

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI
FACULTATEA DE ISTORIE ȘI FILOSOFIE
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ „ISTORIE. CIVILIZAȚIE. CULTURĂ”

PhD THESIS

Liberalism and the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary

(1838-1914)

summary

PhD Supervisor:

Prof. univ. dr. Sorin Mitu

PhD Candidate:

Andrei Sabin Faur

2022

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Keywords: liberalism, conservatism, intellectuals, Transylvania, Hungary, parliamentarism, liberty

The purpose of our research was to analyze the reception of liberalism by the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary between 1838 (the year when the first Romanian political journal was founded, which was considered a landmark in the affirmation of the intellectuals) and the outbreak of the First World War, which brought significant political and ideological changes. The sources of our research were the political writings of the Romanian intellectuals, many of them published in various Romanian newspapers, but also in other forms.

The thesis is divided into three sections, which correspond to the different perspectives we've used to study the ideas with regards to liberalism formed by the Romanian intellectuals.

In the first section, we analyzed the perception of several main liberal principles like liberty, the freedom of the press, the right to freedom of assembly and association, parliamentary representation and legislative elections, economic freedom, administrative centralization and decentralization.

In the second section, we intended to reconstruct the image which the educated Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary had formed regarding the advance of liberalism in several lands. We took in consideration the two models for the European liberal tradition: English liberalism and French liberalism, so we decided to analyze how they were perceived by the Romanian intellectuals. Besides these models, we analyzed the perception of the Hungarian liberalism and of the liberal movement from Walachia and Moldavia.

The third section contains three case studies on liberal conservative Romanian intellectuals. We chose here to study the works of the Transylvanian born George Barițiu and Ion Codru Drăgușanu, and of Aurel C. Popovici, born in Banat (Hungary), who became one of the most important Romanian political writers of his time.

In the first chapter of our research we analyzed the definitions for “liberalism” and “conservatism” that the Romanian intellectuals had used in their writings, or in regards to their own political activity. We discovered that these concepts were defined shortly after the first Romanian political newspapers appeared. Although they knew these terms, the largest part of the Romanian intellectuals didn't assume a political identity, as liberals or conservatives, although we found several exceptions. The

Romanians that lived in Hungary seemed more willing to call themselves “liberals” and we tried to find some possible explanations for this situation.

The second chapter was dedicated to the perception of liberty in the 19th century. We’ve studied the intellectuals’ opinions on liberty before and after the 1848 revolution, which can be seen as a turning point in their political views. An important part of this chapter was dedicated to the relationship between individual and national liberty. We tried to prove that, although several Romanian leaders of that time declared that national liberty was more important than the individual one, there had always been a strong commitment for the latter.

In the following chapters we analyzed the Romanian perception on the main characteristics of a liberal political regime: the freedom of the press, the right to freedom of assembly and association, parliamentary representation and legislative elections, economic freedom, administrative centralization and decentralization. The freedom of the press and the freedom of speech was an important political goal of the Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary, ever since they earned the right to own newspapers (at the end of the fourth decade). This goal affirmed even in authoritarian times. Romanian intellectuals had hopes for a liberal press when the Habsburg Monarchy abandoned absolutism, but the Austro-Hungarian compromise brought new constraints against journalists. Publishing articles against the government could lead to press trials, prison sentences and high fines. Despite of these barriers, the press remained an important part of the Romanian political life and had an important contribution to the modernization of society.

During this time, associationism had a significant increase among the Romanians from the Habsburg Monarchy. The first associations can be traced before the 1848 revolution, but the most important of them were founded in the second half of the century. In this chapter we made a short presentation of the most important Romanian associations, like Reuniunea Femeilor Române din Braşov (The Romanian Women’s Associations) founded in 1850 or Astra (The Transylvanian Association for the Romanian Culture and Literature) founded in 1861. Political assemblies and parties were constantly considered suspicious by the Habsburg state. As it wasn’t regulated by any law after the 1867 compromise, the right to freedom of assembly and association remained an important political goal for Romanian intellectuals, who considered associationism as a mean both to develop their nationality, but also to solve problems that did not fall within the competence of the state.

The role of the parliaments and the importance of elections in liberal political regimes became familiar to the Romanian public in the first half of the century, through the press articles. The Habsburg Empire also had a long tradition of local assemblies which limited the monarch's power. At the beginning of the seventh decade, the October Diploma and the February Patent stimulated the hopes for a constitutional regime, with parliamentary representations and periodical elections. Many memoirs and political programs prove the Romanian political elite was in favour of a census vote. In this chapter, we showed how their political opinions changed in the following decades, by evolving to the universal suffrage, which became an assumed political goal at the national conference of 1881.

The Romanian intellectuals had a very pragmatic approach on economic liberalism, based not on philosophical arguments, but on the political challenges they were confronted with. Several public figures among the Romanians pleaded for the freedom of trade before the 1848 revolution, because they wanted the repeal of the medieval privileges of the traditional Saxon and Hungarian craft guilds. Their effort was oriented on supporting the Romanian merchants, who were especially active in Braşov and Sibiu. This view changed in the second half of the century when, after seeing the marginal role of Transylvania in the Habsburg Monarchy, Romanian leaders started pleading for economic protectionism and the development of a national economy. This change was, without doubt, influenced by the orientation of the majority of the politicians from Europe and the United States towards protectionism, as a means of encouraging national economies.

In the seventh chapter we analyzed the perception of the Romanian elites on centralization. Their view on this process was negative, because the image of an autonomous Transylvania, with its separate institutions, was very strongly desired. Local autonomy was seen as an important means to manage the national and confessional differences between Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons.

The last chapter of the first part was dedicated to the complex relationship between liberalism and religion, as it was perceived by the Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania and Hungary. As a predominantly rural society, the Romanians invested a lot of trust in their two churches, the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic (Uniate), which had important political and cultural attributions. Their bishops were considered the main political leaders of the nation. In this chapter we tried to analyze the main changes that liberalism brought in this relationship. The freedom of

conscience was very important for the Romanian intellectuals. To see their perception on religious tolerance, we analyzed their relationship with the other nationalities (which had different confessions) and also the complex relationship between the two Romanian confessions. We analyzed in detail the conflicts between the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholics that took place in the sixth decade and were eventually solved when laymen intellectuals appealed to tolerance (associated with liberalism) and to their common national identity. We followed the changes in the relationship between state and the two churches under the aegis of secularization. Both clergymen and laymen from both confessions opposed the measures which intended to reduce the presence of the Church in the public life, both in the educational field (through the laws of 1879 and 1907) or in an administrative field (like the introduction of civil marriage in 1894). The relationship between the Romanian intellectuals and the Church changed significantly in the 19th century, with the emergence of new ideologies and alternative world visions.

As we already mentioned, the second part of our thesis was dedicated to the image that the Transylvanian and Hungarian Romanians had formed on the emergence of several liberal regimes. In the ninth chapter we analyzed the perception of the English liberalism, which all European liberals had admired and had taken as a model, and which was especially popularized by the Hungarian reformist movement. The Transylvanian Romanians perpetuated the image of Great Britain as a positive model until the outbreak of the First World War. They admired the freedom of the press, the strong parliamentary tradition, the political moderation and the great economic development. The Romanian press didn't follow all the changes in the political life, but several English public figures were well known to the Romanians. This was the case with William Ewart Gladstone and John Stuart Mill, whose important book, *On Liberty*, had been translated in Romanian by Teodor V. Păcățian. There were also negative articles on the English political life, because the Romanians were aware about the Irish question, the negative side of the industrial society or the problems of colonialism.

In the next chapter we analyzed the image of the French political regimes from the French Revolution until the end of the Second Empire (1871). If England offered a perspective on a liberal regime for the entire 19th century, the situation was different in France, which had several political regimes that varied between liberalism and authoritarianism. We began our analysis with the image of the Romanians on the

French Revolution and we proved that the intellectuals also gained a positive image of these events. The large number of news concerning the French political scene from the Romanian press proves their constant interest in this subject. They were familiar with many of the most important political debates, including some over the role of the parliament or the limitations of rights when a dictatorship was installing.

In the eleventh chapter we discussed the image of the Hungarian liberalism, which represented an important part of the national image that the Romanians had formed on their Hungarian neighbors. We tried to show that this image varied during the years, from person to person, depending on the political and cultural background of each intellectual. There were Romanians who sympathized with Hungarian liberalism and who, in 1848, had supported the Hungarian revolution. A large part of the Romanians that resided in Transylvania developed a negative image on the Hungarian liberalism, because they saw in it a threat to their own nationality. They affirmed that Hungarians promoted a false liberalism, which intended to restore the old feudal relations between nobles and peasants in the new Hungarian nation-state. Despite these critics, the Romanian leaders viewed liberalism also as a means of settling a common ground with the Hungarian politicians.

The second section of our thesis ends with the chapter dedicated to the Romanian liberalism, which was developed in Walachia and Moldova, united in 1859. We started our research with a short history of the connections between the Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary with the other people with whom they shared the same language. There was a strong interest for all the cultural events and political transformations on both sides of the Carpathians. We took into consideration the relationship between the Transylvanian Romanians and some of the main liberal leaders from Romania and analyzed the image they formed on the liberal groups' activity at the beginning of Charles I's reign. We paid a special attention to the reflection of the Ploiești Republic in the Transylvanian press, because we thought, following Silvia Marton's work, that this was a very important moment, that served at clarifying the political options of the Romanian liberals. We tried to see several perspectives, from different Transylvanian newspapers, about the formation of the Romanian National Liberal Party in 1875 and of its first government in the following year. In the last part of this chapter we made a case study on how the different liberal governments were perceived in one of the most important Romanian newspapers from Transylvania, *Gazeta de Transilvania*. Even though many of their political

achievements were not presented to the Romanian public from Austria-Hungary, we could conclude they had a good knowledge on the National Liberal Party and its leaders.

In the third section of our research we prepared three case-studies on two well-known intellectuals, which illustrated in different measures a liberal conservative ideology. In the thirteenth chapter we analyzed the political ideas of George Barițiu, the founder of the Romanian political press in the Habsburg Empire, who was also one of the most well known journalists of his time. Barițiu can be considered one of the most important supporters of liberalism through his political writings and through his editorial options, because he published many news from England and France before the 1848 revolution in *Foaia pentru minte, inimă și literatură* and *Gazeta de Transilvania*. He never assumed a liberal political identity due to his excessive prudence, but at the end of his career he manifested a positive attitude towards conservatism, which he perceived as favourable for the defense of the political autonomy and nationality against centralization and assimilation.

The second case study was dedicated to the Ion Codru Drăgușanu, the author of *Transylvanian Pilgrim*. Even though they were not so complex or so vast as other works of that time, Drăgușanu's writings proved his sympathies for liberalism (as he admired both the British political regime and the French Revolution) and also a significant conservative influence.

In the last chapter of our thesis we analyzed the writings of Aurel C. Popovici, one of the most complex political authors of his generation. Although there are a few important contributions to the understanding of his work, we believe that some issues should be reevaluated. He had a strong preference for liberal conservatism, as he declared himself an admirer of Ion C. Brătianu, the most important leader of the National Liberal Party in the 19th century but was also very hostile to C. A. Rosetti and to all liberals that wanted an advance towards democracy. We identified the common points between Popovici's ideas and the liberal ideology, although he always rejected any set of ideas that would claim itself to be a solution for society's problems. This conservative approach explains a series of paradoxes in his work, that we identified and later tried to clarify.

