolidate itself, thus removing it from the ideological area of social-democracy.

From such a perspective, I noticed that this party mutation occurs not only against the backdrop of the electoral takeover of the ethnonationalist niche that they controlled, in turn or together, parties such as PUNR and PRM, but also against the rise of right-wing populism in European and international plan. With this ideological "metamorphosis", PSD responds to the expectations long forged by the populist discourse at the level of the Romanian collective imaginary, regarding the "pride of being Romanian" and gives, in the political practice plan, the valorization of the specific attitudes of a paternalistic political culture, of the ruler type, in the direction of establishing an authoritarian regime. We do not want to express, from the statements presented so far, that we interpret what is happening in the Romanian political space through the prism of "exceptionalism", be it a negative one. The policy based on the meaning of "classical" ideologies does not have a good direction neither in other areas of the European continent. It is likely, however, that consolidated democracies will produce antibodies much more easily for slippages, including, therefore, for the ideological deficit identifiable at party level. Of course, the political parties, as well as the society as a whole, react adaptively to stimulus. The problem configured by the ideological dissolution on the left-right axis is that any stimulus oriented against the democratic policy balances (from the parties that, although ideologically deficient, have a democratic orientation, however) two types of effect: the *imitation* and the *recalibration*. We have shown that, in this context, a party that can produce antibodies will ideologically recalibrate to resist political competition without giving up its fundamental values but, on the contrary, strengthening and adapting them. On the other hand, a party crushed by ideological deficit will opt, through the voices of its leaders, for the exercise of imitation, which can endanger democracy itself, directing society on the path of authoritarianism.

Chapter III. Coordinates of intellectual populism

The third chapter commences with the finding that we must take into account the fact that the presence and social infusion of the populist discourse, encouraged by the authoritarian remnants of the culture specific to the post-communist political class, by the way of recruiting and training the political leaders within it, as the tendency to personalize the political life and often against the democratic procedures, are not caused exclusively by political parties and leaders. Thus, we argue that, during the post-communist period and especially since 2004, "prelates" of populism were not only politicians, but also public intellectuals or journalists, who symbolically rallied behind the leaders and parties who claimed and claim to speak in the name of the "people". From this perspective, we consider that the temptation of authoritarianism on a populist background has a traditional character in the Romanian society and from the perspective of employing intellectuals in the service of the power holders.

Thus, both "technical" intellectuals and "public" intellectuals have contributed to the construction and maintenance of a mythological discourse not at all disconnected by the progress of things in our society. The illusion of non-involvement, as well as the reality of involvement, has directly affected this course of things, both for good and for bad. In fact, today's Romanian public space is a tribute to a consolidated structural mannerism from our late modernity. It is overlapped on an acute democratic deficit, which makes the virtue of moderation most often lacking in the debates of public intellectuals. The various "prestigious groups" usually state their ideas in the logic of good and bad from which what is missing is precisely the protein beauty of the shades. Thus, we identify in the context of the analysis dedicated to intellectual populism the following ten elements manifested discursively and attitudinally by our public intellectuals: Manichaeian positioning instead of the nuanced approach; assuming a doctrinal infallibility; extreme positioning in relation to ideological opponents; customizing the policy; "rewriting" or circumventing reality (in cases of cognitive dissonance); imaginary projection of an "ideological curtain"; outcry of moral supremacy; electoral dilution of democracy; "chameleon" appeal to the "pragmatism" argument; recourse to monologue. They base in their area of intersection a mythological "canon" observable during the post-communist decades and which can be highlighted by reference to the "mythical constellations" identified by Raoul Girardet: "golden age", "unity", "conspiracy" and "savior". As a result, what mythological exhibit in contemporary Romanian, some public intellectuals, contributing to the reproduction of ideological Manichaeism and to the exacerbation of the democratic deficit, are the following mythical structures: the interwar as

the founding myth of post-communism, the myth of post-communist deideologization, the myth of original democracy, the myth of state reconstruction / reform and the myth of the providential man. From our point of view, all these contributed, directly or indirectly, to the erosion of the democratic public space (however insufficiently developed) and to the institutionalization of an agency that ensured the necessary perimeter of the resurgence of populism with authoritarian aims. As such, continuing the exercise of understanding the resorts that cause the intellectuals to surrender on the altar of power by promoting a discourse dominated by populist accents, we specify that, from the perspective of an assumed subjectivity (founded on the honest reserve of what we consider to be "the myth of objectivity" in the social sciences), we do not consider that they must be indifferent to what is happening in the country, as we do not consider that the opposition to or, respectively, the pacification with an oppressive regime, as it was the communist one, can be judged in general terms. We set out, therefore, to decipher the resorts of the mechanism by which an oppressive regime, such as that of communist totalitarianism, succeeded, either by force measures, or by stimulating the temptation of "voluntary servitude", to transform some of the most important Romanian intellectuals in ideological prelates. It is understood that we detach ourselves completely from the illusion of one, even being a negative one, Romanian "exceptionalism", as long as such situations of the intellectuals can be identified in various other historical contexts and socio-cultural spaces, in political regimes similar to the one existing in Romania between 1945 and 1989 or in other regimes developed under the label of totalitarianism or under that of authoritarianism. On the other hand, we also detach ourselves from the illusion that the attraction that the power exerts on the intellectuals would be, in Romania or elsewhere, exclusively the apprehension of totalitarian or authoritarian political regimes; that, in the case of these oppressive regimes - in which rationally designed crime becomes an existential basis of an illegal, non-contractualist state and eminently anti-political in relation to the values of modernity - the surrender of intellectuals on the altar of power is all the more tragic and dishonorable, if it were to remember the valences of the critical spirit, of honesty and responsibility. This represents an additional motivation for the interpretation we bring to our attention in our research, regarding the intellectual maintenance of the nationalist populism during the communist period. In order to illustrate this situation, we analyze the case of Constantin Noica, but also the contribution of protochronism to the consolidation of the national Stalinism regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. Going forward, in trying to circumscribe the area of the manifestation of intellectual populism in the post-communist period, we consider that it is necessary to refer to two mythological "terminals" that have been fixed,

through the dominant discourse in the public space - having obvious political connotations - at the level of the collective imaginary. These allowed, on the one hand, the reproduction of the Manichaeism that crosses, as we have suggested, the whole period of the modern evolution of the Romanian society and, on the other hand, the minimization or even the circumvention of an alternative, nuanced speech that could have had, once adopted by public intellectuals whose influence was immediately manifested in the 1990s, a major role in carrying out the process of democratization and Europeanization of Romania. It is first of all about the mythical instrumentalization of the interwar period, in the sense of transforming it into a founding myth of post-communism, so that the term "anticommunism" of the new cleavage instituted at the dawn of post-communism ("communism" - "anticommunism") becomes consistent. Basically, we can see that the intellectual vehicle of this founding myth has placed its supporters in the position of defenders and retrievers of the values of a "golden age" whose continuity was suddenly interrupted by the installation of communist totalitarianism, thus giving them the legitimacy to institute a type of dominant discourse, against those who tried to maintain, especially at the level of the political class, the networks of institutional power originated in communism. Explainable from a socio-psychological perspective, the recovery of the interwar by the influential public intellectuals from post-communism was achieved, at least at first, totally in an uncritical way, being the preferred version of the idealization of a period which, in essence, was one of intellectual manifestation and anti-democratic and anti-liberal policies. A second mythological "terminal" set by public intellectuals in Romanian post-communism and embraced by politicians who characterized themselves as "of the right" from an ideological point of view is that of the need for a "reconstruction of the right" on the alignment of the integration project combination. of our society with the national project. We find in both discursive constructions, mythological and ideological elements of "Romanian exceptionalism", as well as the old obsession for a "national project" which an "elite", both intellectual and political, whose axiological roots are found in the "golden age" of to the interwar, can transpose it into reality so as to ensure, on the one hand, the total and definitive breakdown of communism (as it comes from the "right", defining anti-communist) and, on the other hand, the "good" direction that the Romanian society can follow. The result is the emergence of elitist intellectual populism that has, over the course of three decades, captured the forefront of Romanian public life, which also has political implications, especially in the ideological area assumed to be of "the right", even under the conditions in which, since the beginning of post-communism, there has been an alternative intellectual model, proposed by Adrian Marino, a "liberal" model which, although not independent of the old problem of

national identity, lies on the other side of anti-individualism, specific to anti-democracy and providentialism, and at present, on the dominant intellectual model. We consider that the case study we propose to illustrate Adrian Marino's intellectual model is relevant in this regard.

Basically, during this chapter of the paper we have highlighted the existence of a tradition of political enlistment of intellectuals, which may be of formal or symbolic nature and which can be detected, temporarily, from the beginning of the modernization process of the Romanian state, crossing the interwar and communist periods until present day. Invoking and analyzing this tradition of intellectual populism manifested in various forms, we intended to emphasize that, beyond the differences implied by the mentioned historical eras, there are certain common elements specific to the way in which the Romanian intellectuals understood to relate, over time, to politics and to the holders of power. On this background, the Romanian intellectual tradition was articulated in the space of an ethno-symbolism that, at least for the construction phase of the national state from the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the next one, was in line with what was happening also in other states of Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, however, we have argued that the specificity that we believe we can identify at the level of the intellectual and political elites in the Romanian space is that, from one generation to another and from one historical era to another, the element of continuity of the national project (no matter what the latter was), as well as the way in which the issue of collective identity was instrumentalized had an ethnicist basis. Precisely the permanent relation to the nation from an ethnic, and not civic angle - as it happened in the western states, but also, at one time, in other Central European states - was the link that ensured the continuity between the romantic nationalism of the second half of the nineteenth century with that of interwar Romania (taken to the extreme right by legionary fascism and its intellectuals), with that of communism specific to the national Stalinism of Nicolae Ceausescu (strongly dogmatized by his court intellectuals, if we are to only think of the protochronism promoted since 1974) and, finally, with the one of the post-communism, which meant, in fact, the recovery of the last two forms of manifestation of ethnic nationalism in various equations of a cultural-political nature. We have also identified, on the intellectual dimension of the Romanian society, the hard core of populism, visible at the level of all the forms it took in the various historical stages of modernizing our society: understanding and using the concept of "people" not in a sense civic, but in a tribal sense, articulated not on the basis of the constitutional-political value of citizenship, but on that of ethnic origin. We have shown this is where practically resides what unites the romantic populism practiced by Eminescu and the xenophobic one of Nicolae Iorga, the anti-Semite one of A.C. Cuza and

poporanism or samanatorism, Codreanu's legionary populism and Ceausescu's national Stalinism, reaching the post-communist populism identifiable both politically and intellectually. Of course, these various forms of manifestation of populism in the Romanian society have known, during the historical stages under discussion, when an important intellectual support, when a great intellectual support, although, for short periods (in the interwar period), mediums (in post-communism) or long (in communism), they were assumed both at the political level and at the intellectual level. Being, in its hard core, ethno-symbolically charged, the Romanian populism has ideologically positioned itself, if we pay attention to its forms of manifestation, especially in the area of a political and intellectual right of conservative-nationalist type and could generate, from this perspective, a specific to a dominant political culture over time. It is, to invoke a typology considered to be already classical in political science, about the political culture of addiction or paternalism, which has been replicated until nowadays and which followed, immediately after the formal establishment of the national state in the posterity of the First World War, a patriarchal or traditionalist political culture. The elements of this dominant political culture have been socially stated and transmitted through speeches, attitudes and behaviors of the public intellectuals from different generations, most of them being, most often intended and assumed, within the politics. Thus, they legitimized the various directions in which political populism was manifested, causing public intellectuals to become propagandists of political parties and / or political leaders who announced "change" or "reform" projects in Romania. The Romanian tradition of seduction that populism exerts on public intellectuals is only paradoxical in appearance. By projecting themselves in the role of "illuminators" of the masses, of the "people", public intellectuals really assume the status of members of the elite. At the same time, however, they seek to annex the "people" to a project that, with the benefit of a certain political support, will give them the aura of "saviors of the nation". Basically, talking about "people" and promising to save it, they are interested in "people" giving legitimacy to their own projections that they place on the altar of power, especially when it is embodied by a "providential" leader that intellectuals perceive him as the one who has the vision to place the whole society on certain "historical coordinates". However, such a positioning of intellectuals in the public sphere and, with the phrase of Pierre Bourdieu, in the "political field" cannot lead to a result other than that of shaping a type of political culture of paternalistic-dependent nature. We have argued that, from our point of view, its main constituent elements are anti-individualism, anti-democracy and providentialism, all being grafted on a Manichaeian background whose hard core is the ethnonationalism that Romanian

society inherited until now. Thus, with regard to *anti-individualism*, the populists, including those who manifest themselves intellectually, resolve in simple terms an apparent contradiction: that of the collective invocation of the "people" by reference to a saving leader / individual. How can they do this? Usually, claiming that the leader is the "emanation of the people", a "mirror" of the "collective soul" of the "nation", which embodies and knows "a priori" its expectations. Practically, although considered to be an exceptional individual, the leader himself is understood not as a product of the process of individuation that characterized the birth of European modernity, but is designed, in a form with magical-religious valences, as an embodiment of collective expectations. In other words, he does not exist autonomously, in the spirit of liberal individualism (which proclaims freedom of conscience as an essential element of political freedom), but only insofar as it is the "highest expression" of the collective entity of the "people". Its individual identity is practically canceled by its equivalence with the collective one. *Anti-democracy* is another important component of the paternalistic political culture maintained discursively and attitudinally by the Romanian intellectual tradition, and this reaching its peak in the interwar period, to be transmitted further into communism and post-communism. If anti-individualism has, as we have seen, as the main consequence of orienting certain representative intellectuals towards the extremist collectivism, anti-democracy is, in our view, a correlated component whose main effect is the attraction it exerts on the same intellectuals, authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government. From this point of view, we concluded that the contribution of most of the Romanian intellectuals to the exacerbation of the existing democracy deficit and today in the Romanian society is defining. Finally, we added *providentialism*, which represents, no less, a component of the political culture that intellectual populism has explicitly promoted whenever it has been in the service of a political project. Considering themselves providential and "saviors" of the nation, the top public intellectuals performed the exercise of "voluntary servitude" towards the political leaders of the moment. In the second half of the 19th century or in the interwar period, in communism - especially after the famous 1968 speech of Nicolae Ceausescu, in which he condemned the intervention of the Warsaw Treaty troops to quell the "Prague spring" - or in post-communism, the ethical and Manichaeian radicalism of the opinion creators "fractured" them the critical reason and produced quasi-religious adherence to certain leaders considered to be providential and, therefore, saviors of Romania, especially in crisis situations. Moreover, at the mental level, the present providentialism - recessive or dominant - in the Romanian society throughout this historical period is a populist reflex that not only ordinary people but intellectuals have fully exercised. Thus, a true mythical structure

was outlined, still visible today in the Romanian contemporary society. Even when alternative cultural models existed, and this happened in both pre-communism and communism or post-communism, most intellectuals preferred to turn their attention to national-populist discourse. We have explained this by contrasting, in the context of the analysis dedicated to the intellectual dimension of populism, two case studies: the one regarding how Constantin Noica legitimized and coordinated by the political police of the communist regime, the perceptions of the national Stalinism of Nicolae Ceausescu and the one represented, in the dawn of post-communism, by Adrian Marino. We have argued that although it was opposed, even hostile, to both the visceral populism of "autochthonism" and the "pro-Western" spiritualist and collectivist elitist populism (in which the idea of "elite" is assumed in the sense of a prestigious group with access to symbolic and institutional resource), the alternative intellectual model proposed by Marino could not exceed the area of marginality imposed on it. For most of the intellectuals, the "really important" themes were and still are, maintaining the intellectual debates in the Romanian public space in an area of continuity marked by the symbolic coexistence between the "interwar paradise" and the "golden age" of national Stalinism.

Chapter IV. Coordinates of media populism

The fourth chapter commences from the hypothesis that the democratic deficit whose main aspects were exposed during the previous chapters has decisively influenced both the evolution of the media and the democracy in post-communist Romania. In this regard, we intend, in a first section, to refer to some arguments of a normative nature, in order to support the importance of understanding the democratic ideology in the sense of a "thinking practice" that the media institutions - with all that they entail, from journalists to editorial policy - should share with society and its leaders so that the strengthening of the democratic regime can become a reality. More precisely, what interests us is the analysis of the way in which the media institutions have contributed to the articulation of the post-communist Romania public space, by referring to the trends existing today at European level and with reference to positioning citizens "outside" the media and political games whose stake is the establishment of the public agenda. We try to show the difficulties of establishing a public space in which to be transported and debated, and through the participation of the citizens, the democratic values, which went in the same cadence - when not directly influenced - with the institutional dysfunctions of the fragile Romanian democracy. In a second section we intend to offer an interpretation of how the claim of objectivity of the media, as well as the discourse of the

authority, issued from the state policy environment, exerts pressure on the public space, directly influencing the cognitive reports, affective and evaluative of citizens, to the political system in post-communist Romania and, thus, to their civic competences themselves. The analysis we propose is carried out from the perspective of the process of politicizing the institutions and, thus, the media "agoras", both by creating "political-media complexes" that had as main result the "cartelization" of the press, both of the written and online one, as well as audio-video one, as well as by developing a new type of journalistic discourse, which is in line with the one promoted in the political area, namely the populist discourse. Our opinion is that, practically, the media allowed to set up a space of the plurality of opinions that, even if it did not involve, at least in a first phase, directly the citizens - still marked themselves by the control of the public opinion existing in the previous regime - offered the possibility that the critical voices of journalists, representative public intellectuals and those of political opposition representatives, respectively, could intervene in the incipient forms of public debate. Once consolidated and in spite of all the pressures - coming from both employers and governmental power - this pluralistic space for the expression of opinions transformed the media into a real democratic power, whose counterbalance with the political power represented an essential resource for advancing the democratization process. Referring to the evolution of the media institutions in the post-communist Romanian society, we aim to highlight the way in which they succeeded or not, to involve the public in the processes of debating the problems of general interest, our conjecture being that, if in the first two decades of democratization, the classical media had a "monopoly of opinion" by referring to the recipients of the transmitted messages - exceeding the traditional information function and manifesting it, especially in the problems of a political nature, that of "orientation", which implied and manipulative elements - in the last decade of very recent history, with the emergence of new media and with the increasing access of the public to information, the framework for manifesting a perverse effect has emerged: resorting, for reasons not only economic, but also political, to the attempt to increase the addressability of the messages through the maximum involvement of the public in the process of media communication, the representative media institutions were forced to adopt and, on the other hand, to promote the populist discourse. At the same time, the public itself was the subject of a transformation, in accordance with the high access to new communication technologies: the poor ability to interact with the classical media recorded during the first two decades of democratization made it, to some extent, distrustful of them - as compared to the political class - and forced it to develop "public counter-spaces" as "valves" for the expression of opinions and for

messages and protest actions against the political authorities. If the latter contributed to the democratization of public opinion, they also offered the populist discourse of rejecting the political and media establishment opportunities for infrastructure to manifest. The manner in which it is instilled in the public space through the media discourse is treated in the third section of the final chapter, starting from the distinction between "populism expressed by the media" and "populism through the media", which allows the intersection between politics and the media, as well as careful observation of the problems generated by it. The final section of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of what we call "multimedia populism" or "E-populism", outlined even in the Romanian space of the last decade and which combines the "citizen journalism" encouraged by the classical media and their last attempt to be present on social networks.

The analysis of the media dimension of populism in the Romanian society, carried out during the final chapter, started from the finding that, in the conditions in which, at the beginning of the 1990s, in Romania there were no premises for the rapid evolution towards a polyarchy - which was valid for other former communist states - the newly emerged media institutions have taken over, in the context of a real "explosion" of freedom of expression, the driving role of the transition to democracy. Even though, in the beginning of the phase of the democratization process - long enough delayed by the new established power - the control of the "official" media was in the control of the political power, the incipient media pluralism made a decisive contribution to the construction of a public space in a society devoid of the tradition of authentic democratic debate. Of course, the fact that, during the post-communist years, more and more media institutions have appeared does not mean that, automatically, citizens have had access to *alternative* sources of information, which can be found even today, if we consider the tendency of "cartelization" of the press. But the merit of ensuring, at least formally, a public space comes, undeniably, to the media and, subsequently, to the gradual evolution of civil society. However, what we have noticed is that the "media agoras" in post-communist Romania - represented, especially, by the trusts that include television with political impact - have the discursive architecture of "arenas" of which, excepting the "electoral" quality and, respectively, the "audience", citizens and groups are excluded. Thus, the media institutions turn into political actors, pursuing specific interests, and leave the area of civil society, practically becoming competitors of the political class in the struggle for influence and even for political power. Of course, as Peter Gross points out, the situation cannot be invoked only in the case of post-communist Romania. On the other hand, the politicians themselves contribute to the mythological symbolism present in this arena. What

results is a space of permanent confrontation, from which the democratic debate, one that also involves the citizens, is eluded, and from which bi-directional accusations are issued: from politicians to journalists and their employers and, conversely, from those followed to the political class. Under these conditions, the very credibility of democracy as a type of political regime - as long as it exists - is suspended. By restricting his qualities as a political actor to being part of the "public" (in the sense of "audience") and, respectively, of the "electorate", the citizen is in a position of passivity and obliged to follow the "Ping-Pong media" between media institutions and politicians. Obviously, this state of affairs means a setback from the perspective of democratic political organization. In time, the media institutions have managed to consolidate, from our point of view, as a real democratic power, influencing, in their turn, politicians. In fact, this intersection between politicians and the media, which has been present since the dawn of post-communism, has never been erased, and its existence eventually pencils one of the important signs of the presence of democracy, as it is manifested everywhere in the western world. In Romania, however, given the Manichaeic background of political culture, as well as the democratic deficit, the media intersection with politics has produced different types of relations, which does not cancel, in our view, the status of the democratic power in the post-communist context. On the other hand, we admitted that, especially since the second half of the 2000s, the media no longer represented as much a democratic power, but especially a political one, thus exceeding their informal status of being "a" fourth power in the state "and assuming, through certain trusts (such as Intact or Realitatea-Catavencu) through businessmen interested in politics (as it has been the case since 2012 in the case of Romania TV) or through aspiring journalists in politics (Dan Diaconescu's case was also opposed to the controversial OTV television station, established in 2000, having the license suspended by the National Audiovisual Council between 2002-2004 and being permanently withdrawn in 2013) as a political actor, which meant and represents even today, a reversal of democratization. Entering directly into the political competition and thus emphasizing the already existing social polarization, such media institutions, having a relevant impact on the level of public opinion, opted to create the conditions of manifestation for media populism, the latter using, practically, the same props instrumented already by the political populism and identifiable in the intellectual populism. It is, more precisely, about the Manichean construction of the socio-political reality by drawing the symbolic border between "us" and "them", about restoring to the foreground the debates of nationalism of ethnic orientation and with often orthodox accents, as well as about display of the main characteristics of the paternalistic political culture, namely liberal anti-individualism,

procedural anti-democracy and messianic providentialism. Thus, assuming a role of great importance in the direction of democratization followed, especially during the last decade of post-communism, the outline of a propagator of populism, of maintaining and promoting its elements and thus of deconstructing, the public space necessary for a democratic society. Added to this evolution was the lack of interest in treating the public as a dialogue partner, which led, on the one hand, to a recoil of his confidence in the classic media broadcasting political news and his orientation towards the new media and, on the other hand, the emergence of those "public counter-spaces" specific to a culture of protest that is addressed to certain media institutions, usually to those who became agents of politicization. Basically, with the transition from the status of democratic power to that of political power, the politically relevant press institutions in Romania have integrated into the discursive and cultural-political framework of populist sources, ensuring its maintenance and directly contributing at its development, which is still valid today. Involving the public in debating important issues for society and respect for the public did not, even for the Romanian media, represent priorities in the initial stages of the democratization process. On the contrary, even when, in the middle of the second decade of post-communism, they came to consolidate their status as democratic power, the media institutions continued to exclude the public from debates, and when they began to manifest themselves as political power, promoting an anti-democratic discourse from a procedural perspective (towards democratic institutions, such as parliament and, often undifferentiated, to the legitimate political class through the mechanism of democratic voting), they emphasized conditions for the accelerated evolution of a media populism that integrated with the political and with that specific to the intellectual environment. What resulted was the outline of a climate of mistrust both of the media content and of the procedural institutionalized policy, as well as the orientation of the public towards other areas of communication and civic involvement, a tendency obviously encouraged by the emergence of new media and social networks, which have undergone a great evolution since the beginning of the third decade of post-communism. For a better understanding of how populist media discourse is manifesting in contemporary Romania, we considered it necessary to carry out an analysis that departs from the distinction between "populism expressed by the media" and "populism through the media", which means that, in the first case, the media become platforms of populism, and in the second they become real tools. Thus, taking into consideration the situation of the main and influential news television, we have shown that they have developed, especially since the second half of 2000 and until now, in the most important TV shows, namely those dedicated to debate on political topics, what contemporary

analysts in the field call "monocultural media populism", placing themselves, both when manifesting themselves as platforms, and when they become tools of populism in a rhetorical area that involves a kind of justice communication assumed "for" and "in the name" of the Romanians, this category being not understood, however, in the civic sense of constitutional citizenship, but especially in the ethnic one, that of a "nation". All that pertains to "Romanians", as ordinary people, to "Romanianism" and "Romanianity" represent absolute priorities to which the moderators of political debates give the right status, registering without reservation to promote the "true values" of the "nation", which they oppose, as a rule, at least to a certain part of the political class, to those who are considered "anti-Romanians" and, of course, to those who would pay attention, from the outside, to the national sovereignty (whether they are European politicians, ambassadors of other states, foreign businessmen or representatives of institutions of the European Union). In this sense, the moderators and their guests, as well as the topics they approach, trying to impose them on the public agenda, become the components of a rhetorical game that support and encourage the populist approach to reality. From the perspective of some communication platforms, the media, especially television, become, if we consider the distinction given above, the exponents of the "populism expressed by the media", which we have highlighted by the discourse analysis and the media of the editions of some programs made and broadcast by OTV, Realitatea TV and Antena 3 over the last decade. We referred, on the other hand, to the case of the media used as tools of populism. As we have found, in the case of populism that transforms media into instruments or "politically generated populism through the media", as it is called, four strategic formulas can be identified: neutral, passive transmission of populist discourse; critical approach to populism, by underlining its characteristics; legitimizing populism; critical approach to institutionalized, mainstream politics, which favors populism. What we tried to highlight, by appealing to new examples, was the fact that, from the perspective of communication tools and manifesting a certain type of political complicity, the media, television in particular, became tribunes of "populism through the media".

Going further and referring to the emergence of new media, we identified, beyond the existence of a "hybrid media system", configured at the intersection between classical and new media, the emergence of a new type of populist discourse, namely that specific to "multimedia populism". Thus, we have found that, from the development of online TVs to online publications that have their own programs transmitted over the Internet, from personalizing journalism through the appearance of professional blogs or those supported on important online platforms (such as, for example, *Huff Post* in US and the *blogs Adevărul.ro*

in Romania) and up to social networks such as Facebook, the new media reconfigured the public space and offered, on the one hand, the immediate access of politicians to voters and, on the other hand, the possibility of a wide participation of them at political debates. As in the case of the classic media, especially the television, and in the new media, their ability to represent a particularly friendly environment for populism was noted. We argued that, from our point of view, the configuration of such a media system encouraged the emergence and development of a type of populism specific to the contemporary period, including in the Romanian public space, namely "multimedia populism". Unlike the populism visible in the classical media period, "multimedia populism" does not involve, as actors, only politicians and / or journalists, but also the public. Our assumption, certified by recent studies in the field of media communication analysis, was that there is a specific audience for populist discourse, which encourages direct communication with political representatives and those of public institutions, which is very vocal in public debates, and is encouraged by the development of new communication technologies to make its voice heard and who, like the populist leaders, calling for an "excess of democracy" in the direction of democratic "directism" mentioned by Giovanni Sartori, only erodes the architecture of representative democracy, both from the perspective of the functionality of its procedures, as well as from the perspective of the civic competence of the citizens. As such, we were interested in highlighting the two-way character of this kind of populism (from politicians and the media to citizens and vice versa) by calling for the illusion of direct democracy, motivated by the fact that we are in the multimedia age, and the way we reveal it, in which "citizen journalism" tends to impose a hegemony of opinion in the public space, increasingly "liberated" from what Sartori himself called by the phrase "cognitive authorities". We have concluded that this new reality, which is due to the imperative of "viral advertising", is one in which, as a rule, the facts (whose detailed presentation, based on credible sources, was one of the fundamental attributions of the old media system) are losing importance, which appears as relevant being the dramatic effect and the statements that are capable of triggering emotional responses.

We have noticed that, as a result, an environment favorable to multimedia populism is established, marked by a true hegemony of opinions regarding what concerns the public and / or political sphere. Not obeying the alethic criteria, opinions shape the emotional framework for the manifestation of the new type of populism, which also benefits from a support that brings together politicians, journalists and citizens in the same intersection of the hybrid media system. As we are dealing with a quantitative growth of democracy, a decrease in its quality results, as long as the degree of knowledge of those involved is likely to be

characteristic for what the political scientist Giovanni Sartori indicated by the expression "hypo-citizen". Finally, we have argued that, paradoxically, although the new media brought, in the Romanian society, the opportunity to access as much information as possible, the latter did not - as an observable reality in other societies in the Western world - as much an increase in capacity for citizens to clarify on matters of public interest, as well as the danger that, given the increasing relevance of populist discourse, they will become not only preferred targets of political populism, but also producers of multimedia populism.

Conclusions

Obviously, this paper does not have, in the alternative, the claim of completeness. It represents only a directing of the research of populism in contemporary Romania beyond its strictly political manifestations, to this dimension being added that of intellectual manifestations, respectively that of media manifestations of populism. From our point of view, all three dimensions of populism in contemporary Romania, analyzed in the context of the present work, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Taking into consideration the coordinates on which their main characteristics develop, we have also tried to identify the causes of the main dysfunctions of a fragile democracy and in a permanent state of alert in relation to the challenge of populism.

The intention was that, by analyzing them, we could outline an overall framework for studying populism in our society, to be supplemented by empirical analyzes based on sociological measurements and on average audience measurements of populist messages. From this perspective, the present research offers only a few opening angles for further investigation. At the same time, in terms of intellectual honesty, we must point out that one of the limits of our research is given by the disregard of a fourth dimension of populism that crosses the history of modern Romania, namely the religious one, under the conditions in which the Romanian Orthodox Church remains an institution deeply attached to the Romanian state and the resources offered by it, also having a very important influence in the public space.

In the same direction, we consider that the deepening of the manifestations of intellectual populism should highlight, possibly by appeal to the case study method, the subtype of "folk populism", just mentioned here, but not developed, as is manifested by artists such as Dan Puric, Grigore Leșe or Tudor Gheorghe. No less important would be, in the case of the media dimension of populism, the investigation of the role that new communication technologies play in the process of transmitting "fake news" that affect the democratic

societies of the contemporary and which may have, more than that, geopolitical implications. There are, however, aspects that we have not been able to deal with in our research, but which can certainly enrich it, in the conditions of its development. What remains valid, however, from our point of view, at the end of this research, is the understanding that today's fragile Romanian democracy still has an opponent whose challenges will not be tempered in the foreseeable future.