MODERNIZATION AND REFORM IN THE ROMANIAN AREA OF THE PERIOD 1831-1918

Magda–Ioana IACOB*

Abstract

By 848 oligarchic regime established by the Organic Regulaments was unchanged. Then, while the four months from June to September, the victorious revolution was to dismantle the statutory political frenzy around the structure, burning both Regulation and Gentlefolk the public market and adopting a new constitutional document based on the principles of free . This experiment, however, liberalization will be quickly crushed by the Russian-Turkish invasion in September 1848 he returned to compromise regulatory regime. But not for long, international events (deletion of Russian influence after 1853, the intensification of the struggle for unification, the rise of the Unionists) leading to the gradual disintegration of the system introduced in 1831-1832. Political structure has been continuously modified in favor of liberal elements, mostly from small landlords, while the old administrative provisions remained in force.

Keywords:

absolutism, administration, power, oligarhic regime, Fanariots, Organic Regulations.

* Univ.asist.PhDs., Faculty of Law, University of "Petre Andrei" from Iasy

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The Organic Regulations, the first acts with a Romanian constitutional character have solved only partially the problem of power. Undoubtedly, they had a modernizing role in terms of the state administration. But, in terms of exercising the power, they had only replaced the old regnal absolutism, with the new oligarchic regime, which concentrated all power in the hands of several large families of boyars, the same who overthrown the Fanariots and whose representatives have written the Organic Regulations . Although these had been introduced with the agreement of Russia and Turkey, the political system adopted will not be at all like the absolutism practiced in Istanbul and Petersburg. The financial control and the legislative powers of the public meetings were made so that the prince could not rule without the great aristocracy's contest which dominated the meetings. As it was expected, hence arose a perpetual conflict between the central power and nobility, a conflict that dominated the regulations era both in Moldova and Wallachia.

The extraordinary public meetings had a significant structure in terms of the exclusive character of the power. This is, the Wallachian one in 1834, was composed of 190 deputies, of whom four big prelates, 50 boyars of the first rank, 73 boyar of the II rank, 34 deputies of the districts and 27 deputies of the municipal corporations. They were summoned for the election of the princes. Of their structure, as we saw above, there was no representative of the peasantry. Therefore, such an assembly was actually less representative than the old meetings of the states that it had been included in, at least the yeomanry. For about two months per year, the Ordinary Public Meetings were summoned. These had a social and more narrowly character, for example, the Highlander was composed of the metropolitan, three bishops, 20 big boyars, and 19 small boyars. In Moldova, this had besides the metropolitan and bishops, 16 big and 16 small boyars. The election of these deputies by the boyars' class was determined by the Regulations every five years. But we must not lose sight of, because of the oligarchic character of the normal political system some new and modernizing elements introduced in 1831-1832 by means of the same constitutional acts, such as, the royal oath of respecting the country's Regulation and law, the separation of the country's treasury of the prince's chamber by creating a civil list, the partial responsibility of the central power over the meetings, and above all, the achievement of a separation of the powers that had not existed before. By creating a "council" of the ministers, he has ordered the state administration. This "council" of the ministers comprised of 6-8 persons, appointed and responsible to the Prince. The old political class considered appropriate to endow the state with a limited number of departments whose titles were indicating functions still relatively limited: the State Secretariat (for General Affairs and External Relations), the treasury (then called finance), the inner affairs, the army department, of faith (then called cults), of justice. Then there have occurred two more ministries, the public works and the public control. During the entire period of the normal era, the state apparatus

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remained reduced, not only the number of ministers, but that of the servants in general. Thus, in 1833, the finance department counted only 37 clerks, the inner one 38, the court one 28.

By 1848 (Gane, (1937), : 40-42), the oligarchic regulation established by the Organic Regulations was unchanged. Then, for four months, from June to September, the victorious revolution was about to dismantle wildly the entire political normal structure, burning both the Regulation and the Almanac of the Nobility in the public square and adopting a new constitutional document based on the most liberal principles. This liberalization experiment, however, will be quickly crushed by the Russian-Turkish invasion in September 1848 that has reintroduced the compromised regulatory regime; But not for long, the international events (the removing of the Russian influence after 1853, the intensification of the struggle for unification, the growing influence of the Unionists) leading to the gradual disintegration of the system introduced in 1831-1832. The political structure was permanently changed in favor of the liberal elements, most of all from the small boyars, while the old administrative provisions remained in force. The Treaty of Paris (1856) has accepted the idea to summon some of the Ad Hoc Assemblies where the Romanians were about to express their wishes on the future organization of the country. The electoral law gave the right to vote to a number of 11.750 voters (753 big boyars, 8211 rural landowners, most of all boyars too, 2886 townspeople) in Wallachia and the 2.954 voters (507 big owners, 261 small owners, 1153 rural owners and freelancers, 896 merchants and artisans, 137 delegates of peasants) in Moldova. According to this law, those with a right to vote have elected in the Assembly in Bucharest, 34 big owners, 17 small owners, 31 city deputies and 17 peasant deputies; in Iasi, the deputies who represented the large property, were 28, the deputies who represented the small property, were 14, the townspeople had 20 deputies, 15 for the peasantry. There were added for the both Principalities the elected officials of the clergy. Thus, is explained why for the first time in the history of the meetings, the big boyars were not able anymore to maintain their monopoly on the political life, being defeated by the coalition between the liberal aristocracy and the bourgeoisie whose program was supported by the peasantry too. In the same way, is explained the extent that took the discussions on the international status of the principalities and the union regarding these matters, the consensus is almost total, but those relating to the internal reform program. In 1858, the state representation was replaced with an electoral qualification system, which initially divided the electors into 2 election categories (1858), then in 4 (1866) and later in 3 (1884). Despite the gradual reduction of the census, in 1913 will have voted directly only 1.9% of the population of the country, 0.4% for the Senate, 1.5% for the chamber. At these low percentages were added a total of 1,139,301 voters with an indirectly vote right. By a simple calculation, gathering the two categories we see that, around World War I, 17.6% of the population of the kingdom could vote one way or another, a

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percentage that showed, with no doubt, the limits of the Romanian parliamentary democracy. But we can not deny that, in relation to 1831, when the voting right had been restricted to about 800 boyars, however, the progress was undeniable. The raised value of the census is a reason for the low number of electors. Thus, for college I, during 1911-1915 was 1,200 lei per year. College II, were voting all the townspeople who paid direct taxes of at least 20 lei annually, the freelancers, the retired officers, all the graduates of the primary school, being exempted from the census, were voting at this college. There were part of College III those who paid a tax, no matter how small. Those who paid taxes bigger than 300 lei annually voted directly, if they studied, then the priests, the primary teachers and the tenants whose rent exceeded 1,000 lei. The rest of the voters voted indirectly. Although the majority of people voted in this college, it received in the Parliament only 38 deputies, while in college I were chosen 40 deputies. Old Romania had a parliamentary democracy obviously imperfect. It is therefore amazing that she has worked in a calm way, without twists or violent changes. More or less respected by Cuza, the constitutional reign was established in the politics at the same time with the Constitution's adoption in 1866, which remained in force with minor changes, nonstructural, until 1923. The personality, but the long reign of Carol I, too (prince between 1866 and 1881), then a king until his death in 1914, also contributed to the stabilization of the institutions and to the insurance of a continuity which, before, under the frequent changes of the ruler could not exist. The mechanism of the parliamentary life imposed slowly, the political class after the unification kept for a time the no professionalism and the lack of discipline with which led the country before as nobility, not as the servant of the state. Of course, it could not be imposed overnight the modern administration technique, its absence explaining the cascade of the 20 governments from both principalities during the first three years of the reign of Cuza, the governments appointed by the prince in the virtue of his right as a sovereign. After 1866, there could no longer been made any change of the government without consulting the electoral body. The king appointed the government; the government organized the elections and lead the country with the help of the parliament elected until the appointment of another government and the organization of the new elections. This is why there were many electoral consultations, which between 1866 and 1871 were held annually. The crystallization of the political parties in the 70's has somewhat stabilized the game as the parliament, the Liberals and the Conservatives turning to come to power at regular intervals. The Parliamentary elections, the changes of government began to be organized in enlarged periods of time: 1871.1876, 1879, 1883, 1884.1888, 1891.1892, 1895, 1899, 1905.1907, 1911, 1912, so, generally every 4 years, the legislatures now were having a clear party color. This practice of the governmental rotative, had given to the political life a remarkable stability, thus standing aside of the violence and the instability that were marking other Balkan peoples in the 19th century.

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The Parliamentary sessions started in November of each year and lasted until March the next year, the deputies took their role very seriously. Often, the sessions were extended up to the summer just to give the necessary time for discussions and adoption of laws. The *"Official Gazette"* of the time, by publishing the debates, illustrates us a fierce parliamentary life, the legislatives were getting involved with passion for the regulations. Thus, between January and June 1879, the Parliament passed 72 bills. This need for the adoption of laws is explained by the fact that many cases were now presented for the first time, being in the early period of the building of our modern Romanian society. However, we can say that the Legislature forum had an excessive tendency towards regulation and towards the repeated change of some laws already enacted. In this sense, the civil procedure code, introduced in 1865, was amended in 1900, then changed again in 1904,1905,1907,1909; the commercial code, promulgated in 1840, amended in 1864, was replaced with a new code in 1887, which in its turn was amended in 1895, 1900, 1902, 1906. The Criminal Code, adopted in 1865 has seen its articles changed too in 1874, 1882, 1893, 1895, 1900, 1910, and 1912. Throughout the whole 19th century, despite the changes mentioned above, the internal state functions have remained relatively limited. The first unique government of Romania (1862) had only eight ministries: interior, foreign affairs, finance, public works, justice, churches and public education, war, control. Barely after 1864, there appeared the economic ministries, in the year when Cuza created the *"ministry of interior, agriculture and public works"*. This one became, by separating of the internal in 1869, the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works. The Public Works have separated in 1893 too, the minister becoming one of agriculture, industry and commerce, the evolution of its title showing us the growing interest in the governing for the organization of the economic life.

We're in a 19th century Romanian society with a relatively open nature, as shown by its low weight given to the interior ministry, coupled for a long time with the public works or with economic departments. This had a low coercive nature, the rural gendarmerie being organized barely towards the end of the century, because only in 1908 to appear the department of the *"general security"*, after the unsuccessful attack on Ion C. Bratianu.

We can say that the main flaw of the political regime installed in 1866 was its limited representativeness. Certainly the constitution, laws, the form of government were modern, even more, for those liberal times and certainly more democratic than most of the democratic forms of central and eastern European government. But their operation was reserved for a percentage too reduced by the citizens. Such a situation seems to be one with an objective character, if we think to the general state and the social backwardness of that moment. It seems that the main obstacle to participate to the political life, of the right to vote, was not like we would be tempted to believe, the census, decreased in College III, but the obligation to have studied. It was considered by many politicians,

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especially of the conservative ones, as offering voting rights to all the citizens who mostly did not know how to read or write, would have meant to create a mass of people easy to handle, within the reach of demagogues. But in 1892 (Gane, (1936), : 5-25), the Liberal party introduced the request for the universal suffrage in its program, and would be followed a year later by the Social Democrats.

The democratization of the political regime installed in 1866 was too slow. On paper, in the constitution, in parliament, the things seemed to go encouraging, but the 1864 agrarian reform was not completed even in 1877. In 1888, the uprisings somehow rushed the agrarian relationships reform, but in the early 20th century most of the peasants lived in poverty. Thus, its promise to the replies of reform always postponed was the 1907 uprising (Gane, (1936), :275). It started in northern Moldova and quickly covered the entire country. According to the official data, during the repressive actions there have been killed over 1,000 peasants, these actions being overly energetic led by the Liberal government with Ion I.C Bratianu and General Averescu to war.

The need for the adoption of some structural reforms would be the natural conclusion drawn after the bloody events of 1907 spring. The conservatives with old bosses and difficult to move, have continued to support the old order, accepting only some surface improvements. But, the Liberal Party, under the influence of its wing of left, especially of C. Stere, has adopted very determined the way of the institutional reforms and of the changes of the political regime. Thus, in 1913, Bratianu, with the agreement of the King, has published a reform program that was about, a month later to become the official program of the program. Thus it was proposed the introduction of the universal suffrage as well as the allotment of the peasants through expropriation.

The new parliament in February 1914, dominated by liberals, began discussing the reform project, which the conservatives, split, resigned and sensitive to the pressures of the palace they have only formally opposed at first, not realizing that in this way they were signing their own political death warrant . The Chamber of Deputies adopted the draft reform, at its 3rd reading with 143 votes for and one against. A few weeks before the event in Sarajevo on June 5, the parliament declared itself a constituent assembly and there began the discussions in the sense proposed by the reforms, to change the constitution. Despite the war, the works continued until December 1914, when, due to the international circumstances, the foreign policy had to elapse before the internal. Thus, at the Bratianu's proposal, the parliament's works were to be resumed after the war, being suspended from that moment.

Several elements that must be highlighted are the evolution of the political system and of the institutions. The nature of the political class, which, was dominated socially almost all the time by the nobility, for the beginning by the big nobility (until 1858), then until the First World War, by the gentry. Even the Liberal Party that supported a capitalist policy was mainly driven by the

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boyars. The access of the bourgeois in the political class was slow and limited. Most of the boyars of the political life of the 19 century were dominated by the idea of reform. The vast majority of people, educated in the West, the members of the political class of the old kingdom were often people of culture, scholars too, their policy following a precise goal: the introduction in Romania of the Western model, through modernization. We can attribute to the politicians of the ancient kingdom an undeniable quality, these making politics without being yet politicians, because the policy was not yet a profession as it will happen after 1918. The political affiliation of the boyar class and its economic independence, deriving from the status of landowners had the role to delay fully resolution of the issue of peasant and of other social problems, but on the other hand, they had had a positive corollary. The hanging on power was still a foreign mentality, and the social status had nothing to gain through the political function.

It is for these specific features of the ruling class that they owe a certain quality of the political life. To the same effect, the period 1831-1918 does not know major violence, taking place a single political assassination in 1862 and one palace coup in 1866.

Bratianu, the main actor of the 1848 revolution, of Cuza's subversion and Carol's bringing to power has expected to become prime minister until 1876. The reforms in 1848, 1864, 1914, although they had certainly undermined the social and political positions were accepted by the conservative with a relative lack of opposition.

Firstly dominated by the small landlords, then by the coalition between this and the representatives of the bourgeoisie, the Liberal Party was the main political factor of the age. It remained faithful to the ideas of 1848, and can say that it was, somehow, the one who, actually has "liquidated" the old Romania by the decrees of 1917 and the 1923 Constitution.

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