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The Survival Strategies of the Conservative Party and the Emergence of the Inter-war
Political System in Romania (1918-1925)

by

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ABSTRACT

Romania was one of the great beneficiaries of World War One. It doubled its territory and its population but, at the same time, its political system changed fundamentally. In the new environment marked by a radical land reform and by the introduction of universal male suffrage, the Conservative Party found it difficult to return to the prominence of political life. In the post-war era, the party changed its name to the Progressive – Conservative Party (PCP) and implemented a series of survival strategies. After a series of electoral defeats, the party focused on organizing a coalition capable of standing up to the Liberals. During the last three years of its existence, Alexandru Marghiloman, the PCP leader, disappointed by the King's partisan attitude and by the inability of the other opposition parties to collaborate, focused on finding a merger partner for his party. In the end, after his death, the remnants of Marghiloman's party joined the People's Party and returned to power only a few months later.

In the broader context of the political transformation in agrarian societies, Romania is a unique case study. Despite the scare of the peasant uprising of 1907, its political elites were able to prevent a revolution. At the same time, the industrialization policy pursued by the same elites was not rapid enough in order to provide the restless countryside with a safety valve. World War I weakened the landowners and allowed the Liberals in collaboration with the King to undertake an extensive land reform meant to pacify the countryside during times of extreme international volatility. In the aftermath of this reform however, the peasantry did not become a strong Conservative force as in many other countries. This insured the failure of the Conservative Party to survive as a prominent political force in inter-war Romania.

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Introduction

This thesis will focus on the Progressive-Conservative Party of Romania (PCP) in the aftermath of World War I (1918-1925). Its main argument is that the party employed two survival strategies during this period. Initially, the party leader, Alexandru Marghiloman, still believed that his party could return to power via the electoral process. However, after the disappointing election results of 1919 and 1920, the party realized that it was no longer able to succeed at the polls and concentrated on its second survival strategy. This implied either the organizing of an anti-Liberal coalition within which the PCP would play an important political role or the outright merger with another party capable of forming the government. The PCP was able to organize an anti-Liberal coalition in December 1921 but it was not able to convince the King of its viability. As a result, after March 1922, the PCP concentrated on finding a merger partner and by the summer of 1925, this strategy proved to be successful as the remnants of the PCP joined General Averescu's People's Party.

The Romanian state was created in 1859 when the political elites of Moldova and Wallachia elected Alexandru Ioan Cuza to rule in both principalities. Seven years later, concerned with the prince's dictatorial tendencies, the same elites forced him to abdicate and brought in a Prussian prince named Charles who became the longest-serving head of state in the country's history.¹ Prince Charles proved to be exactly what the new country needed. A patient, disciplined and hard-working individual, Charles used his considerable powers to promote stable and efficient governments. Within less than fifty

¹ Keith Hitchins, Rumania 1866-1947 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 11-13.

years, the country was transformed from a vassal of the Ottoman Empire to an important player in the Balkans.

There were two main parties in pre-war Romania. One of them was the Liberal Party (PNL) which represented the emerging bourgeoisie while the other one was the Conservative Party (PC) which represented the interests of the large landowners. The Liberals controlled a fair share of the financial system including Romania's largest bank. The Conservatives owned a great deal of land in a country which was one of the world's leading exporters of wheat. The King was the most important political player in the country. He appointed the Prime Minister and he also had the power to dissolve the two chambers of Parliament. Once appointed, the Prime Minister had the task of organizing the elections which were simply a process meant to rubberstamp the King's choice. Using the state apparatus, the government ensured electoral victory by putting pressure on the voters or by outright rigging the elections. In fact, until 1914, no government ever lost the elections it organized. Essentially, the King's appointment meant that the respective government could rule for as long as Charles considered useful.²

The franchise was severely restricted by wealth requirements which ensured that the vast majority of the population who lived in the countryside did not have a political voice. The political elite of both parties was small and many of the leading politicians knew each other personally. The Capsa restaurant in Bucharest, where a great number of politicians from both parties met, became famous as the place where many political negotiations between the two parties took place.³ The King was the political referee and he was careful to alternate the two parties in power. Despite not being democratic by any

² Ion Bulei, Conservatori si Conservatorism in Romania (Conservatives and Conservatism in Romania) (Bucharest: Enciclopedica, 2000), 27-31.

³ Bulei, Conservatori (Conservatives), 145.

standards, the pre-1914 Romanian political system was effective and stable as the politicians of both parties and the King agreed on the essential issues such as foreign policy or the development of the country's infrastructure. In fact, when Take Ionescu broke away from the PC in 1908, after a failed attempt to challenge the leadership of Petre Carp, the King was not impressed and he told both sides to settle their dispute because a third major party was not necessary at that point in the country's development.⁴

In 1914, prior to World War One, Ion Bratianu was the leader of the Liberals and Alexandru Marghiloman was the leader of the Conservatives. Take Ionescu had not rejoined the PC and his new political organization, called the Democratic-Conservative Party (PCD), collaborated with both major parties whenever it was in its interest to do so. When the war began, Romania chose to maintain its neutrality even though it had signed a secret treaty of mutual assistance with the Central Powers in 1883.⁵ Its objective was to recover the mainly Romanian provinces of Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the province of Bessarabia from Russia. Since the two major powers were fighting each other, Romania had to choose sides if it wished to expand its territory. Prime Minister Bratianu favoured neutrality until 1916, when, in his opinion, the Entente offered Romania the maximum of concessions it could hope to obtain. Since he also believed that Austria-Hungary was nearing collapse, Bratianu declared war on the Central Powers in August 1916.⁶

While the PNL was united behind Bratianu in its views on foreign policy, the same cannot be said about the PC. Three contrasting views emerged in the Conservative

⁴ Ibid., 363.

⁵ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 142.

⁶ Glenn Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998), 138-139.

camp as early as the first few weeks of the war. Petre Carp, who led the party until 1912, believed that the Central Powers would win the war. Furthermore, in his opinion Romania could not ally itself with Russia, which represented the greatest threat to its national security. Thus he advocated, from the very beginning of the war, an alliance with the Central Powers against the Tsarist Empire in an effort to recover the province of Bessarabia. Carp's only major ally in this matter was King Charles but this was not sufficient to bring the old Conservative to power or to have the country join the war against the Entente. King Charles died in November 1914 and the new king, Ferdinand, was much more favourable towards Britain and France.⁷

Nicolae Filipescu, who was one of the leading members of the PC, held an opposing view. He believed that it was time for Romania to join the Entente and to try to gain the three Romanian provinces controlled by the Habsburg monarchy.⁸ Marghiloman believed that Romania should have embarked on a cautious policy of neutrality until an eventual entry into the war ceased to be a major risk. In other words, he wanted the country to wait until one of the sides had the clear upper-hand before committing its small resources.⁹ When Marghiloman tried to impose party discipline after Filipescu's repeated criticism of the King and the government, Filipescu left the PC together with all his supporters and joined Ionescu's PCD.¹⁰ Therefore, there were three diverging views within the PC regarding foreign policy and this lack of unity contributed to the weakening of the party during the war.

⁷ Bulei, Conservatives, 465-468.

⁸ Ibid., 442.

⁹ Ibid., 443.

¹⁰ Ibid., 457.

Initially, the war proved to be disastrous for Romania. By the end of 1916, the country had lost more than half of its territory and its army was almost completely annihilated. The King and the Liberal government together with the remnants of the army retreated to the northern province of Moldova.¹¹ Marghiloman, after consulting with both Bratianu and King Ferdinand, remained in the occupied territory in an effort to provide the latter with an exit strategy in case the Central Powers would force Romania out of the war. The King and the Liberal Prime Minister agreed that the country needed a back-up plan since it seemed at the time that the final collapse of its army was simply a matter of time.¹²

Although the Romanian Army performed admirably during the summer of 1917, by the end of that year, the country faced encirclement, since the Bolsheviks who had taken power in Russia decided to sue for peace.¹³ Bratianu resigned and a new government led by General Averescu undertook the task of negotiating a peace settlement with the Central Powers. Averescu had become a war hero and the most popular man in the country following his exemplary leadership of the army in the summer of 1917. When the Central Powers made their demands public, he resigned and at that point, Bratianu, King Ferdinand and Averescu agreed that Marghiloman should be asked to form a new government in an effort to improve Romania's negotiating position. Marghiloman had kept amiable relations with the occupiers in Bucharest but this did not help because the Central Powers were anxious to take Romania out of the war quickly in order to move troops to the Western front. The Peace of Bucharest signed in March 1918

¹¹ Constantin Kiritescu, Istoria Razboiului pentru Intregirea Romaniei (The History of the War for the Unification of Romania), 2 vols. (Bucharest: Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1989), 1: 562.

¹² Bulei, Conservatives, 479.

¹³ Kiritescu, The History, 2: 197.

was a humiliating one for the country. Romania lost the province of Dobrogea to Bulgaria and the Carpathian passes to Hungary. Germany would enjoy a monopoly on Romania's wheat and oil production for ninety years.¹⁴ The only consolation was that the Central Powers allowed Romania to occupy the former Russian province of Bessarabia in order to prevent it from turning Bolshevik. Bessarabia's Parliament voted to unite with Romania on 27 March 1918.¹⁵

During the summer of 1918, the Central Powers forced Marghiloman to bring members of the Bratianu government to trial for their alleged failures and corruption during the war. In November, when the Allied victory became a certainty, the King forced Marghiloman to resign by telling him that the Western Allies did not trust his government. Since Bratianu was still technically on trial, Ferdinand called upon General Coanda to form a government meant to pave the way for the return of the Liberals. By royal decree, Ferdinand dissolved the Conservative-dominated Parliament that had resulted from the elections held in May 1918 and also nullified all its legislation. This move stopped the legal proceedings against the Liberal ministers and allowed Bratianu to return to power in December 1918.¹⁶ During the last fifty days of 1918, the Romanian Army occupied the Austro-Hungarian provinces promised by the Allies.¹⁷ Thus, the Romanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference essentially had only to gain the recognition of these territorial acquisitions from the Western Allies.

World War One was a monumental turning point in the history of Romania. After the initial disasters, the country managed to reach all its territorial objectives in a

¹⁴ Charles and Barbara Jelavich, Formarea Statelor Nationale Balcanice 1804-1920 (The Establishment of the Balkan National States 1804-1920) (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1999), 341.

¹⁵ Hitchins, Rumania, 276.

¹⁶ Bulei, Conservatives, 527-528.

¹⁷ Jelavich, The Establishment, 344.

development few could have predicted in 1914. Romania acquired the provinces of Transylvania, Bukovina and Banat from Austria-Hungary and Bessarabia from Russia. The size of the country increased from 137,903 squared kilometres in 1914 to 295,049 squared kilometres in 1919 while its population increased from 7,741,341 to 14,669,841 during the same period.¹⁸

The war also accelerated and radicalized the reform process which the political class had only begun to contemplate prior to 1914. The two major reforms under discussion were the agrarian reform and universal male suffrage. The agrarian question remained an unresolved issue in Romanian politics from the creation of the country until 1921. The difficulty lay in the fact that the Romanian state was never able to come up with an appropriate strategy vis-à-vis the surplus rural population. The industrial sector developed slowly and was not able to provide a safety valve for the peasantry who did not own the means for a comfortable life.

The land reform put forward by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1864 distributed monastic land to a part of the peasantry and allowed the peasants to divide their land among their heirs, making the development of modern agricultural techniques impossible. Furthermore, not all peasants were given land and most of those who received it still did not own enough to make their enterprises viable.¹⁹ In addition, Romania's population increased by 54 percent between 1859 and 1899. The most pressing problem however was that by 1905, over 50 percent of the land was concentrated on estates of over 100 hectares. This represented less than one percent of the number of land owners, while the

¹⁸ Irina Livezeanu, Cultura si Nationalism in Romania Mare 1918-1930 (Cultural Politics in Greater Romania 1918-1930) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 17-18.

¹⁹ Henry Roberts, Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 12.

small properties belonging to the peasantry encompassed only 40 percent of the cultivated land though they constituted over 95 percent of the number of land owners.²⁰ As a result, a considerable portion of the peasantry had to rent land from the large estates. A large number of landowners exacerbated the difficulties by choosing to lease their estates to tenants who in turn would force the peasants to pay more for the use of the land. Succinctly, the peasants wanted more land and felt that the state should expropriate at least a portion of the large estates in order to make this land available to them. They considered this to be the only solution to their problems.

In 1907, a peasant revolt that spread rapidly from the north of the country to virtually all districts of the Old Kingdom shook the political establishment from its foundations. Both major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives agreed to use the army to crush the revolt but, in the aftermath, the agrarian question returned to the political debates.

Ion I.C. Bratianu, the leader of the Liberal Party (PNL) published an article in the autumn of 1913 advocating the expropriation of some of the large estates and an increased franchise.²¹ The main goal of such a policy was to strike a blow against the Conservatives rather than to tackle the agrarian question. At this stage, the Liberals intended to extend the franchise to all literate males and to eliminate the electoral-college system which had favoured the richer elements of society, the majority of whom were Conservative.²²

²⁰ Roberts, *Rumania*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² Sorin Radu, *Electoralul din Romania in Anii Democratiei Parlamentare (1919-1937) (The Romanian Electorate during the Parliamentary Democracy Years (1919-1937))* (Insitutul European, 2004), 16.

The Conservatives who were mainly landowners objected in principle to the expropriation, which they viewed as an attack on private property. Their leading expert on the agrarian question, Constantin Garoflid, wanted to create a strong middle peasantry by consolidating the peasant holdings and by making them a great deal more efficient.²³

Regarding the issue of enlarging the franchise, the Conservatives believed this to be a needless reform since on the one hand the peasantry was not demanding the right to vote and on the other hand such a reform would give equal voices to citizens of unequal ability and knowledge. Since the rural population vastly outnumbered the urban one, the Conservatives believed that such a reform would be counterproductive and dangerous.²⁴

During the spring of 1917, however, when what was left of the Romanian Army was bracing for another German attack, King Ferdinand, in an effort to bolster the morale of his soldiers and to prevent the spread of the Bolshevik propaganda from the Russian Army, promised the peasantry land and universal male suffrage at the end of the war.²⁵ Compared to Bratianu's proposals from 1914, these reforms were indeed radical. While the agrarian reform can be understood as an effort to pacify a restless segment of society, the extension of the franchise to such an extent can only be interpreted as an attempt to imitate some of the Western democracies which were undertaking similar reforms at the time. One of the major goals of this thesis is to gauge the impact of these reforms on the behaviour of Marghiloman's party after the war.

The war also modified the political system to a certain extent. King Ferdinand, who retained his powers, did not share the determination, energy and political neutrality

²³ Constantin Garoflid, Problema Agrara si Deslegarea Ei (The Agrarian Question and Its Solution) (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice, 1908), 11.

²⁴ Garoflid, The Agrarian Question, 34.

²⁵ Hitchins, Rumania, 266.

of his predecessor. Famous for his timidity and hesitance, Ferdinand's political decisions were heavily influenced by his advisers such as Prince Barbu Stirbey and Alexandru Misu who were also members of the Liberal Party. Through these men, Bratianu found out everything that was happening at the royal court and could always influence the King's actions.²⁶ Thus, the PNL acquired a tremendous political advantage which it exploited very effectively in the postwar years.

Although the King still appointed the Prime Minister who could then use the administrative apparatus to obtain a majority in Parliament, universal male suffrage forced all political parties to expand their field of activity into the countryside in order to appeal to the peasantry who represented over eighty percent of the electoral body. This was made even more difficult in the first few post-war years by the poor infrastructure and the disinterest displayed by most voters in the rural areas. Nevertheless, all parties realized fairly early on that the expansion of their organizations into the rural areas was crucial to their political survival in the post-war environment.

The most important change that occurred in Romania's political system was the disappearance of the two-party system and the emergence of a number of parties which represented regional, class or even personal interests. A brief survey of the various political forces in the early postwar period reveals the complex and fluid nature of the new political system in which the Conservatives had to compete.

The Conservative Party, led by Alexandru Marghiloman, was in a tenuous position at the end of the war. First, during the previous ten years, the party had splintered into four different branches. In 1908, Take Ionescu broke away from the party

²⁶ Constantin Argetoianu, Memorii (Memoirs), 10 vols. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995) 5:242-243.

when he failed to win the leadership race against Carp.²⁷ In 1915, Nicolae Filipescu, who wanted Romania to enter the war against the Central Powers, joined Ionescu in the pro-Entente camp.²⁸ Later on, when Germany was defeated, Carp, who was a legendary figure among Conservatives and who wanted Romania to fight against Russia, retired from politics and his supporters did the same.²⁹ Nicolae Filipescu who had lost a bitter leadership battle against Marghiloman died during the war. However his supporters who had joined Ionescu's party did not forget this incident and were prepared to do anything in their power to sabotage a possible reunification of all active Conservatives. Furthermore, a number of prominent Conservatives such as Constantin Argetoianu joined General Averescu's political organization. Thus, by the end of the war, for various reasons, the PC had lost a significant number of its members who had either retired or joined other parties.³⁰

Second, the Liberals associated Marghiloman's government with the occupying armies. Although Bratianu had been the one to suggest that a Conservative government was appropriate in March 1918, the PNL argued that the signing of the Peace of Bucharest by Marghiloman was a treacherous act. Of course, the treaty had been signed with Bratianu's full knowledge and backing since he could not see any other solution at that particular moment. However, the fact that Marghiloman's government began legal proceedings against prominent Liberals for their role in the corruption scandals of 1915-1916 infuriated the PNL elite.³¹ Although this was forced upon Marghiloman by the

²⁷ Constantin Xenii, Take Ionescu (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2002), 94.

²⁸ Hitchins, Rumania, 257.

²⁹ Bulei, Conservatives, 529.

³⁰ Mircea Musat and Ion Ardeleanu, Viata Politica in Romania 1918-1921 (Politics in Romania (1918-1921)) (Bucharest, Politica, 1976), 237.

³¹ Alexandru Marghiloman, Note Politice (Political Notes), 5 vols. (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice "Eminescu", 1927), 4:144-145.

Central Powers, it could be argued that the Conservatives stood only to gain from a possible sentencing of their political opponents. At the same time though, it is also true that the Liberals had been involved in some controversial commercial deals that saw some members of the PNL profit tremendously during Romania's period of neutrality. Thus, by November 1918, the PNL treated the PC as a hostile force and sought revenge by having the King annul the Conservative legislation in an unprecedented political action.

Third, the relationship between the Crown and Marghiloman deteriorated as well. Queen Marie who was an active political player and a Bratianu sympathiser had been an ardent supporter of the Entente. Her family connections with the British and Russian monarchies as well as her conviction that only alongside the Western Allies could Romania hope to reach its territorial objectives made her throw her political weight behind Romania's war effort. Consequently she did not appreciate Marghiloman's cautiousness and his suggestion that Romania could have achieved the same results by remaining neutral to the end or at least until the defeat of the Central Powers was assured.³² Furthermore, the King's unceremonious annulment of the PC legislation did not help matters either. Therefore by the end of the war, the PC had suffered a number of defections and had alienated the two most influential political actors in the country, namely Bratianu and the King.

These damaging political developments were not the only ones to negatively impact the PC. The two major reforms which the King agreed to promulgate were going to damage the economic as well as the political power of the PC. Since the Conservatives were mainly large landowners, they stood to lose the most from the

³² Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 153.

agrarian reform. Politically, the introduction of universal male suffrage was supposed to have a negative impact on the party since it was hard to believe that the peasants would vote for the PC, especially when some of the other parties that had emerged in 1918 were promising them much more than Marghiloman.

By the end of World War One, the PC was facing a difficult situation. The party had lost some of its members due to differences of opinion regarding foreign policy. It had also alienated the Liberals and the Crown and it had emerged from the war with a tarnished image which was to a large extent undeserved. Furthermore, the reforms that were supposed to follow were only going to weaken the party further. Under these circumstances it took a great deal of courage on the part of the party leadership and especially on the part of Marghiloman to continue the political struggle.

The most powerful party of Greater Romania was the National Liberal Party (PNL) led until 1927 by Ion I.C. Bratianu.³³ The Liberals were the only political group to survive throughout the entire period from the creation of the Romanian state in 1859 to the consolidation of Communist power in 1946-1947. As mentioned, the Liberals controlled a large part of the Romanian financial system and some of the emerging industry. At the end of the war the Liberals enjoyed a number of advantages vis-à-vis the other political actors. First, Bratianu was the most influential politician in the country. Second, although luck was on their side, the Liberals could claim that their policies were crucial in the creation of Greater Romania. Third, their party organization was remarkably disciplined and well financed. Fourth, their influence on the Crown was their most important asset. At the same time, their errors during the war and the corruption scandals involving Liberal ministers that occurred during Romania's neutrality (1914-

³³ Musat and Ardeleanu, Politics, 109.

1916) were not forgotten. The PNL was not a popular party despite its accomplishments. Their objectives at the end of 1918 were to expand their party organizations in the newly-acquired provinces and to prevent any other party from threatening their economic and political position.

One of the political parties that emerged during 1918 was General Averescu's People's League (LP).³⁴ The party was created by a number of ex-Conservatives such as Constantin Argetoianu, Alexandru Cantacuzino or Petre Panaitescu who rallied around the most popular man in the country. The general, who became the idol of the peasantry, was not well versed in the political arena. At the beginning he wanted to create a political movement meant to establish the responsibilities for the country's disaster.³⁵ After the Entente won the war, his party's objective was to create a counter-balance to the mighty PNL. Initially, the LP enjoyed broad support from all classes of society especially in the Old Kingdom. The challenge faced by Constantin Argetoianu, the LP's main strategist, was to create a cohesive party with a large and stable social base capable of withstanding the inevitable waning of Averescu's popularity. The obstacles in his path were the strength of the Liberals and the King with whom Averescu did not enjoy the best of relations.

The National Party (PN) claimed to represent the interests of the Romanians from Transylvania within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian state. Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod were the PN's leaders. After the war, the party maintained the support of the Romanian Transylvanians regardless of their class background and could

³⁴ Ibid., 235. In 1920, the name of the party was changed from People's League to People's Party. Both names will be used in this text.

³⁵ Ibid., 242.

therefore count on a constant number of seats in the Romanian Parliament.³⁶ Because of this all political parties from the Old Kingdom tried to enlist the support of the PN. The main objective of the PN was to find the most appropriate merger partner in the Old Kingdom and since the party occupied a centrist position on the political spectrum, essentially all major players across the Carpathians were possible coalition partners.³⁷ The weakness of the PN was that, being a regional party, it could not hope to extend its influence outside of its Transylvanian base without the help of another political party.

Ironically, the only important party that claimed to represent a significant social class was born almost by accident. Constantin Argetoianu mentions that in the autumn of 1918 he sent Ion Mihalache from the wartime capital of Iasi to his native Arges district to found the local LP organization.³⁸ However, the ex-leader of the National Teachers' Association founded a new party called the Peasantist Party (PT).³⁹ The party initially proclaimed itself to be a class-based party. It advocated an immediate and radical land reform which was supposed to expropriate more land than the one proposed by the Liberals and distribute it to the peasants free of charge.⁴⁰ No one paid any attention to the PT at the end of 1918. However, during the elections of 1919 the party emerged as a political force as a result of Averescu's boycott.⁴¹ Obviously, the party's initial objective was to make its ideas known in the countryside from where the bulk of its support was supposed to come. With no financial resources, it had to rely on its network of connections among the rural teachers who had served under Mihalache's leadership.

³⁶ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 393.

³⁷ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 157.

³⁸ Argetoianu, *Memoirs*, 6: 64.

³⁹ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 186.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴¹ Argetoianu, *Memoirs*, 6: 63.

The Democratic-Conservative Party (PCD), led by Take Ionescu split from the main CP in 1908. Although the PCD participated in a Conservative coalition which governed Romania during the Balkan Wars, it proved impossible to reach an understanding with the PC leadership in regards to a possible reunification of the party.⁴² During the war, Ionescu and another ex-Conservative named Nicolae Filipescu were the most ardent supporters of the Entente. During the summer of 1918, the Germans allowed Ionescu to travel to France on a sealed train reminiscent of the one carrying Lenin to Saint Petersburg. During his stay in the French capital, the Romanian politician made many friends among Europe's diplomats but at the same time he ignored his party organization.⁴³ Since the PCD revolved around his personality, his prolonged absence from the country undermined the party's moral capital obtained during the war. At the end of the war, the party was in a somewhat similar position as the PCP. It could try to survive on its own and hope that its leader's influence in the European diplomatic circles may translate into an important political appointment at home. Or, it could attempt to find a coalition partner that was in need of Ionescu's foreign policy expertise and of its experienced members. Of course, an expansion into the countryside was problematic since the PCD lacked Averescu's popularity, the PT's radicalism or the PNL's financial resources.

One of the features of the new multi-party system that emerged after 1918 was a clear shift towards the left of the political spectrum. All the new parties were center or center-left political organizations. The PT's program could be best described as peasant socialism. Averescu had populist tendencies and the PN was a party with a mixture of

⁴² Bulei, Conservatives, 414-416.

⁴³ Ibid., 644.

populist and conservative views. In this context, the Liberals who until 1914 represented the moderate left were all of a sudden considered to be to the right of most of these parties excluding the two Conservative factions.

The major flaw of this new political system was that it did not match the intentions of the reforms that created it. If universal suffrage was instituted in order to “give a voice to the people” then it was logical to assume that the Parliamentary majority would nominate the Prime Minister. In such a system, as long as the elections were free, the results would have been crucial in determining the strength of the political parties. However, in Greater Romania, the king retained the powers he held in the Old Kingdom. His ability to appoint the Prime Minister and to dissolve Parliament combined with the use of the state apparatus at election time in order to influence the result of the elections essentially meant that as long as a party had the support of the King, it could govern without enjoying the necessary popularity in the country. It was precisely this feature of the system which offered hope to the Conservatives. Although they had not abandoned the idea of coming to power via their own electoral strength, if that was not going to be possible in the new environment, they also had the option of coming to power with the help of the King. All they had to do was convince the King of their usefulness. Considering that the Liberals could not maintain power indefinitely and that the rest of the political class was fairly inexperienced, it appeared that as long as the Conservatives could maintain amiable relations with the royal couple, they could hope to return to power either by themselves or as part of a coalition of parties.

The Conservative Party of Romania has not been a popular topic for historians. The last few years (December 1918 – May 1925) of its existence have been even less so.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, for inter-war historians the events appear to have been too close in time and somewhat uninteresting. In fact, none of these historians ventured to analyze the activity of Alexandru Marghiloman's party post-1918. Second, the inter-war period of Romanian politics can be described as a volatile time during which a number of new parties were born and, at various times seemed to embody the hopes of large segments of society. For example, General Averescu's People's League (1918-1921), the National Peasants Party (1928-1930) and the "All for the Country" Party (1937) were all popular political organizations which promised a certain level of changes in the political life of the country. The influence of these parties was greater than that of a Conservative Party far removed from its glory years. As a result, after the fall of Communism historians who could write once again without fear of censorship preferred to cover these topics. Third, during the Communist era (1945-1989) the Romanian Marxist historians, as Gheorghe Gica admits, were not interested in writing about what they saw as a reactionary political party.

Gheorghe Gica was the first historian to write about the PCP. In an article published in 1967 he attempted to describe the last few years of Marghiloman's party. While his effort is laudable, numerous factual errors combined with a rigid ideological interpretation of the events take a great deal away from the quality of Gica's effort. Gica's main argument is that the agrarian and electoral reforms that followed World War I constituted the death blows to an already-weakened Conservative Party.⁴⁴ His opinion is that the Conservative Party could not adapt to the realities of the post-war era and that,

⁴⁴ Gheorghe Gica, "Procesul de Descompunere a Partidului Conservator-Progresist de sub Sefia lui Alexandru Marghiloman (The Disintegration Process of Alexandru Marghiloman's Progressive-Conservative Party of Romania)" Analele Universitatii Bucuresti, Seria Stiinte Sociale, Istorie XVI (1967): 85.

following its failure to gain significant number of seats in Parliament, the party began to disintegrate.⁴⁵ While these assertions are fairly obvious, the hopes of the Conservatives were not to become a mass party but rather to return to power as part of a coalition within which the PCP would play a stabilizing role. Gica's commits a number of errors caused in part by his somewhat careless look at the available sources. For example, Gica writes that the PCP won 16 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the 1919 elections and for 1920 elections.⁴⁶ In fact the PCP won only 13 seats in 1919⁴⁷ and none in 1920.⁴⁸ Gica's insistence that the PCP was the representative of the landowners is in accordance with the traditional Marxist view of the Conservatives. However, although there were many landowners in the party, it would be a mistake to consider the PCP a purely class-based party since it also comprised of numerous middle-class elements such as teachers, army officers and well-to-do peasants. Interestingly, in a review, Constantin Angelescu points out most of the errors in Gica's article and offers a number of explanatory details meant to clarify and expand on Gica's ideas.⁴⁹

Mircea Musat and Ion Ardeleanu included a chapter about the PCP in their Viata politica in Romania 1918-1921 (The political life in Romania 1918-1921). The two historians agree that a part of the bourgeoisie and a number of the leading intellectuals could be found in the PCP alongside the landowners.⁵⁰ They also correctly point out that the Conservatives intended to create a strong middle tier of peasants who were supposed

⁴⁵ Gica, The Process, p. 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁷ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 409.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 5: 56.

⁴⁹ Constantin Angelescu, review of Gheorghe Gica, "Procesul de Descompunere a Partidului Conservator-Progresist de sub Sefia lui Alexandru Marghiloman (The Disintegration Process of Alexandru Marghiloman's Progressive-Conservative Party of Romania)" Analele Universitatii Bucuresti, Seria Stiinte Sociale, Istorie XVI (1967).

⁵⁰ Musat si Ardeleanu, Politics, 62.

to own between 25 and 100 hectares of land.⁵¹ However the two authors quote the same erroneous number of seats won by the PCP in the first two post-war elections as Gica.⁵² In fact they seem to have been heavily influenced by Gica's article especially since the conclusions of both texts are basically similar.

Mihail Rusenescu and Ioan Saizu in Viata politica in Romania 1922-1928 (The political life in Romania 1921-1928) attempt to describe the last three years of the PCP's existence (1922-1925). They point out that following the 1922 elections Marghiloman attempted to reach an understanding with some of the parties opposed to the Liberals such as the PN and the PP. However, their description of these attempts is somewhat superficial.

Ion Bulei is the most authoritative scholar when it comes to the history of the Conservative Party of Romania throughout its existence. His monograph entitled Conservatori si Conservatorism (Conservatives and Conservatism) contains one chapter on the history of the party after 1918. Bulei in fact deals with both Marghiloman's and Take Ionescu's parties in the post-1918 era and argues that in the new political arena the Conservatives did not possess the necessary tools to compete effectively with either the powerful financial machine of the Liberals or with the newer parties. He also points out that the reforms and especially universal suffrage had been too abrupt and that the Conservatives simply did not have enough time to adapt to the new conditions.⁵³ In terms of the sources cited, Bulei's work is notable also because he uses a larger variety of the party press and more correspondence exchanged between Marghiloman and some of the party members. Given the scope of his work which documents the entire life of the

⁵¹ Ibid., 79.

⁵² Ibid., 81-82.

⁵³ Bulei, Conservatives, 634.

Conservative Party, Bulei does not focus particularly on the last few years of Marghiloman's party for obvious reasons. The one criticism that could in fact be directed towards all the authors mentioned above is that they do not seem to realize Marghiloman's importance in the exhaustive political negotiations taking place at the end of 1921.

This thesis contributes to a broader scholarly discussion about the political modernization of agrarian countries. The following works are helpful in placing the Romanian example in the wider context of developing countries that are going through a period of fundamental agrarian reform. Samuel Huntington in Political Order in Changing Societies provides various models of development that modernizing societies have followed. In his opinion one of the important steps on the road from feudalism to capitalism is a comprehensive land reform.⁵⁴ He argues that a land-owning peasantry is a conservative and stabilizing force in society while a peasantry that is landless could always transform itself into the shock troops of revolution. One of the keys to peaceful development is whether the ruling elites are able to accommodate the peasants and their immediate demands in a timely fashion.⁵⁵ Huntington contends that in order for this to happen, a powerful group other than the landed elites needs to gain enough power to make the reform even if this requires extensive confiscation of land. Another alternative is that of a strong ruler who can force the landed elites to accept such a reform. Huntington also points out that without a dominant political force in Parliament that is dedicated to ensuring the success of the reform the conservative landowning elites are

⁵⁴ Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 376.

⁵⁵ Huntington, Political Order, 375.

usually able to resist it successfully.⁵⁶ Huntington's model of development and especially his theory of land reform are useful tools when looking at Romania's path to modernity. Some of his requirements for a successful transition are met while others are not.

Barrington Moore in his Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy is trying to explain why some of the world's powers emerged into vibrant democracies while others evolved into authoritarian or even dictatorial regimes. One of the issues that Moore emphasizes is the relationship between the peasant and his landlord as well as the way the land-owning class made the transition from the feudal period to modernity.⁵⁷ His observations are extremely useful when analyzing Romania's situation which, due to the various historical influences was bound to follow a hybrid route of development.

Romanian leaders were able to prevent a catastrophic revolution; the peasant revolt of 1907 was accompanied by a great deal of bloodshed, even though it did not cause major social changes immediately. At the same time, however, the landowners did not survive as a political or economic force and the country evolved during the inter-war period first into a semi-democracy and then into a royal and military dictatorship.

Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan are interested in the relationship between various groups in society and political parties that represent them.⁵⁸ They argue that in general, conservative parties evolve to represent the agrarian interests of both landlords and peasants or agricultural workers. They also point out that in countries with rural majorities, agrarian parties tend to emerge which tend to be on the left side of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 388.

⁵⁷ Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

political spectrum. Although the Romanian Conservatives hoped to transform the party into a representative of the entire agrarian spectrum, the differences between landlord and peasant in terms of income and education were so overwhelming that the emergence of a peasant-based agrarian political party which was completely separate from the PC was almost inevitable especially after the war. In their belief that they could imitate the success of the British Conservatives and survive in the era of universal male suffrage, the Romanian Conservatives tended to ignore the level of economic and political development that Britain had already reached by the end of World War I.

Neal McCrillis provides an absorbing description of the first few inter-war years for the British Conservatives.⁵⁹ He concentrates on the Conservative strategy of attracting the new segments of the electorate by expanding the party and by ensuring its future. Essentially, the British Conservatives during the first inter-war decade were able to do what the Romanian Conservatives could not. While the make-up of the two societies and electorates was visibly different, the need to expand their powerbase was present for both political organizations. Undoubtedly, the British Conservatives were better prepared to undertake this expansion of their party organization than their Romanian counterparts. Their propaganda efforts had to focus in the urban centres where the vast majority of the population lived and not in a hostile countryside. Also, they did not have to be concerned with expanding their organization into new provinces. Furthermore, the war had not damaged their reputation as it happened to the Romanian Conservatives. The comparison between the two parties which were apparently facing similar challenges is useful in underlining the differences in development between an

⁵⁹ Neal McCrillis, The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1998).

already-industrialized Western Europe and a mostly-agrarian country which despite all its efforts could not catch up with its Western Allies in terms of economic and political development.

Due to the nature of the topic, the vast majority of the sources used for this thesis are primary sources. They include political memoirs, periodicals and archival records. The most useful of the political memoirs was Alexandru Marghiloman's Note Politice (Political Notes). The five-volume political diary of the Conservative leader covers extensively the period from 1913 to 1922. It is perhaps the most valuable source available to the historian of that particular decade as it describes the inner-workings of Romanian politics during the Second Balkan War, World War I and the volatile post-war years. As Marghiloman was the leader of the Conservatives for most of this period, his diary is invaluable in providing information about the party's political strategy during the period between the end of the war and his death. Marghiloman recorded his opinion on the main political events, the leadership meetings of the PCP, his conversations with other political leaders and his dealings with the royal couple. The publication of the Political Notes on 15 May 1927 caused a storm of criticism from a political class whose behaviour and secrets had been exposed. The Averescu government confiscated the remaining copies less than two days after their appearance on the market.

The other main Conservative memoirs of the post-war period belong to Mariu Theodorian-Carada. He was one of Marghiloman's closest friends and political collaborators. Interestingly, he believed in a reconciliation and collaboration with the liberals. Despite the fact that this was never achieved, Carada remained loyal to

Marghiloman until the latter's death in 1925. His memoirs are important because they reveal some of the decision-making process within the PCP.

Constantin Argentoianu was a leading Conservative who joined Averescu during the war. He became the strategist of the People's Party and his memoirs reveal the relationship between the two parties as well as that between Averescu and Marghiloman.

The Conservative party press was another rich source of information regarding the actions of the PCP. The PCP's national newspaper, called Steagul, appeared daily until December 1922 despite the high cost and the limited number of subscribers. The publication provides information on a series of topics such as the activity of the party, the PCP's position regarding the main political events as well as the party's relationship with the other political actors. Basically, Steagul provides a day-to-day log of the PCP. At the end of 1922, after a dispute between Marghiloman and Andrei Corteanu who was Steagul's director, the publication ceased to exist and was replaced beginning with March 1923 by Timpul which served as the main Conservative newspaper until August 1924. The two newspapers were virtually identical in terms of format and content. For the last several months of the party's existence, the PCP did not have a national newspaper due to financial difficulties and to Marghiloman's precarious health.

The PCP also had a number of local publications financed by the local party members. The most notable of these were Gazeta Dorohoiului (1918-1923), Presa (1919-1920) and Conservatorul (1923-1924). These reveal the local activity of the party and provide details about the relationship between the central leadership from Bucharest and the various local organizations.

Unfortunately, the Romanian National Archives contain few records about the Conservative party during this period. Although the Conservatives appeared to keep internal records detailing things such as the names of the party members and the names of the subscribers to their various political publications few of these ended up in the Romanian archives. It is not clear whether such documents still exist. The materials that can be found in the Romanian National Archives can be divided into three categories: personal letters exchanged between various members of the Conservative leadership, propaganda materials used for the general elections of 1919 and 1920 and internal records such as financial records and resignation letters. Of these, Marghiloman's letters to Constantin Meissner, the leader of the Iasi Conservative organization constitute the most valuable archival source when dealing with the Conservative party after 1918. The two men appeared to be close friends as well. Marghiloman wrote a few letters every year to Meissner, detailing the new political developments and his opinion on the current political events. The letters are important because they provide an interesting insight into the PCP's political strategy in its attempts to survive and to maintain its relevance. They also expose the weakening of some of the local party organizations especially after 1919. The archival records also contain a few letters that Meissner received from other Conservative leaders during the last few months of Marghiloman's life and in the period immediately following his death. These help the historian to identify the main political developments in the last year of the PCP's existence.

The political memoirs allow the reader to view the political system as the various politicians perceived it. They reveal the goals of the politicians involved as well as their opinions about their peers. They also provide information about some of the strategies

used by the PCP during its negotiations with the other political partners. The party press is more useful in figuring out the party's official position about the current events. Also political manoeuvres were usually preceded by some sort of reaction in the press. Furthermore, important statistics such as numbers of members present at party meetings, lists of candidates in the various elections as well as details about these candidates and the local party organizations can only be found in the press. The archival records contain mainly personal letters exchanged between Marghiloman and some of the other leaders of the PCP. They reveal details about the various plans of the party leadership and help the researcher to understand the political situation in some of the local organizations. They also reveal the frustrations displayed by Marghiloman but also by some of the other prominent members of the party, especially in the last few years of his life.

This thesis will contain three main chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 1 begins with the creation of the PCP in December 1918 and ends with the party's participation in the elections of 1920. It explores the electoral strategy of the PCP and the reasons for its failure. Chapter 2 analyzes the PCP's activity during the Averescu government and the political crisis that followed it. The chapter focuses in particular on the political negotiations that took place in December 1921 during which Marghiloman played an important role. During this period, the PCP concentrated on a strategy of returning to power as part of an anti-Liberal coalition. Chapter 3 looks at the last few years of the party (1922-1925). During this phase, the main concern of the party was to find a suitable merger partner. In this it succeeded, and after Marghiloman's death, the PCP merged with Averescu's PP.

Chapter 1

On 6 November 1918, Alexandru Marghiloman resigned as the Prime Minister of Romania. Earlier that day, King Ferdinand had made it clear to him that his Conservative government did not enjoy the support of the Western Allies, who were by then assured to win World War I.⁶⁰ This chapter will argue that in the interval of time between November 1918 and May 1920, Marghiloman's party employed two strategies in order to return to political prominence. On the one hand, the Conservatives still believed that they could obtain notable election results and become important players in Parliament. On the other hand, they tried to establish amicable relationships with some of the other parties and the Crown, hoping to return to power as part of a political coalition or at the King's request. The first strategy failed, as the party only won a few seats in 1919 and none in 1920. In the process, while hoping that General Averescu's boycott of the 1919 elections would translate into more votes for them, the Conservatives refused his offer to join him. Thus, they missed a tremendous opportunity to establish an alliance with the General which quite possibly would have seen them return to power as part of his government in 1920. After May 1920, it became clear that only the second strategy remained available to the Conservatives.

Marghiloman was replaced by General Coanda whose government was meant to pave the way for Bratianu's return. After the King solved the Liberal leader's legal difficulties by voiding the Conservative legislation, Bratianu returned to power on 11 December 1918.⁶¹ Greater Romania was rapidly becoming a reality as the Romanians in Bukovina and Transylvania declared for union with the "motherland" on 28 November

⁶⁰ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 4: 117.

⁶¹ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 357.

and 1 December respectively.⁶² The challenge of the following year for the Romanian state was to consolidate its gains and to have them recognized by the Great Powers. When the communist regime in Hungary attacked Romania on 15 April 1919, the Romanian Army took the opportunity to eliminate a strategic and ideological threat on its western border.⁶³ Bratianu's objective in Paris was to convince the Allies not to renege on the promises they had made to Romania in 1916 despite the fact that Romania had signed a separate peace with Germany in 1918. Although in the end Romania did lose some of territory promised three years earlier, it was compensated when the Allies recognized its acquisition of Bukovina and Bessarabia.⁶⁴

Domestically, the Liberals kept postponing the elections due to the unstable international situation. Bratianu resigned in September and the King formed a government under General Arthur Vaitoianu who had the sole responsibility of organizing the first elections in Greater Romania.⁶⁵ A number of parties such as General Averescu's LP and Ionescu's PCD boycotted the elections, contesting the fairness of the process. The PN and the PT were the noticeable winners while the Liberals failed to win a majority though the government was visibly on their side.⁶⁶ Alexandru Vaida, a prominent Transylvanian politician, led the resulting PN-PT government. General Averescu accepted the position of Internal Affairs Minister in an effort to convince the PN to merge with his party and create a powerful national party. When this failed, he

⁶² Hitchins, *Rumania*, 257.

⁶³ Lucian Leustean, *Romania, Ungaria si Tratatul de la Trianon (Romania, Hungary and the Treaty of Trianon)* (Iasi: Polirom, 2000), 81.

⁶⁴ Sherman D. Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1962), 227.

⁶⁵ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 357.

⁶⁶ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 406. Out of a total of 568 seats, the PN obtained 168, the PNL 103 and the PT 61.

resigned and began attacking the government.⁶⁷ Prime Minister Vaida's spent most of his time in power in foreign capitals trying to pacify Romania's important allies who had been disappointed by Bratianu's stubbornness. While he was successful in this enterprise, his absence from the country allowed the PT to push forward its radical agrarian agenda.⁶⁸ As a result of this development and of the numerous strikes orchestrated by the Socialists under the admiring eye of a Peasantist Interior Minister, the King sacked Vaida's government and brought General Averescu to power on 13 March 1920.⁶⁹ Averescu's party, which had changed its name just ahead of the elections from the People's League (LP) to the People's Party (PP), easily won the elections organized in May 1920 while the Liberals were soundly defeated and the Peasantists proved that they had established a presence in the countryside.⁷⁰

Chronologically, the period between the fall of the Marghiloman government and the general elections of 1920 can be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase (November 1918 – November 1919) corresponds to the period between the fall of the Conservatives and the first elections held under universal male suffrage. The Paris Peace Conference dominated the political debate during this phase, as the various political forces that had sprung up were trying to define their points of view in relation to the Allied demands and to Prime Minister Bratianu's resistance to them. The second phase essentially consisted of the life of the first Parliament of Greater Romania. It lasted from November 1919 to May 1920.

⁶⁷ Argetoianu, *Memoirs*, 6: 95.

⁶⁸ Roberts, *Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, 27.

⁶⁹ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 29-30.

⁷⁰ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 362. Out of a total of 369 seats, the PP won 224 seats, the PT 44 seats, the PN 34 seats and the PNL only 9 seats.

Following the collapse of their government, the Conservatives found themselves in a difficult political situation. A number of their members began to leave the party mostly under the pretext of no longer agreeing with its ideas.⁷¹ Although most of these members had joined the party in 1918 while it was in power, their departure weakened it numerically.⁷² At the same time the party became isolated among its counterparts because, in the context of Romania negotiating with the Allies, no one wished to be associated with a party perceived to have been neutral or even pro-German during the war. Furthermore, the Crown not only dissolved the Conservative-dominated Parliament but also voided all legislation passed under Marghiloman's government.⁷³ Although the King awkwardly attempted on more than one occasion to make the Conservative leader feel appreciated, the Queen did not hide her animosity towards him.⁷⁴ Under these circumstances, at the beginning of the post-war era, the Conservative Party of Romania faced a difficult task when it came to returning to the forefront of national politics.

Phase 1 – Activity

The party's activity during the period between November 1918 and November 1919 can be categorized into three main areas: party meetings attended by leading members of the organization meant to establish a new strategy suited for the post-war political environment, the drafting of a new program coupled with the renaming of the organization, and election-related propaganda and rallies. The series of leadership meetings that took place in the latter part of 1918 and the first few months of 1919 played

⁷¹ Arhivele Nationale Romane (ANR) (Romanian National Archives), fond Meissner, dosar V/208, f. 59.

⁷² Ibid., f. 59, 67-70.

⁷³ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 144.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4: 303.

an important role in establishing the objectives as well as the direction of the party for the immediate future. During the first of these, on 8 November 1918, it became clear that some of the leading members believed that the party's mission was over. For example, C.C. Arion, the first man in the party hierarchy after Marghiloman, stated "we no longer exist...our saviour is [General] Averescu."⁷⁵ Arion was referring to the fact that many ex-Conservatives had joined Averescu's LP and that Marghiloman should have attempted to form a partnership with the general. Nonetheless, although Arion continued to hold this belief until his death in 1923, he showed tremendous political and personal loyalty to Marghiloman by remaining in the party. Still, at the meeting, the Conservatives decided to launch a propaganda campaign in order to explain the activity of their government and to wait and see how this was going to be perceived by the other parties.⁷⁶

Ten days later, the Conservative ex-ministers decided to accept any offer of collaboration within a national unity government, in order to be able to moderate the agrarian reform that was supposed to follow.⁷⁷ By the middle of December the Conservatives agreed on a new program which included most of the reforms preached by their opponents.⁷⁸ At the same time, Mariu Theodorian-Carada, another leading Conservative, convinced Marghiloman to also change the name of the party to the Progressive-Conservative Party (PCP).⁷⁹

On 7 February 1919, the PCP leadership again examined the possibility of participating in a national-unity government. Most of those present agreed that, although

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4: 126.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4: 126.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4: 144. The Liberals used a decree to initiate the reform in late 1918. However, the full text of the agrarian reform was going to be negotiated in Parliament after the first country-wide elections.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 4: 175.

⁷⁹ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 89.

the voiding of the Conservative legislation had been an insult to their party, collaboration with other parties – and implicitly with the King – was more important than moral retribution. As Bratianu was facing increasing difficulties in negotiating with the Allies in Paris, the rumour of a coalition government formed by the non-Liberal parties reappeared.⁸⁰

In regards to Romania's foreign policy, the PCP crystallized its point of view by June 1919. The Conservatives supported a policy of resistance when it came to the Allied economic and political demands but argued that a policy that would ensure the security of all of Romania's borders had to be adopted even if it meant conceding some territory in the west to the newly-formed Yugoslavian state.⁸¹ The last notable gathering of Conservative leaders during this period decided to participate in the general elections of November 1919.⁸² Even though some of them, led by C.C. Arion, wished to abstain, just as general Averescu had asked them to do in return for a possible collaboration after the elections, Marghiloman was able to impose his view believing that Averescu's absence from the polls would allow his party to become the main opposition to the Liberals.⁸³ On this as well as on many other occasions, Marghiloman's opinion, though challenged by some of the other leaders of the party, was not overruled.

The political decisions taken during the leadership meetings influenced the party's new program as well as the attempts to familiarize the population with its various points. The new program was Marghiloman's work, though his ideas had to be approved by the Executive Committee of the party. Interestingly, the first part of the program explained

⁸⁰ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 232-233.

⁸¹ Carada, The Ephemerids, 92.

⁸² Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 393.

⁸³ Carada, The Ephemerids, 93.

the decisions of the Conservative government as well as its accomplishments. Most likely, the Conservatives felt the need to explain the reasons why peace with Germany in 1918 had been necessary and why they had volunteered to sign such a treaty, especially since these actions led other politicians to accuse Marghiloman of treason. For propaganda purposes it made sense to include such an explanation in the party's program.

The rest of the program focused on the reforms deemed necessary. The PCP agreed with the political consensus established by the King and the Liberals that two million hectares of land had to be expropriated from the landowners and distributed to the peasants.⁸⁴ However, the Conservatives insisted that that number should not be exceeded as some of the new parties, especially the PT, were proposing. They were also trying to create a strong peasant class by advocating lots of no less than five hectares, with the majority of the land being distributed in holdings between twenty-five and one hundred hectares. Furthermore, they wanted to ensure stability in the countryside by making the peasant plots indivisible, thus allowing the excess population to migrate to the cities and find employment in the emerging industries.⁸⁵ As Henry Roberts argued, this idea of consolidating the peasant holdings was not popular in the countryside because the peasantry was only concerned with obtaining more land and did not think in strategic terms.⁸⁶

The PCP's program was ambiguous in regards to the proletariat. Marghiloman agreed that the workers should receive state benefits but he did not go into details as to what criteria should be used to determine these benefits. However, just as in the case of the peasantry, he insisted on raising the level of education and technical knowledge

⁸⁴ Gazeta Dorohoiului (The Dorohoi Gazette), 11 December, 1918.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 11 December 1918.

⁸⁶ Roberts, Political Problems, 29.

among the proletariat. On the issue of universal male suffrage, the PCP leader believed that fathers with two or more children deserved to have two votes instead of one. The Conservatives considered any form of universal suffrage inappropriate given the low level of literacy of the peasantry. This was simply an attempt to give more authority to older and presumably more conservative elements within the peasantry. Lastly, the PCP considered that decentralizing public administration was a necessity especially since Romania had gained such diverse territories.⁸⁷

The PCP's program could be described as a clever attempt at compromise. Marghiloman understood that, politically, it was senseless to oppose reforms that were surely going to take place since they had been guaranteed by the King. His hope was to moderate these reforms rather than to prevent them. By announcing his party's willingness to accept these changes, Marghiloman intended to disarm the opponents who were hoping to use the Conservatives' resistance to reforms against them. At the same time, he did not alienate his political base by moving too far to the left.

Although the new program helped to protect the party from outside attacks, it did not contain anything that was likely to dramatically increase the appeal of the party. Since the main concern of the peasantry was to obtain as much land as possible through the expropriation process, the PCP could not compete with much more generous land distribution offers made to the peasants by Averescu or by the newly-formed PT. The industrial workers were more likely to prefer the Socialist Party which promised a great deal more for them than Marghiloman's ambiguous program. Therefore, it could be argued that the Conservatives' new program was more defensive in nature. Its main goal was to present the renamed party as an exponent of moderation, experience and selfless

⁸⁷ Gazeta Dorohoiului, 11 December 1918.

patriotism. A recurring theme in Marghiloman's thinking in the post-war years was the need for capable politicians once the agrarian problem was solved. The Conservative leader believed that his party was going to regain its popularity after the new parties had exhausted themselves in fighting over the right to enact agrarian reforms.

One of the main objectives of the PCP immediately after the war was to gain entrance to the first Parliament elected by universal male suffrage. The elections, which were eventually held in November 1919, were important for the party for a number of reasons. First, the party needed to prove that it could function under universal suffrage. Second, a strong result would be conducive to future negotiations with other parties regarding both a coalition government and possible political cooperation. Third, the PCP needed a good result in order to prevent its members from defecting to other parties. In a letter to Constantin Meissner (head of the Iasi organization of the PCP), Marghiloman emphasized the importance of the elections as well as his optimism by saying that "our party must prove its viability in all circumstances. Even if we only receive ten percent of the vote, it is unthinkable to not run in the elections. That is something that will not happen ever: I give you my formal assurances regarding this matter."⁸⁸ In essence, Marghiloman believed that his party was still capable of obtaining a significant share of the votes in November 1919.

Was this a real possibility or just wishful thinking of the part of the PCP leader? By having the King appoint a military government in September 1919, the Liberals were pretending that the elections were going to be free and fair even though the rest of the parties anticipated that General Vaitoianu's government would do everything in its power to provide the Liberals with a majority in Parliament. General Averescu and Take

⁸⁸ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 36

Ionescu had decided to boycott the elections precisely because of this.⁸⁹ Since the PCP appealed to the same sections of society as those two parties, Marghiloman believed that their withdrawal from the race would tremendously increase the numbers of votes his party would receive. Taking into account that the Liberals had seen their popularity erode during 1919, it is conceivable that the PCP could have obtained notable results had it mobilized its members throughout the country. At the same time, the PCP's propaganda efforts were impeded by the poor state of the country's infrastructure which had been in large part destroyed by the war and had not been repaired. For example, when Marghiloman travelled by train from the war capital of Iasi to Bucharest, the trip lasted forty-one hours though the distance between the two cities is about 400 kilometres.⁹⁰ The railroad system was crucial to any successful propaganda campaign in particular for a party which derived its limited popularity from its leader.

During the campaign, the PCP's message was fairly simple. It claimed credit for saving the army, the Crown and the country during 1918.⁹¹ It also defended itself against attacks for having signed the peace treaty with Germany by saying that Bratianu had agreed to it after his own policy had failed. In addition, the Conservatives also reminded the electorate that Bessarabia and Bukovina were obtained during Marghiloman's government.⁹² The PCP's intention was to come across as an experienced and reliable political force which was ready to sacrifice itself at any moment for the good of the country. It should be noted that the PCP did not put forward any candidates in the newly-acquired provinces as the precarious state of the transportation system and the party's

⁸⁹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 396.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4: 150.

⁹¹ Steagul, October 3, 1919.

⁹² Progresul (Galati), October 31, 1919.

strained resources did not allow it to expand there. Consequently, out of a total of 568 seats, the PCP contested only the 247 seats reserved for the Old Kingdom.⁹³ Since the Liberals were in the same predicament, Marghiloman's optimism seems misplaced if not outright naïve. In order for the PCP to do well, it had to secure more than half of the votes in the Old Kingdom, which was highly unlikely because the Liberals were more popular and had the support of the state apparatus.

The PCP's propaganda consisted of an increase in the number of local party newspapers coupled with the publication of a variety of posters and manifestos. Marghiloman and a few other prominent Conservatives went on a short electoral tour as well.⁹⁴ Steagul (The Flag), the party's main newspaper, together with Presa (The Press) and Gazeta Dorohoiului (The Dorohoi Gazette), which were local publications that appeared on a regular basis repeatedly published the party's program and the lists of Conservative candidates in the various districts of the country.⁹⁵ A number of local publications such as Ordine si Progres (Order and Progress) (Mehedinti), Steagul Brailei (Braila's Flag) (Braila), Progresul (The Progress) (local versions at Ramnicu Sarat, Craiova and Galati) and Politica (Politics) (Buzau) appeared only around the time of the election in order to bolster the party's propaganda effort. Marghiloman emphasized the importance of the party press by writing to C. Meissner that the party's expansion into the rural masses was essential and that without newspapers this could not be achieved.⁹⁶ Marghiloman's only trip in preparation for the elections was a one-day visit to Braila and

⁹³ N.T. Ionescu, Alegerile Parlamentare din Noembrie 1919 (The Parliamentary Elections from November 1919), (Bucharest: 1920), 5.

⁹⁴ Steagul, October 14, 1919.

⁹⁵ Steagul, Presa, Gazeta Dorohoiului during October 1919.

⁹⁶ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 48

Galati where he gave brief speeches.⁹⁷ Compared with the PT's propaganda, which involved its members, the majority of whom lived in the countryside, talking directly to the peasantry, and with the coercive methods of the Liberals, the PCP's efforts were bound to be ineffective. Marghiloman did not realize this and this proved to be a major error in judgement on his part.

The PCP's results in the general elections were disappointing. The party won 13 out of 568 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 4 out of 236 seats in the Senate.⁹⁸ The Conservatives placed second in the Dorohoi, Romanati and Constanta districts in the voting for the Chamber.⁹⁹ They also won the Senate race at Constanta where they swept the three seats available.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, given the fact that General Averescu, the most popular politician at the time, boycotted the elections and that a portion of his voters were likely to vote both against the Liberals and against the upstart Peasantists, it becomes clear that the PCP failed in the electoral process in the most promising setting the party would see after 1918. Marghiloman noted in his Political Notes that his partisans "admit the great error that they have committed by refusing to work."¹⁰¹ His frustration was evident especially when it came to the PCP's propaganda in the countryside. Although he had encouraged his supporters to go on trips among the peasantry, he lamented in a letter to C. Meissner that "among the rural [population] there was no shadow of work."¹⁰² The PCP and in particular its leader committed two grave tactical errors during the electoral campaign. Marghiloman widely overestimated his

⁹⁷ Steagul, October 14, 1919.

⁹⁸ Ionescu, Parliamentary Elections, 19.

⁹⁹ Viata Romaneasca (Romanian Life) (Iasi: Institutul de Arte Grafice, 1922), 372. Romania was using a proportional representation system.

¹⁰⁰ Ionescu, Parliamentary Elections, 26.

¹⁰¹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 409.

¹⁰² ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 57.

party's political capital. His party obtained only 6.40% of the votes in the Old Kingdom¹⁰³ and 3.89% of the votes in the whole country.¹⁰⁴ This is far from Marghiloman's worst-case scenario described in the letter to Meissner. At the same time, since he convinced his reluctant party members to actually participate in the 1919 elections, Marghiloman should have ensured that his party was properly mobilized for the electoral campaign especially since this was the first time that the party had to engage in rural propaganda. If he was convinced that the PCP could not be effective in the countryside, Marghiloman should have accepted General Averescu's offer of collaboration and boycotted the elections. Simply lamenting that his subordinates did not follow his advice in regards to having an active presence among the peasantry does not excuse the party leader for failing to foresee such an event. In fact, Marghiloman's own lack of involvement in the electoral campaign can only be seen as an inability on the part of the PCP to truly compete in the new electoral system. Thus, in the year that had passed between their downfall and the first post-war elections, the Conservatives modified their program and the name of their party, managed to retain their most important members but also failed to meet their own projections when it came to the election results. In what were the most promising of circumstances, the party's failure to mobilize and undertake a vigorous propaganda campaign in the countryside, where the vast majority of voters now lived, condemned the PCP to modest results in the first post-war elections.

¹⁰³ Ionescu, Parliamentary Elections, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Musat and Ardeleanu, Politics, 81.

Relations with other parties

After the union of all Romanian provinces and the implementation of universal male suffrage it became clear that the two-party system present prior to the war was defunct. Because of this, political manoeuvring and coalitions became much more important after 1918. In this context, one of the Conservatives' goals was to escape the isolation forced upon them by their wartime foreign policy. During the period from November 1918 to November 1919, the PCP's most important contacts were with Averescu's People's League and with Take Ionescu's Democratic-Conservative Party.

As mentioned, two days after Marghiloman's forced resignation, C.C. Arion expressed his belief that only Averescu could save the Conservatives.¹⁰⁵ Although in time this prediction appeared to be prophetic, in the early post-war days Marghiloman still believed that his party could play an important political role by itself as illustrated by his decision to contest the 1919 elections.¹⁰⁶ However, he did believe that a possible collaboration with the most popular man in the country was definitely desirable. As such, the General became the most significant negotiating partner of the PCP.

Mariu Theodorian-Carada, one of the leading Conservatives, mentioned that on 16 December 1918, Marghiloman was prepared to join an Averescu government even alongside his long-time rival Take Ionescu.¹⁰⁷ Marghiloman does not mention this episode in his writings but there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of this information. According to the Conservative leader, his first meeting with Averescu took place on 5 March 1919. Averescu acknowledged the need for a united anti-Liberal opposition but

¹⁰⁵ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 126.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4: 338.

¹⁰⁷ Carada, The Ephemerids, 90. Ionescu always sought the leadership of the PC. When he was not able to oust P.P. Carp from that position in 1907-8, he left the party only to see Marghiloman replace Carp in 1913.

seemed preoccupied with how to make peace between Marghiloman and Take Ionescu. Marghiloman declared that he would support a government led by Averescu or by a member of the PN.¹⁰⁸ On 28 June 1919, Marghiloman talked to Duiliu Zamfirescu, one of Averescu's emissaries, about the international situation emphasizing the need to make moderate territorial concessions in order to secure the country's new provinces. It seemed that the General, who was going to attend a meeting with the King, wanted to know whether he could still count on Marghiloman's support.¹⁰⁹ Since the idea of a national-union government never materialized, further negotiations between the two parties did not occur until just before the November 1919 elections.

The two parties shared a common enemy, namely the Liberals. Bratianu's party, in an effort to monopolize the merit for the unification of all Romanian provinces, continuously attacked both Marghiloman and Averescu for having negotiated with the Germans, even though those negotiations had been sanctioned and even encouraged by the Liberal leader.¹¹⁰ The Conservative press defended the PCP as well as Averescu from such attacks. Opinia Oltului (The Olt View) wrote that Marghiloman and Averescu were the ones who saved Romania during 1918.¹¹¹ Steagul Brailei (Braila's Flag) considered that without the two men Romania would have seen a disaster in 1918¹¹² and argued that the reason why the Liberals were accusing Averescu of treachery was because the General had threatened to investigate Liberal illegalities committed during the war.¹¹³ Vot si Pamant (Vote and Land) even argued that the peasants had to thank Averescu for

¹⁰⁸ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 252.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4: 338.

¹¹⁰ Steagul, February 12, 1919.

¹¹¹ Opinia Oltului, October 19, 1919.

¹¹² Steagul Brailei, October 21, 1919.

¹¹³ Ibid., November 3, 1919.

the land that they were going to receive since he had asked the King for it.¹¹⁴ Steagul stated that Averescu and Marghiloman saved whatever was left to be saved after Bratianu's gamble in 1916.¹¹⁵ The main Conservative newspaper even called Averescu the "hero of the peasantry" and continuously tried to associate the General with Marghiloman during the last days prior to the general elections.¹¹⁶ Evidently, the PCP was trying to benefit from Averescu's boycott of the elections by appealing to his possible voters. A Conservative electoral poster defended Averescu from Liberal attacks and stated that the General's name is "mentioned with holiness by the peasantry."¹¹⁷

During October 1919, Averescu did everything in his power to convince Marghiloman and the PN to join him in boycotting the elections, believing that such a move would remove any legitimacy the upcoming elections might have had. The Transylvanians, confident that they would obtain the majority of the 205 seats reserved for their province, declined Averescu's offer. In return for the PCP's boycott, on 8 October, the LP's leader offered the neutrality of his press and the possibility of future political cooperation.¹¹⁸ In subsequent meetings, Constantin Argetoianu, who was Averescu's right-hand man, found Marghiloman to be well disposed towards the General and the PL.¹¹⁹ On 20 October, when Marghiloman met Averescu, he told him that he was making a tremendous error by not being involved in the electoral struggle.¹²⁰ Three days later, Averescu offered to publish an article praising Marghiloman if the PCP were to

¹¹⁴ Vot si Pamant (Vote and Land), February 25, 1919.

¹¹⁵ Steagul, October 25, 1919.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, October 31, 1919.

¹¹⁷ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar V/214, f.14.

¹¹⁸ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 391. Averescu believed that if enough parties would boycott the elections, the King would be forced to ask him to form the government.

¹¹⁹ Argetoianu, Memoirs, 6: 212.

¹²⁰ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 396. Interestingly, Argetoianu agreed with Marghiloman and tried to convince the General that his popularity would overwhelm the Liberals. See Argetoianu, Memoirs, 6:70.

withdraw from the race. This was supposed to represent a sign of a future political alliance. In addition he promised the neutrality of Take Ionescu's press which had been attacking Marghiloman for months.¹²¹ On 27 October, Averescu made his final offer which included a common program and one third of the ministries in a future Cabinet. Marghiloman treated this offer cautiously. He asked for half of the ministries in a coalition government and also asked Averescu to clarify his position on private property since there were rumours that the General would agree to a total expropriation of the land in order to satisfy the peasantry.¹²² In the end, Marghiloman politely refused Averescu's offer and chose to participate in the elections.

Marghiloman had two options regarding the 1919 elections. The first option was to try to benefit from Averescu's boycott of the elections by winning a considerable number of seats in Greater Romania's first Parliament. The second option was to accept Averescu's offer to boycott the elections and hope that the resulting government would be shortly replaced by one led by the General. It also implied that the PCP was going to be part of any Averescu government. Unfortunately for the PCP, Marghiloman chose the first option without making sure that his party could attain its electoral objective.

Averescu's offer was a generous one. A third of the ministries in a future Averescu government was a great deal more than the PCP could hope for at that particular juncture. Considering that Averescu came to power only a few months later, in March 1920, Marghiloman committed a grave error in judgement when he refused the General's proposal while the PCP missed an important opportunity to return to political relevance.

¹²¹ Ibid., 4: 399.

¹²² Ibid., 4: 403.

The PCP's other possible ally was the Democratic-Conservative Party (PCD) led by Take Ionescu. Although given the rivalry between Marghiloman and Ionescu and the animosity between the two parties, cooperation between the PCP and the PCD appeared unlikely, there were two strategic reasons for both organizations to at least contemplate an alliance. First, both parties were the enemies of the powerful Liberal Party, which was trying to portray itself as the only contributor to the making of Greater Romania. Second, both parties shared the same conservative values, making a common program easier to construct. Since it was doubtful that the two parties combined had enough strength to form a government by themselves, an alliance involving Averescu was the most likely form of collaboration between them. Together, the PCP and PCD would have supplied Averescu with many capable and experienced men and, in the event of a merger of all three political parties, most Conservatives would have been reunited in the new political organization.

Between November 1918 and November 1919, the relationship between the PCP and the DCP was marked by two contrasting periods. From November 1918 to June 1919, the two parties were largely neutral to each other, although there were instances when they defended each other from Liberal attacks. Starting in June 1919, the two sides resumed their hostility due to the diverging views on foreign policy and more precisely on Romania's relationship with its Western Allies.

On 27 November 1918, Marghiloman was visited by Alexandru Badarau, one of the leading members of the PCD. The two men agreed that their parties had to continue the fight against Bratianu. When asked whether he would accept an anti-Liberal Bloc led by Ionescu, Marghiloman replied that he would not insist on leading such a coalition and

that he would analyze any formal proposal that would be made to him.¹²³ In February, there were rumours that Ionescu was going to return from Paris in order to form a national union government and Marghiloman convened the Consultative Committee of the PCP to discuss this eventuality. Overwhelmingly, the committee was of the opinion that collaboration with such a government was crucial and that any differences could be set aside in the interest of returning to power.¹²⁴ However, Ionescu did not return until June 1919 and by that time most of the political class was opposed to his policy of accepting all Allied demands. While Bratianu stubbornly resisted some of the Allied demands, Ionescu believed that by offering to be more conciliatory towards the Entente, he could be asked to form the government in the event that Bratianu refused to sign the peace or if the Allies pressured King Ferdinand to dismiss the Liberal leader. By then, however, the PCP's position on foreign policy was much closer to Bratianu's than to Ionescu's.

Throughout the first part of 1919, the press of the two parties had a somewhat amiable relationship. Steagul criticized Bratianu for not including Ionescu in his delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.¹²⁵ The Conservative paper also considered that Bratianu always attempted to claim all the credit for Romania's spectacular political success even though Marghiloman and Ionescu deserved just as much recognition.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, Romanimea, the PCP's main newspaper defended Marghiloman from the Liberal accusations of treachery. In an article published on 9 February 1919, Romanimea

¹²³ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 149-150.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4: 232.

¹²⁵ Steagul, January 29, 1919.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, February 27, 1919.

asked rhetorically why Marghiloman was vilified by the Liberal press. The PCD publication chose to also answer the question with another one:

Because he held the same political belief that all, absolutely all politicians of this country held between 1866 and 1914? Because, having been called upon by the King, he agreed to represent him at the signing of the disastrous Peace of Bucharest, a peace which was accepted as a necessity by the King, the head of the army and the head of the Liberal Party?¹²⁷

Such a statement essentially meant that the PCD understood and accepted Marghiloman's position in 1918. However, at the beginning of June 1919, the relationship between the two parties became inimical once again. Steagul published an article on 1 June which was a veiled proposal for collaboration between the two parties.¹²⁸ The next day, Romanimea replied that such an event was never going to take place.¹²⁹ Later on that month, Ionescu returned from Paris and it became clear that his position on foreign policy was completely opposed to that of Marghiloman.¹³⁰ Ionescu advocated a policy of close cooperation with the Western Allies and the acceptance of the Allied terms without hesitation. Marghiloman conceded that some territorial sacrifices needed to be made in order to secure the new borders but that Romania should not agree to anything that might allow the Allies to interfere in the country's internal political or economic affairs.¹³¹

The war of words escalated as the PCD press began accusing the PCP of a hidden alliance with the Liberals since Marghiloman's foreign policy views were similar to Bratianu's by the late summer of 1919.¹³² The PCP accused Ionescu of naiveté because

¹²⁷ Romanimea, February 9, 1919.

¹²⁸ Steagul, June 1, 1919.

¹²⁹ Romanimea, June 2, 1919.

¹³⁰ Steagul, July 6, 1919.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, August 10, 1919.

¹³² Romanimea, July 5, 1919.

he believed in the viability of what later became the Little Entente.¹³³ Also, Ionescu's insistence on resisting the Germans in the spring of 1918, in what would have been a suicidal military decision, was brought up against him again.¹³⁴ Thus, by the time of the elections the two parties were attacking each other more than they were attacking the Liberals.

Just as in the case of their electoral activity, the PCP's relations with other parties registered mixed results in the first post-war year. The Conservatives made sure to never attack Averescu directly and, at the same time, defended the General against the accusations of the Liberals. By the time of the elections, the PP's leader tried to convince Marghiloman to join him in abstaining from the parliamentary elections only to meet with a polite refusal in what proved to be a colossal error on the part of the PCP. However, this disagreement did not seem to affect the relationship between the two men or their parties. It could be argued that, by November 1919, the PCP had laid the groundwork for a possible future cooperation with Averescu's party. Unfortunately for the PCP, the same could not be said about their relationship with Take Ionescu's PCD. Although initially the parties showed signs of goodwill towards each other, Take Ionescu's decision to back the Entente unilaterally and without any reservations isolated him from most of the Romanian political class, Marghiloman included. While the end of the war brought the hope of a possible Conservative reunion, the first post-war year essentially killed that project once and for all.

¹³³ Indrumarea (Botosani), August 11, 1919. Take Ionescu believed that an alliance between Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia was necessary in order to protect against Hungarian revisionism. As a Foreign Minister he was able to bring this project to fruition in 1921. The alliance was called the Little Entente and, just as Marghiloman had anticipated, it broke down at the first signs of German pressure.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1919.

Relations with the Crown

The PCP's other objective at the end of World War I was to re-establish a working relationship with the King after the forced resignation of the Conservative government. At the beginning this appeared to be a difficult task since both Marghiloman and his friends felt that they had been treated unfairly by the Crown.¹³⁵ Marghiloman understood the need for his resignation as the Entente ministers made it clear that they did not trust his government. On 6 November 1918, during his last meeting with the king as prime minister, he told Ferdinand that he had served him and the country and that thanks to his government Romania still had a dynasty, an army, enough ammunition and the province of Bessarabia. The King assured Marghiloman of his sympathy and asked for the Conservative leader's continuous collaboration, which was promised as long as Bratianu did not return as Prime Minister.¹³⁶

Ten days later, the King called Marghiloman and discussed with him the current political situation saying that he found it difficult to unite everyone around him. Marghiloman replied that, now that the war was over, Romania needed to show unity at the Peace Conference.¹³⁷ The low point in the PCP's relationship with the Crown came on 19 November when the King dissolved the Conservative Parliament and annulled all its legislation on Bratianu's advice. Although Ferdinand tried to pretend that this measure was not directed against the Conservatives, Marghiloman simply refused to believe such a statement.¹³⁸ During the following few months, various other Conservative leaders

¹³⁵ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 88.

¹³⁶ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 4: 117-118.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4: 139-140.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4: 144-145.

such as Ion Mitilineu, Simion Mehedinti or Arion met the King, who continued to display a certain concern to not be perceived as anti-Conservative and pro-Liberal.¹³⁹

At the end of April 1919, the King sent Madame Dissescu, one of Queen Mary's confidants, to Marghiloman in order to find out his opinion regarding Averescu, Ionescu and the Queen's trip to Paris. The Conservative leader obliged and sent his answers through the same intermediary. Marghiloman's first meeting with the King during 1919 came at the race track on 8 July.¹⁴⁰ Though brief, this encounter set up a formal meeting between the two that took place on 9 August. On that date, Marghiloman was summoned from his summer residence at Buzau to see the King. The main topics of discussion were the situation of Prince Carol and the diplomatic conflict with the Allies. After two and half hours, the King told Marghiloman that he was very happy to have talked with him for such a long time. As a token of respect, the King allowed Marghiloman to return to Buzau in the royal train.¹⁴¹

The relationship between the King and the PCP was strained for the most part of the first post-war year. However, Marghiloman's last meeting with the King was definitely a positive event given its length and the attention that Ferdinand bestowed on the Conservative leader afterwards. It also signalled the normalization of the personal relationship between the King and Marghiloman as the two men seemed to have put behind them the events of November 1918. Given the critical importance of the King, this could only help the PCP in its future political projects.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 4: 145, 195, 244.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4: 339. Marghiloman's love for horses was only matched by his love for elegant clothing.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 4: 361-365. Prince Carol had deserted during the war in order to marry a commoner, Zizi Lambrino, who eventually gave birth to his son. At this point in time, the royal couple had not decided how to proceed regarding this affair.

The period between November 1918 and November 1919 was a difficult one for the Conservatives. After their fall from power, the party had to change its name and program and to defend itself from accusations of treachery especially at the hands of the Liberals. Nevertheless, the party's leadership managed to retain most members and to defend itself effectively against the various accusations hurled at its direction. By the end of this period the PCP was in amicable relationships with Averescu, the most popular politician in the country and with the King. The party's first political opportunity of any significance came during the electoral campaign in October 1919. When offered to join Averescu in boycotting the elections, Marghiloman refused. He compounded this error by overestimating his party's popularity and the willingness of the party members to partake in the propaganda effort. As a result, even though the Liberals were defeated, the PCP could only win a few seats in the first post-war Parliament. At the same time, the party also missed its chance to establish a close relationship with the LP and perhaps to join Averescu's government in March 1920. After the 1919 elections it became clear that the first strategy employed by the PCP, that of returning to power through its own forces, had failed. Nevertheless, the PCP could still return to power as part of a coalition of parties or with the king's help.

Phase Two – Activity

The first post-war Parliament lasted from November 1919 until May 1920. The PCP's activity during these six months sought to expand the party's organization into the countryside and prepare for the 1920 general elections. Unfortunately for the PCP, the party failed miserably on both fronts.

The results obtained by the PT, a party which was very active in the rural areas, and the fact that the vast majority of the voters lived in the countryside convinced the PCP leadership that it was crucial to expand outside of its urban centres. The Consultative Committee convened a few days after the elections also decided to reorganize the party's provincial organizations.¹⁴² In an interview published in Universul, Arion emphasized the need of his party to adapt to the new political conditions.¹⁴³ Miclescu, another prominent party leader, argued in a speech given at the Conservative Club that penetrating the peasant masses was essential for the future of the PCP, while Cerchez, an important figure from the Iasi organization, was of the opinion that the party's agrarian views had to be made known among the peasants.¹⁴⁴ Despite such statements and repeated encouragement from Marghiloman, it does not appear that anything had changed during the 1920 campaign when it came to the rural areas. It is not clear whether lack of funds or the fact that the Conservative members were not accustomed to such a style of campaigning were the causes of the failure of any meaningful propaganda among the peasants. The only instance when a successful reorganization of a party unit took place was in Piatra Neamt where Marghiloman had sent someone with this particular task in mind.¹⁴⁵

Despite these disappointments, the Conservatives were optimistic before the 1920 elections. According to Carada, they thought that some of Averescu's popularity had eroded and that they were going to obtain more votes and seats than in the previous

¹⁴² Ibid., 4: 410.

¹⁴³ Steagul, November 17, 1919.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., March 18, 1920.

¹⁴⁵ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 62v.

year.¹⁴⁶ However, their relationship with the General complicated the Conservatives' election strategy. Since they agreed that Averescu was needed to prevent chaos in the country, the Conservatives could not run against the General. They also failed to reach an understanding with the General that would have secured them a certain number of seats.¹⁴⁷ Thus, because they could not run on a platform opposed to the General and because there was no other way to win seats except to compete against him, the Conservatives had a difficult time in convincing voters to vote for them instead of for Averescu. Their dilemma is best illustrated by an electoral poster directed to the peasants. It invited them to vote for Averescu unless they did not trust him anymore in which case they were told to vote for the PCP.¹⁴⁸ Such ambiguous tactics combined with their lack of propaganda and with Averescu's immense popularity among all social classes ensured that the Conservatives faced a more difficult task than in the previous elections. They failed to win any seats for the first time in their history. If their failure in 1919 left the PCP leaders with any doubts about their party's ability to win votes in the new political environment, the 1920 elections convinced them that they were unlikely to return to power without help from some of the other parties.

Relations with other parties

The animosity between the PCP and Ionescu's party continued unabated after the 1919 elections. In addition to the old rivalry between the leaders, the two parties were now competing for Averescu's support. Ionescu had the advantage of being popular in

¹⁴⁶ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 106.

¹⁴⁷ Such a practice was prevalent in the pre-war years when the government offered the opposition a certain number of seats. Usually, when the opposition refused the deal it ended up obtaining even fewer seats than the government had offered.

¹⁴⁸ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar V/220, f.10.

the West, and especially in France, and for this reason Averescu preferred to have him as Foreign Minister. Ionescu also helped his cause by agreeing to boycott the 1919 elections on Averescu's request.¹⁴⁹ During the period between the 1919 and the 1920 elections, the PCP's two major potential allies were Averescu's LP and National Party from Transylvania led by Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod.

Averescu seemed appealing to the Conservatives for three main reasons: his popularity essentially ensured him a prominent place in Romanian politics, his right-hand man, Constantin Argetoianu and some of the other leaders of his party were ex-Conservatives and the General's determination to not allow the country to slip towards the extreme left was reassuring. A few days after the 1919 elections, a PCP Consultative Committee concluded that it was desirable to establish a common program with Averescu. The Conservatives' main demand was that no more than 2.2 million hectares could be expropriated.¹⁵⁰ Although the PCP was unable to realize this close collaboration with Averescu, the relations between the two parties remained friendly.

In the by-election held at Dorohoi in January, the Conservatives supported Averescu's candidate who was an ex-Conservative.¹⁵¹ Marghiloman praised Averescu's program in Parliament once the King had entrusted him to form a new government after Vaida's dismissal.¹⁵² Steagul Dobrogei considered that "most of the government's program is based on the ideas expressed by the PCP members of Parliament in their speeches."¹⁵³ There was a definite effort on the part of the Conservatives to present themselves as Averescu's partners. Steagul wrote that Averescu represented the idea of

¹⁴⁹ Argetoianu, *Memoirs*, 6: 63.

¹⁵⁰ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 4: 411.

¹⁵¹ *Gazeta Dorohoiului*, January 24, 1920.

¹⁵² Steagul, March 28, 1920.

¹⁵³ Steagul Dobrogei, April 4, 1920.

“order” just like the PCP.¹⁵⁴ Steagul Brailei informed its readers that the PCP was going to support the government in its attempts to re-establish order after the fiasco of the previous administration.¹⁵⁵ When asked by the King through an intermediary whether Averescu should be given power, Marghiloman advised Ferdinand to use the General but to surround him with experienced politicians, which can only be interpreted as an allusion to himself and his Conservative friends.¹⁵⁶

Despite all these attempts to ingratiate themselves with Averescu, the Conservatives did not manage to strike any sort of political deal with the General. Ionescu’s presence in the government obviously had a great deal to do with their failure. The PCP’s consolation was that Averescu asked Constantin Garoflid, a leading Conservative and an expert in Romania’s agrarian situation, to join his government in order to oversee the implementation of the agrarian reform.¹⁵⁷

During most of 1919, the contacts between the PCP and the PN from Transylvania were sporadic. Since there was no legislative activity and the railroads were in poor condition, the Transylvanians rarely came to Bucharest. However, after scoring an impressive victory in the general elections and after Alexandru Vaida-Voevod was entrusted to form the new government, the Transylvanians became a regular fixture of Romanian politics. At the same time, the PCP’s contacts with them increased accordingly.

The PCP hoped to develop a favourable relationship with the PN. In an undated letter written sometime during the fall of 1919, Marghiloman mentioned to Meissner that

¹⁵⁴ Steagul, May 5, 1920.

¹⁵⁵ Steagul Brailei, May 9, 1920.

¹⁵⁶ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 23.

¹⁵⁷ Propasirea Gorjului, May 20, 1920.

Maniu had made flattering comments about the Conservatives.¹⁵⁸ This was quite likely the case since Maniu shared many social and moral views with the PCP. An alliance with the Transylvanians presented a few advantages. First, it would have provided both parties with opportunities for expansion on both sides of the Carpathians. Second, it would have increased the legitimacy of both sides in the King's eyes. The PN would have gained the experience of the PCP members while the PCP could rely on the PN's electoral strength. In many aspects the political programs of the two parties were not all that different so that a common bond could always be made.

Marghiloman's most important visitor was Prime Minister Alexandru Vaida-Voevod.¹⁵⁹ However, other important Transylvanian leaders such as Mihali, Vlad or Bontescu visited the Conservative leader as well. These men represented various groups within the National Party and ensuring their friendship meant that any PN leader would have been well-disposed towards the PCP. Carada argued that Vaida's long conversation with Marghiloman just before he left for London and Paris would to be followed by Marghiloman's appointment to the Cabinet once the Prime Minister returned.¹⁶⁰ It is difficult to establish whether his opinion is accurate but it should be noted that Marghiloman and Vaida always enjoyed a very amicable relationship. It is conceivable that Vaida felt the need to strengthen his government by appointing Marghiloman in a ministry where his experience could have been helpful. Marghiloman felt that Vaida's inexperience showed when he failed to coordinate internal and foreign affairs while he was away. This allowed the Peasantists to present their radical agrarian reform to Parliament. When they tried to obtain an audience with the King, Ferdinand refused to

¹⁵⁸ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 46.

¹⁵⁹ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 8.

¹⁶⁰ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 96.

see them, fired the Vaida government and brought Averescu to power.¹⁶¹ However, the Conservative leader spoke highly of Vaida in Parliament and thanked him in the name of the country for his services in both European capitals where he was able to secure most of Romania's goals.¹⁶² By May 1920, the PCP was able to build a serious number of contacts within the NP who were not opposed to a possible collaboration or even merger between the two organizations.

Relations with the Crown

Marghiloman's relationship with the King continued to improve during this period. On Christmas Day 1919, the two men talked about the political situation resulting from the elections. The King was preoccupied by the matter of dissolving Parliament and believed that that could not be done without a major backlash from the newly elected legislators.¹⁶³ On 22 February, Ferdinand asked for Marghiloman's advice on the same issue and the Conservative leader advised the King to refrain from dissolving Parliament until the fall and from dismissing Prime Minister Vaida while he was on a trip to France and England.¹⁶⁴ Three days later, during another long meeting, the King assured Marghiloman that he was not going to do anything while Vaida was away but that he wanted to have a strong government. The Conservative leader suggested a national government as a solution which did not require the dissolution of Parliament.¹⁶⁵

On 5 April, Marghiloman and his wife met the Queen, who had been unfriendly with the Conservatives during and after their days in power. The atmosphere was so

¹⁶¹ Steagul, March 14, 1920.

¹⁶² Ibid., March 28, 1920.

¹⁶³ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 4: 432-434.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 5: 22.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 5: 24-27.

pleasant that the Queen even paid a visit to the Marghilomans at Buzau during May. On the way back, Marghiloman was invited onto the royal train and then taken to his Bucharest residence by the royal automobile. The Queen even assured him that they had become good friends again.¹⁶⁶ Thus, by the time of the 1920 elections, Marghiloman had regained the sympathy of the Crown and could once again hope to be entrusted with various political appointments. At the very least, the Crown had ceased to be an obstacle to his possible return to power.

Conclusion

Prior to the 1919 elections, Marghiloman believed that his party was strong enough to compete against the other political forces. The 1919 and the 1920 elections convinced him that that was simply not the case. To be fair, the PCP did face unfavourable odds in both elections. In both elections, the party could only compete for the seats from the Old Kingdom because it could not expand into the new provinces. In 1919, although the LP and the PCD boycotted the elections, the PCP ran against the Liberals who were supported by General Vaitoianu's military government. In 1920, the Conservatives had a difficult time running against Averescu whose government they supported. However, the party's failure to mobilize its members and to go on propaganda trips in the countryside meant that a large segment of the population did not even have a chance to come in contact with the PCP's program and ideas. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that the PCP's electoral results were poor. A great deal of the blame lay with Marghiloman. His overestimation of the party's strength and his failure to accept

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 5: 51-52.

Averescu's proposal in October 1919 meant that the PCP missed a tremendous opportunity to ally itself with the most popular Romanian politician of the time.

The PCP managed to avoid political isolation by cultivating friendly relations with Averescu's People's Party and with the Transylvanian National Party. Both of these parties could have been strategic as well as ideological allies. After all, Averescu allowed numerous ex-Conservatives to join him throughout the years and Maniu's high morality and conservative social views were not different than those of the PCP. After 1920, the importance of these possible political partners grew as the PCP proved unable to succeed in elections and remained only with its capital of capable and experienced politicians.

After the King bitterly disappointed the Conservatives by voiding all legislation passed by their Parliament, the relationship between the two sides were at their lowest point. Slowly, however, during the second half of 1919 and the first five months of 1920, Marghiloman and the Crown were able to set aside their differences and renew a cordial relationship which could only benefit the PCP. Given the King's importance in selecting the Prime Minister, it could be argued that Marghiloman's ability to pacify the Crown was a strategic success for the PCP. This is especially true since, after 1920, the PCP was going to play an important political role only through a coalition of parties or through the King's own wish.

Chapter 2

The interval between the Parliamentary elections of May 1920 and the formation of the Liberal government in January 1922 was the most intriguing period in the post-war history of the Progressive Conservative Party. On the one hand, Alexandru Marghiloman played a crucial role in the attempt to keep the Liberals in the opposition by forming a coalition meant to strengthen Averescu's beleaguered parliamentary majority. Although it did not succeed, this enterprise demonstrated that Marghiloman remained an important politician with ambitious political objectives and with a great deal of influence among the main political actors. On the other hand, during the same period, for the first time in their history the Conservatives failed to gain any seats in the Romanian Parliament. This made the party's struggle for survival a more difficult enterprise. Despite the experience of its members, the party became less attractive as a merger candidate with the other parties opposing the Liberals.

Chronologically, this period can be divided into three distinct stages. The first of these lasted from May 1920 to 24 December 1920. During this stage, the PCP was mostly inactive both due to its inability to gain any seats in the Parliament and to Marghiloman's temporary illness. Its position was one of careful criticism of General Averescu but of uninterrupted attacks against Take Ionescu's adventurous foreign policy. The second stage began with Marghiloman's speech at the party meeting on 24 December 1920 and ended on 30 October 1921, during the first stages of the political crisis that preceded Bratianu's return to power. In his speech, which became the party's platform for the next few years, Marghiloman presented solutions for the various economic, financial and administrative difficulties facing the country. Following this

event, the PCP and its leader became much more active. In May 1921, Marghiloman contested a vacant Senate seat in a by-election at Constanta. In July, the party founded its first political organization in the newly-acquired provinces, at Cetatea Alba in Bessarabia and at the end of October it organized its first post-war congress at Iasi. The PCP became more vociferous in its attacks against General Averescu and his government as a whole but also made sure not to sever all ties to the PP.

The last stage (1 November 1921 – 17 January 1922) was marked by the fall of the government and the eventual formation of a purely Liberal Cabinet. During these tumultuous months, the PCP, in alliance with the PP, attempted to build an anti-Liberal bloc meant to create a viable government with a solid majority in the Parliament. The hesitance of the National Party to sincerely back such a coalition and the King's preference for the Liberals allowed Bratianu to return to the position of prime minister and condemned the PCP to opposition for the rest of Marghiloman's life.

The PCP welcomed Averescu's victory in the elections of May 1920 as a necessity after the chaotic last month of the Vaida government.¹⁶⁷ The Conservatives expressed hope that the low quality of some of the people surrounding Averescu would not overshadow the general's popularity and impede his ability to restore order in the country.¹⁶⁸ The Conservatives did not win any seats in either chamber of Parliament and they explained the defeat as stemming from their inability to compete with the Peasantists or with the People's Party in terms of electoral promises made to the peasantry.¹⁶⁹ This

¹⁶⁷ The radical agrarian law of the Peasantists and the strikes organized by the Socialist Party combined with the Prime Minister's absence led some, including the King, to believe that the social order was in danger.

¹⁶⁸ Steagul, May 31, 1920.

¹⁶⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 70. Although some sources use the term "Peasant Party" to refer to the party led by Ion Mihalache, I believe that the term "Peasantist Party" is a more appropriate translation of the Romanian original. The "Peasantists" were members of the Peasantist Party.

shaped the party's activity for the rest of the year. First, Marghiloman considered that the defeat of his party was normal and inevitable.¹⁷⁰ Second, the Conservative leader believed that a new role for his party "would not begin until the end of the agrarian process."¹⁷¹ Lascar Antoniu, another PCP leader, even argued that once this reform took place, the peasantry as a class with conservative values would support the PCP.¹⁷²

Despite such optimism, Steagul also mentioned the fact that the party was not properly organized for the electoral campaign in the countryside.¹⁷³ The PCP leadership believed that it was important to become closer to the peasants and to help build a strong middle-propertied and prosperous peasant class.¹⁷⁴ However, there were no concrete recommendations on how to accomplish such a necessary task.

As a result of the policy of waiting for more auspicious times, the activity of the party for the remainder of the year was almost non-existent. Marghiloman refused to run on the government's list in a Senate by-election at Trei Scaune in Transylvania.¹⁷⁵ He wrote to his good friend, C. Meissner, that he did not want to imitate Take Ionescu's failure to win a seat in Transylvania and that he preferred to run for a Chamber seat anyway. However, the government's offer was viewed as a positive sign since the PCP had no offers of collaboration prior to the general elections of May 1920.¹⁷⁶

Marghiloman did decide to run in a by-election held at Botosani in early September. He believed that the Peasantists would not contest the seat and that the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 56.

¹⁷² Steagul, July 28, 1920.

¹⁷³ Ibid., June 6, 1920.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., June 6, 1920.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., July 26, 1920.

¹⁷⁶ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 72v-73.

Nationalists would help him.¹⁷⁷ He also believed that the election would clarify the relationship between the PCP and Averescu.¹⁷⁸ The Conservative leader expressed his hope that the nearby party organization in Iasi would play a major role in trying to garner support and votes.¹⁷⁹ On 17 August, Marghiloman was forced to abandon the electoral race due to an illness that required him to spend a month in Czechoslovakia, at Karlsbad.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, he did obtain 4,408 votes out of a total of 22,000 which prompted Panait Wyzanti, the local PCP leader, to assure Marghiloman that, had he not taken himself out of the running, his victory would have been assured.¹⁸¹

The official program of the PCP did not change until Marghiloman's speech in late December. Marghiloman indicated that he did not wish to modify the organization or the program of the party before consulting with the local leaders.¹⁸² Upon his return from Czechoslovakia, Marghiloman did have such a meeting at his house on 29 September and his impression was that most of those present leaned towards collaborating with the Peasantists.¹⁸³

After the general elections, the number and the frequency of Conservative publications decreased alarmingly. Steagul remained the only Romanian-language national newspaper. But even its number of subscriptions seems to have declined. At the end of 1920, for example, all seventy-one subscribers from the Iasi district were located in the city of Iasi.¹⁸⁴ This indicates that the peasantry had no exposure to the PCP's main newspaper and that the number of subscribers in a major town diminished substantially

¹⁷⁷ The "Nationalists" refer to the members of the National Democratic Christian Party led by A.C. Cuza.

¹⁷⁸ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 72.

¹⁷⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 72v.

¹⁸⁰ Steagul, September 3, 1920.

¹⁸¹ Steagul, September 8, 1920.

¹⁸² ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 70v.

¹⁸³ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 84.

¹⁸⁴ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar V/224, f. 1.

from 1918 when the paper had over one thousand subscribers in Iasi alone. Some of the local party publications such as Presa from Iasi, Indrumarea from Botosani, Steagul Brailei from Braila and Propasirea Gorjului from Targu Jiu folded in May 1920. Steagul Dobrogei from Constanta did not appear at all between June 1920 and May 1921 while Opinia Oltului from Slatina did not appear between June 1920 and December 1921. Gazeta Dorohoiului from Dorohoi remained the only local party newspaper to appear regularly, though it had to limit its format to only two pages beginning in June 1920.¹⁸⁵

Between the end of May and 24 December 1920, the PCP was an inactive political organization, partly due to the conviction of its leaders that they needed to wait until the agrarian reform and the electoral process returned to normality and partly due to Alexandru Marghiloman's illness, which prevented him from taking part in the partial election at Botosani. This lack of activity was reflected in the party's press as well. The Conservatives had to disband some of their local newspapers after the general elections and could not expand the distribution of the party's main publication to the countryside, where the vast majority of the voters lived.

Relations with other parties

Although the PCP was mostly inactive in terms of building its own organization, there was no lack of interaction between its leadership and most of the other Parliamentary parties. The early 1920s were a time of continuous negotiation amongst the new parties that appeared after the war. The programs of most of these political forces were not yet fully developed and this allowed them to be fairly flexible when choosing their negotiating partners. Thus, despite the fact that their programs situated

¹⁸⁵ Gazeta Dorohoiului, June 12, 1920.

them at various points to the left of the Conservatives on the political spectrum, both the National Party and the People's Party maintained a relatively close relationship with the PCP during 1920.

The PCP's most important negotiating partner during the rest of 1920 was the People's Party. After Averescu's victory, both Bratianu and Marghiloman declared their support for the general's "government of order", which was supposed to eliminate the threat of revolution.¹⁸⁶ No meeting took place between Marghiloman and the General, but the PCP leader routinely met Constantin Garoflid, the minister of Agriculture, who was an ex-Conservative. Initially the relations between the two parties were friendly. On 19 June 1920, Marghiloman wrote that Garoflid was told to offer three Parliamentary seats to the PCP, in return for its silence on the controversial issue of awarding the rights to the entire gas distribution industry to a single Romanian company.¹⁸⁷ Only nine days later, Garoflid met Marghiloman and told him that general Averescu was prepared to support the PCP leader's candidacy in a by-election in Transylvania.¹⁸⁸ Marghiloman politely refused apparently because he had seen Take Ionescu's failure to win in Transylvania despite receiving the government's support.¹⁸⁹ He did mention that he was prepared to run on the government's list if the opportunity arose in the Old Kingdom.¹⁹⁰

Garoflid's advance warning about an offer of seats proved accurate as Constantin Argetoianu, the Interior Minister offered Marghiloman on 4 July the opportunity to run at Trei Scaune in Transylvania.¹⁹¹ Although he was refused, Argetoianu kept insisting for

¹⁸⁶ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 219.

¹⁸⁷ Marghiloman, *Note Politice (Political Notes)*, 5: 61.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5: 66.

¹⁸⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/48, f. 72v.

¹⁹⁰ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 61. The "Old Kingdom" refers to the territory of Romania prior to 1916.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5: 68.

the next two weeks that Marghiloman should have run either in Transylvania or at Botosani if the government had no candidate.¹⁹² Take Ionescu, the Foreign Minister and one of Marghiloman's most bitter rivals, was the only member of the Cabinet who did not agree with the decision of the government to lend its support to the Conservatives.¹⁹³ Argetoianu's rationale was that if the government could not field a candidate, by supporting the PCP, the People's Party could at least prevent the Peasantists from gaining any additional seats.¹⁹⁴ Although all these possible combinations failed to materialize, it is clear that in the initial stages of Averescu's government the two parties were on good terms.

Once the possibility of an electoral alliance disappeared, the Conservative press did begin occasionally to criticize the government and Averescu personally. For example, the Conservatives disapproved of Averescu's talk of "a new morality" as long as Octavian Tazlaoanu, one of his ministers, was implicated in numerous corruption scandals.¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, even privately Marghiloman considered the latter to be nothing more than a "bandit".¹⁹⁶ The criticism was more pronounced during the last two months of the year when the Conservatives accused the government of being incapable and dishonest¹⁹⁷ and Averescu of lacking any economic knowledge.¹⁹⁸ They were apparently not alone in these views. Even Garoflid expressed his frustration in a meeting with

¹⁹² Ibid., 5: 74.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 5: 73.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 5: 74.

¹⁹⁵ Steagul, July 21, 1920.

¹⁹⁶ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 69.

¹⁹⁷ Gazeta Dorohoiului, November 13, 1920.

¹⁹⁸ Steagul, November 29, 1920.

Marghiloman by saying that “the general does not know anything, does not understand anything but he interferes with everything.”¹⁹⁹

The PCP was also in contact with the National Party of Transylvania led by Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Vaida. The meetings between the latter and Marghiloman were cordial, though no meaningful collaboration resulted. On 6 October, Vaida mentioned that in Transylvania, the peasantry was turning Bolshevik and that he was afraid that Romania was going to lose its new provinces.²⁰⁰ He admitted that his party was negotiating with the Peasantists but he added that he did not agree with a merger with them.²⁰¹ On 17 December, Vaida spent the entire day conversing with Marghiloman.²⁰² By this time, the Conservative leader was trying to build a bloc of parties capable of governing with or even against Averescu. Vaida seemed to agree with Marghiloman’s ideas except that he did not wish to provide any assistance to the General. His preferred solution was a government led by someone appointed by the King, who was also supposed to lead the negotiations between the various parties.²⁰³ The Transylvanians always seemed ready to negotiate and to discuss the various options available, but they were slow to decide on the most appropriate course of action. The friendly relationship between the PCP and the NP was important because any attempt to build a coalition of parties without the Liberals could not have succeeded without the participation of the Transylvanians.

There did not seem to be any contact between the PCP and the Peasantist Party during the rest of 1920. However, it should be noted that, during the party meeting on 29

¹⁹⁹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 97.

²⁰⁰ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 85.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 5: 101.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5: 107-108.

September, most PCP members were in favour of collaborating with the Peasantists.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, Steagul considered the Peasantists' results in the general elections remarkable, especially since Averescu controlled the state apparatus and they were his main competitors in the countryside.²⁰⁵ Despite their leftist ideology, the Peasantists were regarded by some PCP members as the future Conservatives since both parties represented agricultural interests.²⁰⁶ Although no negotiations took place between the PCP and the Peasantists in 1920, the relationship between the two parties was such that a future collaboration was possible.

The PCP's relationship with the other parties allowed the Conservatives to hope that a solid Parliamentary bloc could be engineered during 1921. Although towards the end of 1920 the PCP and the PP began attacking each other, the presence of ex-Conservatives such as Garoflid in Averescu's party ensured that a channel for communication existed at all times. The NP seemed ready to negotiate with the PCP and Vaida and Marghiloman agreed on most issues. Though there was no contact made with the Peasantists, the PCP showed signs that a future collaboration with Mihalache's party was possible. Therefore, in December 1920, when Marghiloman launched his campaign for a political compromise meant to allow the country to rebuild itself economically, the PCP was in a position to collaborate with most other political entities, except Take Ionescu's Democratic Party.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 5: 84.

²⁰⁵ Steagul, June 3, 1920.

²⁰⁶ Carada, The Ephemerids, 94.

Relationship with the Crown

After he was forced to resign in 1918, Marghiloman's connection with the royal couple was severed. However, during 1919, the relationship between the King and Marghiloman reached a level of normalcy. The first meeting between the two men took place on 21 June 1920 at the horse races in Bucharest. According to Marghiloman, the King used the pretext of wanting to show him his new automobile in order to be able to speak with him alone. The discussion did not have serious political repercussions as the main theme was the corruption of one of Averescu's ministers.²⁰⁷

On 7 October, Marghiloman, Constantin Meissner and Gheorghe Dobrescu were invited to a Royal banquet organized by the Queen in honour of Prince Carol's return from his trip around the world. Meissner and Dobrescu were invited as ex-presidents of the two chambers of Parliament during the Conservative government of 1918. Marghiloman believed that the King thus acknowledged that he had not nullified that parliament by choice. The main political discussion revolved around the King's distrust of the Transylvanians, which mirrored that of General Averescu. Furthermore, the King believed that Romania needed friendly relations with Hungary at a time when Ionescu was trying to create an alliance aimed at encircling Hungary.²⁰⁸ For Marghiloman, this meeting had a special significance because his fellow Conservatives were also invited and he was able to have a long conversation with the suzerain.

At the beginning of December, Marghiloman asked for an audience with the Queen in order to congratulate her on the marriage of Prince Carol to a Greek princess. During the long discussion that ensued, the Queen expressed her frustration with the

²⁰⁷ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 63.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5: 85-87.

government's poor results which were in part due to what she considered to be the General's naiveté.²⁰⁹ Marghiloman mainly informed the Queen of the corruption and anarchy that existed in the country.²¹⁰ The Queen was known to play a critical role behind the scenes of Romanian politics and Marghiloman's audience must be viewed as an attempt to completely normalize relations between his party and the Crown.

Conclusion

During the second half of 1920, the PCP was mostly inactive. By the end of the year, Averescu's popularity had been eroded by a corrupt and somewhat chaotic government. Marghiloman was careful to maintain working relationships with the People's Party and the National Party. Although no contacts were made with the Peasantists, the Conservative press expressed a great deal of hope in the new party. The normalization of the relationship between the PCP and the royal couple also ensured that Marghiloman's voice could be heard once again whenever an important political decision had to be made. While nothing was achieved in terms of strengthening and expanding the party, it could be argued that by the end of this stage, the PCP was on its way out of political isolation.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 5: 98.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 5: 99.

The Second Stage (24 December 1920 – 30 October 1921) Activity

On 24 December 1920, in a speech given at the PCP Congress in Bucharest, Marghiloman unveiled his solutions for the political and economic crises facing Romania. His speech was significant because it outlined the PCP's new political program and its new view on foreign policy. The Conservative leader began by saying that the country was in a state of anarchy and that no party could govern alone.²¹¹ His political solution was a coalition government from as many parties as possible since he believed that no major political differences remained between the various political forces.²¹² In regards to the economy, Marghiloman argued that the government needed to have a well-defined policy meant to increase production and to privatize the railroad system.²¹³ He averred that a clear budget and low, but progressive taxes were necessary as well. In order to reduce costs, Marghiloman suggested a reduction in the number of ministries on the model of France, Great Britain and the United States, which had fewer ministries than Romania at that time.²¹⁴ Marghiloman also agreed that a close relationship with England and France was the only possible solution for Romania's foreign policy, given the existing international situation. The press of the major parties praised Marghiloman's speech and admitted that his embrace of the Allies coupled with the experience of his partisans made the PCP an acceptable and useful political organization.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Alexandru Marghiloman, Criza prin care Trece Romania – Discursul Rostit in Intrunirea Generala a Partidului Conservator – Progresist din 24 Decembrie 1920 (Romania's Current Crisis – Speech Given at the General Meeting of the Progressive – Conservative Party on 24 December 1920), 2.

²¹² Marghiloman, The Crisis, 5.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹⁵ Steagul, December 29, 1920.

The PCP's activity during the first ten months of 1921 had three main highlights: the by-election at Constanta, where Marghiloman ran for a Senate seat, the formation of the first PCP organization in Bessarabia, and the Conservative meeting at Iasi on 30 October.

Although it was not successful in expanding its social and electoral basis in the countryside, the PCP still tried to return to the Parliament by running a candidate in the Senate by-election held at Constanta, in May 1921. An eventual win would have given the party a more potent political voice and would have made it easier for the PCP to build the coalition that they were seeking. The importance of the election was understood by all party leaders present at a meeting held to discuss the matter. Marghiloman agreed to run at Constanta, while N. Paunescu emphasized the importance of propaganda and General Garlesteanu reiterated the necessity of the electoral struggle, which was supposed to mobilize and rejuvenate the party.²¹⁶

The party seemed to come to life before the election. Corteanu, the director of Steagul, wrote an article for Dobrogea Juna, a non-Conservative publication that seemed to sympathize with the PCP, in which he vociferously criticized the universal male suffrage as premature and noted the inability of the newly formed parties to govern.²¹⁷ On 3 May, a number of prominent local and national PCP leaders spoke at a meeting organized in Constanta.²¹⁸ Marghiloman spoke briefly, analyzing the crisis facing Romania and reiterating the solutions underlined in his December speech. He also defended himself from the accusation of having ceded the province of Dobrogea to the

²¹⁶ Ibid., April 21, 1921.

²¹⁷ Ibid., May 1, 1921.

²¹⁸ Ibid., May 7, 1921.

Bulgarians during his brief period in power in 1918.²¹⁹ In an interview with Dobrogea Juna, Marghiloman went so far as to say that, in his opinion, Romania needed Dobrogea and Bessarabia more than Transylvania, because these two provinces were more backward from a cultural and nationalistic point of view, while the latter was even ahead of the Old Kingdom in its development and, thus, was not in danger of losing its national consciousness.²²⁰

The Conservative leader spent the rest of the electoral campaign visiting and holding brief speeches in over twenty localities of the Constanta district.²²¹ Marghiloman's main rival was a Liberal and because of this his efforts concentrated especially upon the Turkish and Bulgarian minorities, which were unlikely to support the somewhat exclusive nationalism of Bratianu's party. Interestingly, the government supported the Liberal candidate and interfered with Marghiloman's campaign by arresting or preventing some of his supporters from casting their votes. Marghiloman lost by about one hundred votes and was thus denied access to the legislative body.²²² Despite the defeat, Marghiloman took solace in the fact that his party had mobilized itself in an exemplary fashion and that he should have won had the election been fair.

On 7 July, the PCP founded its first political organization in Bessarabia, at Cetatea Alba, under the effective presidency of I.G. Stoian and the honorary presidency of Nicolae Ghika-Comanesti.²²³ This event was significant because it constituted the PCP's first attempt to expand its organization into the new provinces. The Executive Committee elected included a marshal, a major, two lawyers, an engineer and a

²¹⁹ Ibid., May 9, 1921.

²²⁰ Steagul Dobrogei, May 1921.

²²¹ Ibid., May 14-16, 1921.

²²² Ibid., May 19, 1921.

²²³ Steagul, July 13, 1921.

teacher.²²⁴ Clearly, the PCP continued to rely on intellectuals and on experienced members of the community. It is unclear how many members the new organization had but there is no mention of either peasants or workers having joined the PCP at Cetatea Alba. The Bessarabian organization was not involved in any notable political activity and later on, in 1922, Marghiloman complained that he had no news at all from its members.²²⁵

Prior to this event, on 13 March 1921, Steagul published a list of forty-six new members from Albeni, a village situated in the Gorj district.²²⁶ A month later, Steagul reported that there were eleven new members from Stefanesti, five from Bobu and eight from Sacelu who had joined the PCP after discussions with two experienced members of the party from the neighboring Albeni.²²⁷ Steagul did not mention the new members' occupations but, since the paper usually mentioned members' professions or prior political positions, it could be assumed that they were all peasants.²²⁸ However, this cannot be interpreted as a successful expansion of the PCP in the countryside since nothing else was ever mentioned about these new party members again. This seems to have been an exception rather than the norm in regards to the PCP's efforts to attract the peasantry.

During the rest of the summer of 1921, the PCP's activity fell once again into inactivity. The Executive Committee of the PCP, which met in Bucharest on 16 October,

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 87.

²²⁶ Steagul, March 13, 1921.

²²⁷ Ibid., April 16, 1921.

²²⁸ In all prior cases, Steagul did mention whether a party member had held any prior political positions or was a member of a profession (i.e. lawyer, doctor, teacher, army officer, banker).

was expanded to include one hundred members (from the previous figure of seventy-five) and announced a new party congress to be held in Iasi on 30 October 1921.

The congress held on 30 October was a success for the PCP. Steagul believed that this was the largest political meeting organized in Iasi since the end of the war. A plethora of former ministers, deputies and senators attended, but once again, no peasants seemed to have been present.²²⁹ The two main speakers were Constantin Meissner, the head of the local party organization and Marghiloman. Both men re-iterated the ideas that Marghiloman had unveiled in his December 1920 speech. Meissner argued that no party was capable of governing alone and that only a coalition of old and new parties had a chance of dealing with the country's difficulties. At the end of his speech, he echoed Marghiloman's hope that in a few years, the peasants would be tired of the demagoguery of the new parties and would turn to the PCP.²³⁰

While Meissner dealt mainly with the political solution to the crisis, Marghiloman chose to explain in more detail his fiscal and economic ideas. He reiterated his party's experience and argued that any new coalition government had to reduce the number of ministries and to simplify the tax system.²³¹ He proposed the re-introduction of the old tax system modified to include progressive taxation, arguing that the country could ill afford to experiment with Nicolae Titulescu's complicated and unclear legislation.²³² He believed in the elimination of tariffs in order to maximize exports and to redress the value of the Romanian currency. Since Romania's main sources of export were wheat, lumber

²²⁹ Steagul, November 2, 1921.

²³⁰ Ibid., November 3, 1921.

²³¹ Alexandru Marghiloman, Criza Economica si Solutiuni – Discurs Tinut la Intrunirea Publica Tinuta la Iasi de Partidul Conservator – Progresist la 30 Octombrie 1921 (The Economic Crisis and its Solutions – Speech Given at the Public Meeting Held in Iasi on 30 October 1921 by the Progressive – Conservative Party), 21-22

²³² Marghiloman, The Economic Crisis, 22-23. Nicolae Titulescu was the Finance Minister and a member of the PCD.

and oil, he also suggested a temporary preferential treatment for the producers of these three commodities.²³³ He concluded his speech by suggesting that Romania needed a more prudent foreign policy devoid of quixotic proposals of military aid given to the various Allies.²³⁴

Thus, during the last few days of 1920 and the first ten months of 1921, the PCP was able to pursue its goals more vigorously than in 1920. The party's new program called for a coalition government and for cooperation with England and France on the foreign policy front. This made the PCP acceptable as a partner for most Romanian parties and opened the door to ending its political isolation. The party organized two large meetings, at Bucharest and Iasi and participated in the Constanta by-election in May 1921. Although unsuccessful due in large part to the government's interference, Marghiloman proved that he was a redoubtable candidate and a capable campaigner. Nonetheless, the PCP remained without a voice in the legislature. There were two instances of new party organizations being created, one in Bessarabia and one in a number of villages in the Gorj district. However, the creation of these organizations could be misleading. The Cetatea Alba organization did not prove to be an active one and it did not lead to the expansion of the party into the rest of Bessarabia. Notwithstanding the Gorj exception, the party did not make any inroads in the rural areas where most of the votes lay. The party press continued to survive but besides Steagul and Le Progres, only Gazeta Dorohoiului appeared regularly. There is no indication that the party leadership was able to increase the number of subscribers or to make these newspapers more accessible to the peasantry.

²³³ Ibid., 31.

²³⁴ Ibid., 34. Here, Marghiloman was essentially attacking Take Ionescu's policy and promises of aid to Poland against Bolshevik Russia and to England in Asia Minor.

Relations with other parties

Somewhat paradoxically, after Marghiloman's speech at the end of December 1920, which advocated a coalition government with practical plans meant to deal with the existing crisis, the PCP became more isolated on the political stage. The main reason for this was that the relationship with the PP, the PCP's main potential ally, drifted away from potential collaboration to mutual attacks. This occurred due to a number of unrelated factors.

First, Marghiloman formulated his plan for a large coalition of parties with a concise economic and financial program precisely because Averescu's government was unable to provide solutions for the crisis. Second, during the first few months of 1921, Averescu became concerned about losing power. According to Constantin Argetoianu, the PP's main organizer, once the Communist danger passed, the Liberals began to attack the government and to provoke conflicts between it and some of the opposition, namely the Peasantists and the PN.²³⁵ Because of this, Averescu wanted to ensure that at least Take Ionescu would remain on his side. In order to achieve this, the PP's main publication, Indreptarea, took Ionescu's side in its constant dispute with Steagul.²³⁶ Steagul's reply was that Averescu was the one who had negotiated the peace of Bucharest in 1918 and that Marghiloman had only tried to repair the damage. Only two days later, Steagul published the most vicious attack against Averescu in its history. Calling the Prime Minister, "the ridiculous phantom of an evaporated popularity", the Conservative publication added that Averescu began his career by stealing from the Ministry of War

²³⁵ Argetoianu, Memoirs, 5: 242-243.

²³⁶ Steagul, February 3, 1921. Indreptarea published an article praising one of Ionescu's speeches in which he had attacked Marghiloman's decision to put some of the members of Bratianu's government on trial.

and that Marghiloman had been the one to fire him from that position.²³⁷ Third, during the Constanta by-election, it seemed that the government did everything in its power to stop Marghiloman from winning a Senate seat.²³⁸ During the electoral campaign, the PCP's local press attacked Averescu fiercely. For example, Gazeta Dorohoiului argued that Averescu took power by threatening the King, that his government was corrupt and that the majority of his ministers should have been imprisoned.²³⁹ Steagul Dobrogei also considered that Averescu lacked experience and that he had profoundly disappointed his supporters and the entire country.²⁴⁰ Therefore, during the first ten months of 1921, the relationship between the PCP and the PP deteriorated to the point where the Conservatives argued that Averescu's mission was over.²⁴¹ However, it should be pointed out that throughout all this time, the two parties remained in contact through Garoflid who constantly visited Marghiloman.

The PCP's cordial connection with the NP continued in 1921. During most of the year, the Transylvanians were torn between a possible collaboration with the Liberals and one with the Peasantists and perhaps the PCP. In fact, according to Carada, the King told Maniu that he would be asked to form the new government only if he cooperated with either the Liberals or the Conservatives.²⁴² Marghiloman told Carada that on 13 February 1921, Maniu was sure that he was going to be the next Prime Minister.²⁴³ Furthermore, in March, Marghiloman's friend heard Marghiloman's secretary saying that the PCP

²³⁷ Ibid., February 5, 1921. Also, see Gazeta Dorohoiului, April 23, 1921.

²³⁸ Steagul, May 19, 1921.

²³⁹ Gazeta Dorohoiului, May 14, 1921.

²⁴⁰ Steagul Dobrogei, May, nr. 5, 1921.

²⁴¹ Steagul, September 14, 1921.

²⁴² Carada, Efemeridele (The Ephemerids), 112. For no apparent reason, Marghiloman's political journal provides little information about the encounters with the NP leaders during this period while Carada mentions more details even though according to him he found out most of them from Marghiloman himself.

²⁴³ Ibid., 109.

leader was going to be in the upcoming government, while Marghiloman himself told him that Vaida and Maniu had visited him and that he wanted to have amicable relations with them.²⁴⁴ In his Political Notes, Marghiloman mentions that only Vaida visited him and that they agreed on all issues though the Transylvanian politician told him that Maniu insisted on being the Prime Minister.²⁴⁵ A month later, Carada told Marghiloman that no understanding would be reached with the NP and that he would be better off trying to reach an agreement with Bratianu's Liberals.²⁴⁶ Carada then spent Easter with Vaida, who told him that Marghiloman would enter a government led by Maniu or if such a solution was not possible that he would lead the government himself for three months after which he would cede the power to Marghiloman.²⁴⁷ Marghiloman said that he would consider such an idea but that he also wanted to see what Constantin Stere, a prominent Peasantist, would have to say about it, probably believing that the Peasantist Party also had to be brought into such a government.²⁴⁸ Finally in June, Carada visited Vaida again and told him that Marghiloman was ready to enter any government led by the NP, while the Transylvanian asked whether a government led by General Coanda, who was one of Averescu's friends, and composed of the PN and the PCP was possible.²⁴⁹

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the contacts between the PCP and the NP during the first six months of 1921. First, the PCP was more than ready to cooperate with the NP in a future government led by either Marghiloman or by one of the PN

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 109.

²⁴⁵ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 124.

²⁴⁶ Carada, Efemeridele (The Ephemerids), 110.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 110.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 110.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

leaders. Second, the NP, which was also negotiating with the Liberals, was contemplating the possibility of forming a government with Marghiloman and perhaps with the Peasantists. In July, the NP joined the Liberals when the latter retired from the Chamber, apparently because Maniu reached the conclusion that he could come to power only alongside them. Later on, during the fall, the PN realized that the Liberals could come to power by themselves and its leaders began to negotiate feverishly with the other parties in order to form an anti-Liberal bloc.²⁵⁰

The PCP also improved its relationship with the Peasantist Party. Although in theory the two parties were at opposite ends of the political spectrum, the Conservatives believed that once the agrarian reform was accomplished, the differences between the two parties would not be insurmountable.²⁵¹ The first contact between the two parties occurred in December 1920, when the Peasantists promised to visit Marghiloman but eventually cancelled the original meeting and invited him to a secret one, which he refused to attend.²⁵² Less than two months later, however, Miculescu and General Atanasiu, two prominent Peasantists, visited Marghiloman and seemed to favour a closer relationship between the two parties.²⁵³ On 21 February, an intermediary asked Marghiloman whether he would receive two of the leading Peasantists. Marghiloman answered affirmatively and, on 8 March, he was visited by Constantin Stere. The latter was the leader of the Peasantist Party from Bessarabia, which only a few months later merged with its counterpart from the Old Kingdom.²⁵⁴ At that time, Stere's intentions were to create a truly national Peasantist Party and to stop the Liberals from returning to

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 112.

²⁵¹ Marghiloman, *Criza (The Crisis)*, 5.

²⁵² Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 102.

²⁵³ Ibid., 5: 110.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 5: 123.

power.²⁵⁵ Although these meetings did not amount to any concrete understanding, it appears that they were designed to allow both parties to gage each other's position in regards to a possible need to collaborate in the near future. Throughout the rest of the period, the Conservatives maintained a positive tone in regards to the Peasantists, even admitting that their party inspired sympathy despite its inexperience.²⁵⁶

The PCP made public its plan for solving the political and economic crises in December 1920, but in the following ten months it was unable to build a coalition of parties ready to implement such a plan. In fact, it could be argued that the PCP distanced itself further from the PP, which seemed to have been its more likely ally, while it did not register significant gains in dealing with either the NP or the Peasantists. On the other hand, the PCP did not irreparably damage its relationship with any of the non-Liberal parties. Thus, in the fall of 1921, the PCP was not ready to replace the government at the head of an already-formed coalition, but was in a position to attempt to organize such an alliance of parties which were opposed to a possible Liberal government.

Relationship with the Crown

Marghiloman's relationship with the Crown continued to improve steadily during the first ten months of 1921. On 3 February, Marghiloman and his wife were invited to have tea with the Queen.²⁵⁷ On 28 February, the King sent Alexandru Misu, one of his advisers, to ask for Marghiloman's opinion on a secret treaty that Take Ionescu was negotiating with Poland. The discussion also touched on the government's difficulties

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 5: 123.

²⁵⁶ Steagul, July 3, 1921.

²⁵⁷ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 112.

and Marghiloman made sure that the King was going to be informed about his solutions for the crisis.²⁵⁸

During March, the political crisis became acute. On the one hand the government was incompetent and on the other hand, after a corruption scandal, the Peasantists left the Chamber.²⁵⁹ At this point, the King was faced with a dilemma as the Liberals were not yet prepared to return to power. He could have allowed Averescu to continue as the Prime Minister or he could have named a new head of government who would have had to build a coalition between the National Party and the Peasantists and perhaps the Liberals or the PCP as a guarantee against any left-wing tendencies. Since the Liberals did not seem interested in sharing power with any other party, the King's choice was between the existing Averescu regime and a new government meant to organize new elections. With the Liberals out of the running for the moment, the only force capable of softening the leftist leanings of some of the Peasantist leaders was Marghiloman's PCP.

On 8 April, 1921, Marghiloman had a long audience with the King at the latter's request. Marghiloman suggested a government composed of his party together with the Transylvanians and the Peasantists, which was meant to last for two or two and a half years. The Conservative leader realized that the King was also considering a Liberal cabinet even at that stage.²⁶⁰ The sovereign also saw the Transylvanians as an impediment rather than an asset and he had clearly mentioned to Marghiloman that they had disappointed him.²⁶¹ The purpose of the audience was for the King to find out whether there was a real non-Liberal option left for him. Carada mentioned that during

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 5: 118.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 5: 124.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 5: 128.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 5: 86.

another audience that he had with the King sometime after Marghiloman, the sovereign told him that he would never ask a Transylvanian to form another government during his lifetime. Carada replied that together with Marghiloman the NP posed much less of a risk but this did not appear to convince the King.²⁶²

The King met Marghiloman at the horse races organized in Bucharest on 5 June 1921 and told him that he had decided not to ask the Transylvanians to form a new government, because they lacked the authority and the experience required in a time of crisis.²⁶³ Carada argued that if Marghiloman had been more emphatic about him running the new government instead of the Transylvanians, the King would have agreed to dismiss Averescu.²⁶⁴ However, that was unlikely because Maniu, according to Marghiloman, was insisting on being the head of such a coalition government, which automatically disqualified this possible combination due to the King's reticence.²⁶⁵

Ten days later, on 15 June, the Queen called Marghiloman and spoke with him about various current issues such as the marriage of Prince Carol and the crowning ceremony planned to take place in Transylvania. At the end of their discussion, the Queen asked Marghiloman to speak with the King regarding some of those issues since his opinion carried a great deal of weight with the sovereign.²⁶⁶ In the following days, Marghiloman had two conversations with the King. The King reiterated the fact that he did not wish to have a Transylvanian at the head of the government and that he even told Maniu to accept the leadership of someone from the Old Kingdom, who had the

²⁶² Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 111. Incidentally, the King's prediction proved to be correct since between 1921 and his death in 1927 he did not ask any Transylvanian to form a government.

²⁶³ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 132.

²⁶⁴ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 111.

²⁶⁵ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 124.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5: 132-134.

necessary experience.²⁶⁷ The two men also discussed the details of the coronation, which meant that the Conservative leader did satisfy the Queen's request. For the rest of the summer, the political activity in Romania slowed tremendously due to the Parliamentary vacation and the fact that most of the important politicians went abroad for various reasons.

In essence, the first ten months of 1921 were a time when Marghiloman consolidated his relationship with the Crown. He met both the King and the Queen more frequently and he was consulted on some of the crucial decisions that needed to be made both internally and in foreign policy. In the eyes of the monarchy, Marghiloman became an acceptable political option once again.

Despite these undoubtedly encouraging successes, it could be argued that between April and June, Marghiloman missed an opportunity to become an important part of a new government. As mentioned, the King's reluctance to allow a Transylvanian to lead a government meant that the only alternative would have been to entrust Marghiloman with that mandate. Unfortunately for him and despite assurances from Vaida, the leader of the PCP could not guarantee the collaboration of the Peasantists and especially that of Maniu. As a result, the King elected to maintain Averescu in power and to allow the Liberals more time to prepare for their return.

The Peasantists and the Transylvanians opened the door for Bratianu by not cooperating with Marghiloman in the spring and summer of 1921. While this is definitely true, it could also be argued that, while these moments represented some of the last political opportunities presented to the PCP, the newer parties had the luxury of waiting for the most propitious occasion. The Transylvanians wanted to find a suitable

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 5: 134.

political partner in the Old Kingdom with the help of which to form a truly national party. Consequently, they negotiated with all the other parties including the Liberals even though their most logical partner seemed to be the Peasantist Party. The latter consolidated its position by merging with Constantin Stere's Bessarabian Peasantist organization and tried to take away as many votes from Averescu as it could. Thus, the two potential allies of the PCP did not feel an urgency to return to power, simply because they realized they were in their infancy as political forces and that a further consolidation of the political spectrum was likely.²⁶⁸

Conclusion

By the end of October 1921, the PCP remained the only party capable of putting together a coalition against the Liberal party. Its program provided practical solutions for the economic and financial crises and its position vis-à-vis the other non-Liberal forces was such that its leaders could negotiate a possible cooperation with everyone, including Averescu. Furthermore, the party's relationship with the Crown improved further and the King seemed receptive to Marghiloman's proposal of a grand coalition meant to solve the stringent issues facing the country. Therefore, as the Averescu government came under increasing pressure, Marghiloman and the PCP seemed poised to play the role of the glue that held any anti-Liberal coalition together.

²⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, the Transylvanians and the Peasantists combined their forces in 1926 to form the National – Peasantist Party which was the only major rival of the Liberals until 1937.

Stage Three (1 November 1921 – 17 January 1922) Activity

Given the short period of time under discussion and the fact that Marghiloman was at the center of intricate negotiations involving the PP and the NP, the lack of internal activity on the part of the PCP is understandable. Nonetheless, there were a few events that deserve consideration. On 12 November, Pilescu, the leader of the Constanta organization, called a local party meeting and informed his colleagues that after Marghiloman's speech at Iasi and his audience with the King the PCP was becoming more popular because people were realizing that it was the only one capable to defuse the crisis.²⁶⁹ The Olt organization had a series of meetings in the main city of the district as well as in two villages. The speakers were all intellectuals but, according to the local newspaper, numerous peasants attended these meetings as well.²⁷⁰ However, the most important party meeting took place in Bucharest on 15 December. Marghiloman gathered his comrades in order to find out if they supported a possible Coanda government even without the help of the Transylvanians. Most of those present did agree with this formula although Marghiloman did have to convince a number of Conservatives that if Coanda failed, the Liberals would come to power and the PCP was going to be completely isolated in the upcoming elections.²⁷¹

Relations with the other parties (1 November 1921 – 17 January 1922)

The last two months of 1921 were marked by intense negotiations involving most political parties. Averescu, who came under strong attack from the opposition, tried to

²⁶⁹ Steagul Dobrogei, November 15, 1921. Pilescu is referring to the audience that Marghiloman had with the King on 5 November 1921.

²⁷⁰ Opinia Oltului, December 1, 1921.

²⁷¹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 156.

strengthen his government by negotiating with the PCP, the Peasantists and the Transylvanians. The general needed more time in power in order to achieve a possible merger with the Peasantists, who could have provided a stable social basis for the PP. At the time, the People's Party was the PCP's most likely partner in a possible future government.

During this stage, the relationship between the PCP and the PP evolved from one of open attacks to one of understanding and cooperation. Initially, on 10 November 1921, Constantin Argetoianu offered Marghiloman the position of governor of the National Bank.²⁷² Though the PCP leader refused, the two parties remained in contact through the help of Constantin Garoflid. At the beginning of December, the general understood that his position was crumbling and he met Marghiloman, offering him a ministry and the Transylvanians two ministries. Marghiloman argued that Averescu had to make more concessions to the Transylvanians and that they should be his main target since an alliance with the PCP would probably not be enough to save the government.²⁷³ Only two days later, on 13 December, after he failed to reach an agreement with the NP, Averescu decided to resign. However, he intended to use his parliamentary majority to support a government led by his good friend, General Coanda, thus giving himself time to convince the Transylvanians to join forces with him. Even though Coanda was not invited to form the new government, the General asked Marghiloman to continue negotiating with them on his behalf.²⁷⁴ At this juncture, Marghiloman became the main link between Averescu and the Transylvanians.

²⁷² Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 141.

²⁷³ Ibid., 5: 148-149.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 5: 153.

On 13 December, Ionescu was entrusted by the King with forming a new government and because he did not enjoy a majority in Parliament, the ex-Foreign Minister was given four days in which to create one.²⁷⁵ However, the general's majority held and the Transylvanians declared that they would collaborate with Ionescu only if he convinced the King to dissolve Parliament.²⁷⁶ Despite this, on 17 December, when the grace period expired, the King suspended Parliament for another month giving Ionescu another chance to buy a majority and prompting Steagul to label this decision as illogical.²⁷⁷

Marghiloman's efforts to convince the reticent Maniu to meet with Averescu bore fruit thanks in part to Carada, who was the Conservative leader's messenger to the Transylvanians. On 24 December, after intense negotiations, Averescu, Maniu and Vaida authorized Marghiloman to tell the King that "a cabinet formed and led by him would have the support of the People's Party and of the National Party."²⁷⁸ This marked the highest political achievement of the PCP in the post-war era as well as the closest cooperation with other political forces. According to Carada, Marghiloman was extremely pleased after his meeting with the King and even predicted a short life for Take Ionescu's government. Only a few days later though, Carada found out that the King had decided to bring the Liberals to power and the remaining two weeks left before the government had to face the Parliament passed without any major negotiations among the anti-Liberal coalition.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Carada, The Ephemerids, 112. Take Ionescu had resigned from Averescu's Cabinet on 11 December 1921 and had foolishly believed that Averescu's majority was going to follow him even against the wishes of the General.

²⁷⁶ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 157.

²⁷⁷ Steagul, December 16, 1921.

²⁷⁸ Carada, The Ephemerids, 114.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

After the middle of November, the relationship between the two parties improved dramatically. Averescu needed the PCP in order to demonstrate that he was making an effort to improve his government by adding experienced ministers. His party was keenly aware that it had been built around his popularity and that it did not have a stable electoral base. A return to opposition, especially under a Liberal government might have proven disastrous for the future of the PP. Furthermore the PCP also became the key to reaching an understanding with the Transylvanians. From the PCP's point of view, there were a number of reasons to support the PP. First, the PCP was finally given the opportunity to escape its political isolation. Second, by helping to shore up Averescu's majority and to provide the General with a few experienced ministers, the PCP could have hoped to play a key role in any future non-Liberal government as well as to put itself in a more advantageous position to negotiate a possible merger with the PP. Third, a return to power would have stabilized the PCP and would have prevented any more defections or resignations. Fourth, the PCP was eager to block any attempt on the part of the Liberals to return to power, since that would have meant more political isolation and an almost-guaranteed failure to return to Parliament. Last, there was a sincere belief on the part of the Conservatives that their presence alongside the PP would help to provide the necessary measures to lead the country out of its crisis as well as to moderate any left-leaning tendencies that Averescu's party might have. Thus, the collaboration between the two parties made political sense and was easily achieved.

While the PP was in a hurry to reach an understanding with the PCP, the NP could afford to wait for the most advantageous political offer. The Transylvanians could always count on the votes from their own region. For this reason they proved to be much

more difficult to convince to co-operate in stopping Bratianu from coming to power. In fact, they began to consider the idea of an anti-Liberal Bloc only when they understood that the Liberals did not plan to share power with them.²⁸⁰

As late as 16 November, the Transylvanians were still negotiating with the Liberals.²⁸¹ It is possible that the Liberals did not want to terminate their contact with the NP in order to prevent the formation of a Bloc against them prior to Averescu's fall. The initial talks between the NP and the PP took place sometime around 10 December. The NP leaders were as hesitant as ever and they refused to accept Averescu's proposals which they considered to be insufficient.²⁸² The PCP later claimed that a possible Coanda government based on Averescu's majority failed because of lack of agreement from the NP.²⁸³ Furthermore, although publicly they announced that they would not collaborate with Take Ionescu, privately, as late as 20 December, Vaida expressed the belief that something could be achieved by proceeding without Averescu and by supporting the leader of the Democratic Party.²⁸⁴

On 13 December, Averescu allowed Marghiloman to negotiate with the NP in his name. Three days later, Marghiloman told Vaida that the Transylvanians could count on him to work with both Averescu and the King in order to reach an understanding.²⁸⁵ It could be argued that the anti-Liberal Bloc was engineered and held together by Marghiloman and his party. There was considerable political as well as personal animosity between the Transylvanians and Averescu. Once their initial negotiations

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 112.

²⁸¹ Steagul, November 16, 1921.

²⁸² Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 152.

²⁸³ Steagul, December 19, 1921.

²⁸⁴ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 114.

²⁸⁵ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 153-158.

failed, it was up to the PCP to negotiate an accord between the two sides. Marghiloman's merit was that he was able to convince both parties that they had common goals and that those common goals could be achieved by cooperating against the Liberals.

The PCP did not negotiate directly with the Peasantists during this period. Mihalache's party indicated to Averescu that it was ready to support his government under certain conditions. Since the Peasantists were not indispensable to the creation of the Bloc, the PCP allowed Averescu to handle the negotiations with them.

Relationship with the Crown

The relationship between Marghiloman and the Crown steadily improved during the first eighteen months of Averescu's government. The King had asked for the Conservative leader's opinion and the Queen had exchanged pleasantries with him on a number of occasions. Marghiloman's name had been mentioned even as a possible replacement for Averescu. Thanks to his increased influence with the King, the Conservative leader was destined to play an important role in the political crisis that was about to unfold in the last two months of 1921.

At the beginning of November 1921, as the Parliament's prolonged vacation was coming to an end, the King wanted to see Marghiloman one more time. During their discussion, Marghiloman advised the King to give Averescu another chance to form a strong coalition government even though Ferdinand was clearly leaning toward the Liberals.²⁸⁶ After the General resigned because of his inability to reach an agreement with the Transylvanians, the King named Take Ionescu as the new Prime Minister. Marghiloman was clearly opposed to this decision and tried to convince Ferdinand not to

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 5: 139-140.

suspend Parliament for another month in order to give Ionescu a chance to build a majority. He argued that such a measure would open the Crown to criticism from other parties, would also be dangerous to the Liberals if they were to follow Ionescu in power and would contribute to the immoral act of essentially buying the Parliamentary majority.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Ionescu was given until 17 January to convince the Parliament to support him and he did his best to persuade everyone that his failure meant the return of Bratianu.

The Conservative press reacted with disbelief and indirectly criticized the King. Steagul published a few articles which called Ionescu's appointment "inexplicable" and "illogical."²⁸⁸ Such a reaction from the PCP was understandable given the animosity between Marghiloman and Take Ionescu and the fact that the latter had just betrayed Averescu who still enjoined a comfortable Parliamentary majority. Ionescu's appointment made sense only if the King was trying to pave the way for a Liberal government. Before his audience with Ferdinand on 29 December, Marghiloman also found out from a number of politicians that the King considered him old and his party non-existent.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the Conservative leader presented the King with the solution agreed upon with Averescu and Maniu and left the audience satisfied with the results.²⁹⁰

Why did the King ignore Marghiloman's solution and allow Bratianu to return to power? There were a series of objective as well as subjective reasons for this decision. First, the Liberal Party, in part due to its powerful economic position and to the

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 160-161.

²⁸⁸ Steagul, December 16, 1921 and Steagul, December 22, 1921.

²⁸⁹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 163-164.

²⁹⁰ Carada, The Ephemerids, 115.

experience of its leaders, was the only party that could truly govern by itself. The Liberals had seen Averescu as a temporary bulwark against the Left meant to give them time to reorganize and gain strength. Second, the King was interested in stability and, assuming that the Liberals were able to maintain themselves in power they were the most likely political force to provide that. Third, the King did not trust the Transylvanians and his relationship with Averescu had become glacial after the latter made a clumsy remark that was seen to threaten the monarchy.²⁹¹ As such, Marghiloman's proposal of a coalition between the two parties under his own leadership could not assure the King that such a solution was more adequate than a purely Liberal government. Fourth, there is no doubt that the King had a personal preference for Bratianu. After all, the two men had been through the war together and had shared the initial defeats and the glory of creating Greater Romania. The King had visited Bratianu's estate in the summer of 1921 in an unprecedented sign of political favour.²⁹² Most importantly, Barbu Stirbei, one of Bratianu's relatives, was the Administrator of the Royal Domains and the Queen's lover. With his help, Bratianu was able to convince the King to promote his party's agenda until both men died in 1927.²⁹³ Argetoianu's explanation sums up the situation:

Bratianu was incomparably more intelligent and more experienced than Maniu or Mihalache. But there was something else. Bratianu had Barbu Stirbei and through him he controlled the King playing the game without the risk of losing, while his competitors did not have anyone and did not even know what was happening at the palace. Bratianu had told the King that our government was meant to reestablish order, to destroy the Communist current through repression and the Averescan current through disappointments.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Ion Bitoleanu, *Din Istoria Romaniei Moderne 1922-1926 (From the History of Modern Romania)*, (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1981), 23.

²⁹² Bitoleanu, *Modern Romania*, 27.

²⁹³ *Jurnalul National*, December 12, 2005.

²⁹⁴ Argetoianu, *Memoirs*, 5: 239.

Conclusion

Politically, the PCP registered a series of mixed results between May 1920 and January 1922. The party was able to form its first organization in the new provinces at Cetatea Alba in Bessarabia. However, the impact of this organization was insignificant and its creation did not serve as a precedent for the other provinces. The same could be said about the rural party organizations from the Gorj district. While they did prove that the party could expand in the countryside, these organizations were the exceptions in an otherwise impotent campaign to extend the influence of the party. The party press did suffer during this period due to a lack of funds. Most local publications folded while Steagul could only be found in the main towns. As its leaders expected, the PCP had a difficult time in attracting the support of the peasantry.

The new party program, unveiled at the end of 1920, made the PCP, once again, a potential ally for most of the other political forces. The change in the party's vision of foreign policy removed the "pro-German" stigma which had contributed to the PCP's isolation. Marghiloman's economic and financial solutions were well-received and helped to convince the PCP's negotiating partners that the Conservatives were still capable of providing experience ministers.

The various attempts to gain a seat in the Parliament in order to bolster the party's negotiating position were not successful. Initially, Marghiloman refused to run in Transylvania on the government's list. Later on, he was forced to withdraw from the Botosani by-election because of illness. His final attempt, at Constanta, did bring some enthusiasm back into his party but, due to an alliance between the government and the

Liberals, it was also unsuccessful. The various by-elections did reinforce, however, the dependency of the party on its leader and his reputation.

The PCP did achieve its objective of improving its relationships with the other non-Liberal parties. The relationship with Averescu had its difficult moments but, in the end, the General was more than willing to share power with Marghiloman in a coalition government. The Transylvanians, who seemed to negotiate with all other political parties, also agreed to join a potential anti-Liberal coalition and at various times believed that an alliance with Marghiloman might convince the King to allow them to replace Averescu. The PCP began an amicable relation with the Peasantists as well and, despite the doctrinal differences, there was a great deal of mutual respect between the leaders of the two parties. Its ability to negotiate and its unique position as a partner for both Averescu and the Transylvanians allowed the PCP to play the major role in bringing together a coalition meant to prevent the Liberals from coming to power. In this respect, Marghiloman's skill in convincing Averescu and Maniu of the necessity for collaboration was truly remarkable considering the mutual distrust between the two politicians.

Marghiloman's renewed relationship with the Crown was the catalyst for the PCP's return to respectability. His various meetings and audiences with the King and the Queen allowed the Conservative leader to regain their trust and to present himself as a political alternative, especially in times of crisis. This, in turn, strengthened his negotiating position vis-à-vis Averescu and Maniu who agreed that Marghiloman should be the one presenting the King with their solution for a coalition government.

In the end, however, Marghiloman could not convince the King to postpone the return of the Liberals. This failure meant that the PCP missed its last opportunity to play

a major role in the political history of interwar Romania. Its new friendship with the Transylvanians and the PP did not translate into a meaningful opposition to the Liberal government and Bratianu's party ensured that the PCP could not gain any seats in the elections held in 1922. This development, combined with its inability to expand into the countryside, confined the PCP to an ephemeral existence, one that ended a month after Marghiloman's death in May 1925.

Chapter 3

Right after Take Ionescu's dismissal at the hands of the Parliament, King Ferdinand named Bratianu the new Prime Minister of Romania and also gave him the authority to dissolve the existing Parliament. The appointment also meant that Marghiloman missed one of his last opportunities to return to the forefront of Romanian politics. After the Liberals rigged the subsequent elections, the PCP was left with only one way to return to power. This chapter will argue that after 1922, the PCP's main focus was to find a political ally strong enough to be a potential successor to the Liberals. It succeeded in merging with the PP even though this happened only after Marghiloman's death. The PCP's activity concentrated on the drafting and the popularization of a program meant to solve the country's most stringent difficulties. Marghiloman hoped to build a coalition of parties around this program and to return to power if the Liberals faltered. When this failed he negotiated a merger with Averescu's party. In the end, only his poor health prevented this from occurring during his lifetime. After the disappointment of late 1921, Marghiloman eventually made peace with the King, but the political stability of Bratianu's regime meant that the Conservative leader only saw the King on a limited number of occasions during this period. He made sure though that his relationship with the Crown would not impede the political fortune of his party in the future.

Background

In 1922, everyone understood that the Liberals could obtain a majority only by committing widespread fraud and abuses. Indeed, during the March elections, Bratianu's PNL did everything in its power to obtain at least two thirds of the seats in Parliament in

order to be the party that wrote the new Constitution of Greater Romania. The PNL ended up with 227 out of 369 seats in the Chamber of Deputies but together with its allies such as a Peasantist splinter group from Bessarabia, it could count on more than 250 seats.²⁹⁵ The opposition and especially the PN protested vigorously but the King had decided to back the Liberals and could not be convinced to change his mind. Despite the controversy of its creation, the Liberal government formed in 1922 was one of the most stable governments of the inter-war era. It lasted until 1926 and was replaced by Averescu who came to power after an understanding with the Liberals.²⁹⁶ During these four years, the opposition was not able to unite around one party and to challenge the Liberals. Negotiations did take place between the PP, PN and PT but, in the end, no significant alliance developed. Take Ionescu died on 21 June 1922 and his party merged with the PN shortly thereafter.²⁹⁷ Constantin Argetoianu left the PP in August 1923, thus weakening Averescu's party which was in need of political reinforcements by this time.²⁹⁸ The most important negotiations took place between the PN and the PT. Although the two parties did not reach an understanding until 1926, they did lay the groundwork for their merger which finally created a worthy adversary for the Liberals.²⁹⁹

Activity

The PCP was highly inactive during most of 1922. The Conservatives did not mobilize for the elections in March because they realized that they faced overwhelming

²⁹⁵ Musat and Ardeleanu, *Politics*, 362.

²⁹⁶ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 411.

²⁹⁷ Mihail Rusenescu and Ioan Saizu, *Viata Politica in Romania 1922-1928 (Politics in Romania 1922-1928)* (Bucharest: Politica, 1979), 42.

²⁹⁸ Rusenescu and Saizu, *Politics*, 61.

²⁹⁹ The new party was called the National – Peasantist Party (PNT).

odds. The personal rivalry between Bratianu and Marghiloman ensured that the PCP would not improve on its 1920 results.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the modest results led Marghiloman to forward his resignation at the party Congress convened on 2 April in Bucharest. He explained his decision by declaring that “a party that does not show itself in elections is a political academy rather than a constitutional factor” and that the Crown had taken a clearly partisan position which went beyond its prerogatives.³⁰¹ Realizing that his resignation was equivalent to the dissolution of the party, his fellow party leaders convinced Marghiloman to change his mind by promising to properly finance the party press as well as to undertake the reorganization of the party’s committees. In addition, Marghiloman also obtained full powers to negotiate with any other political force without having to inform the Executive Committee of the Party in advance.³⁰²

The rest of 1922 brought only negative news for the party. In April, the entire party organization from the Bacau district disbanded. Mircea Cancicov, one of the leaders of this organization explained to Marghiloman that most of its members were upset because Steagul, the party’s main newspaper, had treated Nicolae Ghika, their deceased chief who had committed suicide, without the proper respect.³⁰³ Steagul was replaced by Timpul (The Times) in March 1923.

In November, after negotiating with Averescu’s party, General Garlesteanu and M. Saulescu, who were both important members of the PCP, resigned and eventually joined the PP.³⁰⁴ On 9 August Marghiloman announced that the PCP would sever its

³⁰⁰ On a personal note, Marghiloman’s first wife divorced him in order to marry Bratianu. The two men had been political rivals for about twenty years.

³⁰¹ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 181. The PCP did not win any seats in 1922.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 5: 182.

³⁰³ ANR, fond Alexandru Marghiloman, dosar 37, fila 1.

³⁰⁴ Bulei, Conservatives, 650.

collaboration with Steagul because the newspaper had criticized the Crown. This incident had taken place on 27 July when Steagul published an article which inquired whether the rumour claiming that the Queen was on the side of the Liberals was true.³⁰⁵ While no political actor had any doubts that the Crown supported Bratianu's party, Marghiloman believed that making such an accusation would damage his relationship with the Royal family.

Due to its lack of activity, some of the PCP members expected Marghiloman to dissolve the party during the congress that took place on 11 December 1922. However, as Carada said, Marghiloman was not ready to give up yet.³⁰⁶ He used this opportunity to outline a political program that contained his solutions for Romania's economic and fiscal difficulties. Since he believed that the opposition parties lacked practical solutions, his plan was to rally the opposition around this program. It appears that Maniu, the leader of the PN, indirectly convinced him of the need for such a program. Maniu had been told by the King to form a coalition around a clear set of economic and financial solutions.³⁰⁷ Marghiloman's hope was that by constructing such a program and then making it known to the public through a series of political rallies held in some of the regional centers of the country, the opposition might decide to come together.

During 1923, the PCP organized three rallies meant to popularize Marghiloman's program. They were held at Botosani, on 11 March 1923³⁰⁸, at Craiova on 17 June 1923³⁰⁹ and at Timisoara on 28 October 1923.³¹⁰ Two other rallies were planned for

³⁰⁵ Steagul, August 9, 1922.

³⁰⁶ Carada, The Ephemerids, 119.

³⁰⁷ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 191.

³⁰⁸ Timpul (The Times), March 13, 1923. Botosani is located in northern Romania and was one of the PCP's most active organizations.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., June 19/20, 1923. Craiova is the capital of the southern province of Oltenia

³¹⁰ Conservatorul (The Conservative), November 4, 1923. Timisoara is the capital of the Banat province.

Cernauti, the capital of Bukovina and Constanta, the capital of Dobruja but Marghiloman's deteriorating health meant that these meetings had to be postponed indefinitely.³¹¹

Marghiloman's ideas made a great deal of economic sense. His suggestions stemmed from the assumption that Romania did not need social upheavals but rather economic and financial stability in order to rebuild the economy and to successfully integrate the new provinces. One of his main complaints about the previous governments was that they had allowed the Romanian currency to freefall due to poor economic policy. He wanted to see a regime of free trade within Romania's borders and a regime of carefully controlled exports and imports. In order to stabilize the currency, Marghiloman proposed the encouragement of wheat cultivation which would have stimulated exports coupled with severe limits on luxury import items.³¹² He also wanted to eliminate any taxes on exports in order to make Romanian products more competitive internationally.³¹³ He emphasized that internal peace was essential for an increase in productivity and for attracting foreign investors.³¹⁴ Throughout their history, the Conservatives had always been preoccupied with improving agricultural productivity and with removing any export taxes especially on wheat or corn. Henry Roberts argues that wheat, which had been Romania's main product for export prior to 1914, never achieved pre-war levels due to lower yields after 1918.³¹⁵ The Conservatives argued that the high export taxes on wheat imposed by the Liberals had made the peasants cultivate other

³¹¹ Timpul, June 30, 1923.

³¹² Ibid., March 16, 1923.

³¹³ Ibid., June 19/20, 1923.

³¹⁴ Ibid., October 30/31, 1923.

³¹⁵ Roberts, Problems of an Agrarian State, 56.

products which could not be exported.³¹⁶ The elimination of these taxes would have been a popular policy with the peasantry. Furthermore, the PCP hoped to attract significant amounts of foreign capital in order to develop the nascent industry and in particular the oil sector which had proven to be extremely profitable.³¹⁷ Both of these policies ran counter to those of the Liberals. The PNL's economic motto was 'Prin noi insine' (By ourselves).³¹⁸ Being economic nationalists, they did not welcome foreign investment. At the same time, they preferred to tax the peasantry and use the proceeds to finance the development of industry. The policies advocated by the PCP were economically viable, were meant to support the peasantry and were also contrary to the economic interests of the Liberals. It appears that Marghiloman intended to rally the opposition not only around a political program but also around agrarian economic interests which were opposed to those of the Liberals. However, his potential coalition partners were more concerned with contesting the legality of the 1922 elections or of the Liberal Constitution of 1923 than with coming up with an efficient program that could at least have presented the King with an alternative to the Liberal Party.

The PCP's last major meeting took place on 9 April 1924 in Bucharest. The guests celebrated Marghiloman's seventieth birthday as well as the sixth anniversary of Bessarabia's union with Romania.³¹⁹ Over 300 party members attended the banquet and for many of them this was the last time they would ever see their leader alive.

³¹⁶ Timpul, April 17, 1923.

³¹⁷ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 146.

³¹⁸ Hitchins, Rumania, 365.

³¹⁹ Conservatorul, April 27, 1924.

Marghiloman fell ill in August 1924 and spent the last few months of his life in Vienna undergoing a number of surgeries. He returned in April and died on 10 May 1925.³²⁰

The PCP's activity after the March 1922 elections slowed considerably. In fact, during the remainder of 1922, the only notable events in the life of the party were the resignations of some of its leaders and the December congress. Marghiloman's economic program and his efforts to popularize it led to a series of political rallies during 1923. However, when the party leader fell ill, the PCP's activity ceased. By this stage, the party's activity was directed solely towards an attempt to form an anti-Liberal coalition. Most PCP leaders were willing to wait and give Marghiloman time to negotiate a political merger with either the PN or the PP. It appears that even he had lost his enthusiasm. Marghiloman, whose diary was full of useful information until the 1922 elections, began to record his thoughts only sparingly. His frustration with the political process and with the opposition's lack of unity and vision was evident. In February 1922, he wrote that he no longer wanted to keep a political diary "out of disgust. The Liberals are humiliating everyone else. Three quarters of the country is against them and yet, they remained all-powerful because of the general weakness displayed by the opposition."³²¹ It seems that the other leading members of the PCP were simply waiting for Marghiloman to find a suitable merger partner.

Relations with other parties

During the Liberal government (1922-1926), the PCP continued to negotiate with the other anti-Liberal parties. This period can be divided into two main phases separated

³²⁰ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 128-129.

³²¹ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 202.

by the March 1922 elections. In January 1922, Marghiloman understood that the Liberals would do everything in their power to prevent him from acceding to the Parliament.³²² He also realized that, under those circumstances, his party could hardly improve on the results from 1920. Consequently, he attempted on the one hand to create an opposition bloc, which would have allowed him to play an important role in any future non-liberal government, and, on the other hand to negotiate individually with the PP, PN and PT in an effort to reach an electoral alliance.

The issue of a united opposition bloc meant to isolate the Liberals resurfaced after the King appointed Bratianu. For a few days it appeared that the opposition parties, frustrated by the King's blatant disregard of their proposals, might form a strong united front in an attempt to block the Liberals' ascension to power. They met at the PN headquarters but they failed to reach any viable agreement.³²³ On 23 January, in a letter to Meissner, Marghiloman expressed his belief that "a united opposition is impossible because of hesitant men like the Transylvanians."³²⁴ Despite these strong words, Marghiloman continued to negotiate with the three main opposition parties

The PP was the most likely political entity to collaborate with the PCP. Averescu's party, besides the declining popularity of its leader, did not have the necessary specialists required for an efficient government. This became apparent during the brief Averescu government which lasted less than two years – March 1920 to December 1921. Although this party appeared to be leaning towards the left of the political spectrum, judging from its populist rhetoric and the overwhelming support from the peasantry, quite a number of ex-Conservatives had joined its ranks because they

³²² *Gazeta Dorohoiului*, March 18, 1922.

³²³ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 173.

³²⁴ ANR., fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 82.

viewed Averescu as a “man of order” who could prevent a revolution and who also had the needed support to counteract the financial empire of the Liberal Party. Among the ex-Conservatives who had joined Averescu were Constantin Garoflid, Matei Cantacuzino, P.P. Negulescu and Ion Petrovici all of whom occupied important positions in Averescu’s party.³²⁵ Thus, a possible union with the People’s Party would have reunited some of the Conservative elements left after 1918 and would have allowed Marghiloman to undoubtedly become one of the leading figures of the new political formation. Averescu, at the same time, would have acquired numerous capable and experienced politicians and administrators who would have greatly increased the competency of any future government led by the general.

In December 1921, the two parties were ready to collaborate within a government led by either Marghiloman or Averescu. At the beginning, it seemed that Bratianu’s appointment would not impact this understanding. Towards the end of January 1922, the two parties were close to an agreement. On 23 January 1922, Marghiloman wrote to Meissner that an alliance with Averescu would not be difficult to forge since he had already reached an agreement with the General in principle.³²⁶ Only a few days later, Steagul wrote that there were no real differences of opinion between the two parties.³²⁷ Indreptarea, Averescu’s main newspaper, published an interview with Marghiloman. In the introduction, the paper praised the PCP leader and stated that the boundaries between political parties were not stable, which can be interpreted as an allusion to a possible merger between the two parties.³²⁸ By 6 February, though negotiations were still

³²⁵ Bulei, *Conservatives*, 647.

³²⁶ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 83.

³²⁷ Steagul, February 1, 1922.

³²⁸ Indreptarea, February 2, 1922.

carrying on, collaboration was reduced to a series of partial understandings at district level, which according to Marghiloman, could not be extended to include the capital. Apparently frustrated, the PCP leader wrote to Meissner that, in his opinion, Argetoianu lied when he said he wanted to reach a pact between the two sides as soon as possible and that Averescu had become an inactive politician.³²⁹ By the time of the parliamentary elections, no arrangement had been reached and any talk of a political alliance ceased temporarily.

During the two months between Bratianu's nomination and the subsequent elections, the PCP also negotiated with the PN. Right after the war, the political class from the Old Kingdom expected the Transylvanians to have a positive impact on Romanian politics. The politicians from across the mountains were believed to be less corrupt, more honest and fiercely nationalistic. Although some of this enthusiasm had vanished, an alliance with the PN was desirable for any party in Greater Romania. Marghiloman had established a positive relationship with some of the PN leaders and in particular with Vaida. In his discussions with Marghiloman, the former Prime Minister had come across as a man with conservative values who did not trust the left-leaning Peasantists. As mentioned, Carada even argued that Vaida wanted to include the PCP leader in his government in early 1920.³³⁰ During the negotiations that took place at the end of 1921, Maniu and Vaida appeared willing to co-operate with Marghiloman within a coalition government. Furthermore, although the PN was only a regional party, it did have a stable base in Transylvania. The PCP could have provided the experience of its members to a party deemed to be inexperienced.

³²⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 85.

³³⁰ Carada, *The Ephemerids*, 96.

The initial negotiations took place at the PN headquarters when Maniu invited delegates from all the opposition parties in an effort to build an anti-Liberal coalition. They failed after only two days. Nevertheless, the PCP continued to negotiate with the PN. Andrei Corteanu, who was the director of Steagul, offered to provide Vaida with automobiles in the Old Kingdom, for the duration of the electoral campaign. His offer was refused however as the PN decided to run candidates only in Transylvania.³³¹

During an audience with the King, Marghiloman found out that the reason why Ferdinand had not entrusted him with the formation of the government in December 1921 was that Maniu had told the King that he would not support the Conservative leader. When confronted, Maniu argued that the King had misunderstood him but, according to Carada, from then on, Marghiloman “did not trust the Transylvanians anymore.”³³² By the time of the election, the two parties could not reach an understanding regarding either an electoral pact or a possible merger.

Marghiloman even contemplated an alliance with the PT. Despite the fact that the Peasantists were at the opposite end of the political spectrum, he believed that after the agrarian law passed in July 1921, the PT would be forced to moderate its radical agenda. On 23 January 1922, in a letter to Meissner, Marghiloman wrote that an agreement with the PT would have been beneficial because the Peasantists had a strong party organization especially after their merger with the Bessarabian Peasantists. Although he considered their ideas to be “literature for the era after 1950,” Marghiloman argued that an electoral alliance did not necessarily imply a shared political program.³³³ Two weeks later, he wrote to Meissner that the PT was interested in collaborating with the PCP only

³³¹ Gica, The Process, 94.

³³² Carada, The Ephemerids, 116-117.

³³³ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 82.

for the Senate elections, where the Peasantists felt that they were weak.³³⁴ Marghiloman met Constantin Stere who was one of the PT leaders in an effort to reach an agreement regarding this matter. However, Stere told him that the PT was not prepared to collaborate with any other party and that it wanted to remain a separate, class party. Interestingly, however, he did agree that universal suffrage had been implemented too soon and without the necessary preparation.³³⁵

The inability of the PCP to form a partnership with any of the other three main opposition parties was closely related to the inability of the opposition to form a compact anti-Liberal bloc. Obviously, it would have been less difficult to form such a bloc if these parties would have been asked to form the government. In opposition, it proved impossible to co-ordinate the efforts and the interests of the various organizations even though a united bloc would have been the only effective way to combat the Liberals. The Liberals were prompt to organize the elections, thus, not allowing the opposition ample time to prepare for them or to negotiate an alliance. The PCP also had two clear liabilities, which were magnified when the party was in opposition. First, any party that associated itself with the PCP could have been accused of treason by the Liberals as the fact that Marghiloman's party was for neutrality in the war still constituted a political impediment. Second, the fact that the party was not popular in the countryside, where the majority of the voters lived, meant that this possible accusation could not be offset by a strong electoral contribution to any possible ally. Also the party's most important asset, namely the knowledge and the experience of its leaders, which would have helped any

³³⁴ Ibid., f. 85.

³³⁵ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 176. Stere was a Bessarabian ex-member of the Liberal Party. During the war, he agreed with the Conservative Carp arguing that Romania should have joined the Central Powers against Russia in 1914. He resigned from the Liberal Party at the time and later on formed a Peasantist Party in Bessarabia which later merged with Mihalache's Peasantist Party from the Old Kingdom.

other coalition partner, was not as important in opposition as it would have been had the anti-Liberal Bloc been asked to form the government.

After the 1922 elections, the PCP's contacts with the other opposition parties became sporadic. During the meeting of the Executive Committee of the PCP, on 2 April 1922, the majority of those present opted for an alliance with the PN.³³⁶ On 22 June 1922, Take Ionescu died in Italy. He had eaten spoiled oysters in Naples and could not be saved despite the best efforts of the doctors in Rome.³³⁷ Without their charismatic leader, the remnants of Ionescu's party drifted towards the PN and eventually merged with it between November 1922 and February 1923.³³⁸ The result was a strategic defeat for the PCP in its quest for possible allies. On the one hand, any possibility of the reunification of the two Conservative branches ended and on the other hand, once in the National Party, Ionescu's supporters sabotaged any negotiations between Maniu and Marghiloman.³³⁹ Arguably, this event left Marghiloman with the only alternative of reaching an understanding with Averescu, since an alliance with the Peasantists was not seriously contemplated by the latter.

The PCP's negotiations with the PP were more successful. On 25 January 1923, Marghiloman met Averescu and the two party leaders agreed to form any future government together.³⁴⁰ Marghiloman seemed optimistic about such a possibility especially since Nicolae Lupu, a notable Peasantist, had agreed to back such a government.³⁴¹ In July 1923, the PP showed more signs of goodwill towards the PCP

³³⁶ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 182.

³³⁷ Raoul V. Bossy, *Recollections of a Romanian Diplomat 1918-1969* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), 8.

³³⁸ Rusenescu and Saizu, *Politics*, 69.

³³⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 95.

³⁴⁰ Marghiloman, *Political Notes*, 5: 196.

³⁴¹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 95.

when its daily paper, Indreptarea, published an article eulogizing Arion's life.³⁴² In August 1923, Constantin Argetoianu, Averescu's right-hand-man, left the PP with his numerous supporters.³⁴³ This only helped the PCP's position as Averescu needed to replenish his ranks with experienced and capable politicians.³⁴⁴ In the spring of 1924, Averescu wanted to know if Marghiloman would accept to be his Finance Minister.³⁴⁵ Marghiloman was more interested in a merger of the two parties than in the premature division of portfolios. Nevertheless, on 7 June, he agreed to join a possible Averescu government and to merge his party with the PP immediately after that.³⁴⁶ The two leaders agreed to postpone the final negotiations until the fall of that year. However, in August, Marghiloman fell ill and spent the following months in Vienna.³⁴⁷ While their leader was abroad, some of the younger PCP leaders such as Corteanu tried to finalize the negotiations with Averescu. In a letter to Meissner, Lascar Antoniu, another leading member of the Iasi PCP organization, wrote that Corteanu had seen Garoflid and then Averescu and that the latter had agreed to an immediate merger between the two parties.³⁴⁸ When Marghiloman found out about this, he wrote to Meissner that he expected all PCP members to cease any political negotiation in his absence.³⁴⁹ He returned to Romania in April 1924 and Carada, understanding that he had returned only to die at home, asked Averescu to do Marghiloman a favour and allow him to die as the

³⁴² Indreptarea, July 10, 1923.

³⁴³ Rusenescu and Saizu, Politics, 61.

³⁴⁴ Bulei, Conservatives, 653.

³⁴⁵ Carada, The Ephemerids, 126.

³⁴⁶ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 211.

³⁴⁷ Carada, The Ephemerids, 128.

³⁴⁸ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/4, f. 2.

³⁴⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar 48/VI, f. 120.

head of the PCP. The General showed great respect on this occasion and agreed to delay negotiations for as long as it was necessary.³⁵⁰

The final chapter in this long and arduous process was written after Marghiloman's death which occurred on 10 May 1925.³⁵¹ Immediately after his burial, the PCP's Executive Committee met and decided to accept Averescu's offer and to join the PP.³⁵² On 14 June 1925, this decision was ratified and the PCP members joined Averescu.³⁵³ In March 1926, after an understanding with the Liberals, the PP returned to power.³⁵⁴ Averescu's government, which lasted until 3 June 1927, included three former members of the PCP, namely Meissner, Mitilineu and Garoflid.³⁵⁵

Ultimately, the PCP was able to find a party that found the addition of Marghiloman's colleagues both necessary and useful. After the Liberals took power in 1922 and the opposition failed to unite, negotiations meant to consolidate the political stage took place among all parties. The PCD joined the PN after Ionescu's death. At the same time the Peasantists drifted towards the PN as well. In fact the two parties, after a failed attempt in 1923 finally united in what became the National Peasantist Party (PNT) in October 1926.³⁵⁶ In a sense these developments narrowed the options of both the PP and the PCP. After Argetoianu's departure, General Averescu understood the need for bolstering his weakened party with the experienced Conservatives. Although Marghiloman did not live to see the final merger between the two parties, the

³⁵⁰ Carada, The Ephemerids, 129

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Bulei, Conservatives, 658.

³⁵³ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar V/246, f. 4.

³⁵⁴ Rusenescu and Saizu, Politics, 64.

³⁵⁵ Carada, The Ephemerids, 133.

³⁵⁶ Rusenescu and Saizu, Politics, 73.

understanding reached on 14 June 1924 led to the merger of the two parties exactly one year later.

Relations with the Crown

Marghiloman's relationship with the King had a setback when Ferdinand allowed Bratianu to form his government in 1922. Soon after though, the PCP leader understood that he could ill afford to alienate the King. When Corteanu published an article in Steagul accusing the Crown of political partisanship, Marghiloman chose to leave his party without a national newspaper for a few months (August 1922 – March 1923) rather than associate himself with that statement.³⁵⁷

His audiences with the King became rarer because the Liberal government proved to be stable. On occasion, the King would ask to see Marghiloman in order to find out his opinion about the political situation. Unfortunately, Marghiloman's political diary is sketchy and it is possible that there were more meetings than he described in his Political Notes. The two men met in February 1923 and February 1924. During the second meeting, Ferdinand told Marghiloman that he had advised Averescu to strengthen his party and to have a clear program dealing with the economic and financial difficulties of the time.³⁵⁸ Since Averescu's only logical ally at the time was the PCP, which had already publicized its economic and financial program, this would seem to be a careful allusion regarding a possible collaboration between the PP and Marghiloman. However, nothing else is known about the relationship between the two sides during this period. Interestingly, Marghiloman's behaviour towards the King had a series of opponents

³⁵⁷ Steagul, August 9, 1922.

³⁵⁸ Marghiloman, Political Notes, 5: 204.

within the PCP. For example, after Marghiloman praised the Crown in an interview, Lascar Antoniu wrote to Meissner that he found Marghiloman's monarchism to be nothing less than "unsolicited servitude" and that it denoted a lack of dignity on the part of the leader and of the party itself.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, during the last three years of the PCP's existence, Marghiloman maintained a respectful relationship with the King which did not impede his party's chances to return to power after the merger with the PP.

After January 1922, Marghiloman concentrated his efforts on finding a suitable political ally. Understanding that the anti-Liberal opposition lacked clear ideas about how to solve the problems facing Greater Romania, Marghiloman drafted a program which was both economically sound and anti-Liberal in nature. He made efforts to make this program known through a series of party rallies. When the opposition failed to unite and the PN merged with the PCD, Marghiloman turned his attention to reaching an understanding with Averescu. In June 1924, the two leaders agreed to a merger in principle. Marghiloman's illness and subsequent death prevented the two parties from merging during his lifetime. In June 1925, the remaining PCP members finally joined Averescu's PP and returned to power less than a year later when the General was appointed Prime Minister.

³⁵⁹ ANR, fond Meissner, dosar VI/4, f. 2.

Conclusion

World War I radically changed the history and the political map of Eastern Europe. By the end of 1918, Romania managed to achieve all its territorial aspirations. The war also ushered in numerous changes such as the land reform and the introduction of universal male suffrage. These re-shaped the political system as well. Pre-1914 Romania had a stable two-party system in which the monarch played the role of the referee. The king had the power to appoint the Prime Minister and to dissolve Parliament. The franchise was restricted by financial qualifications. The elections were simply meant to confirm the king's choice and not to actually determine which party had more support among the population. The state apparatus was always used during the elections by the party in power in order to guarantee itself a comfortable majority in the legislature. King Charles, who was pragmatic and neutral, alternated the two parties (PNL and PC) in power in a rather efficient manner. During his reign, the country gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and brought the Second Balkan War to an end by promptly intervening against Bulgaria. He had also signed a secret alliance with the Central Powers meant to protect Romania from Russia. King Charles died during the first few months of the war and was replaced by King Ferdinand. After a series of initial defeats, Romania was able to emerge from the war as a major winner. It more than doubled its size and its population.

The new political system created by universal male suffrage resembled in some respects the one before the war. The King maintained most of his prerogatives after 1918, as he could still appoint the Prime Minister and dissolve the Parliament. The elections remained a way to validate the King's choice rather than to objectively gauge

the options of the electorate. There were however a few major changes as well. The monopoly on power of the two parties was broken. Three main parties emerged after the war. Averescu's PP was built around the general's popularity, which he had gained on the front lines in 1917. The PN was a regional party from Transylvania which managed to maintain its power base after 1918. The PT was a party that appealed to the rural inhabitants because it advocated radical land reforms and financial assistance for the peasantry. While the PNL remained the strongest party in the country, thanks to its financial power and influence over the King, the Conservatives could only hope that their capital of political experience and administrative efficiency would allow them to survive in the new era.

The Conservative Party had suffered too many damaging blows in quick succession. By the beginning of the war, the Conservatives had already split into two main parties, the PC led by Marghiloman and the PCD led by Take Ionescu. The war further fractured the PC over differences of opinion on foreign policy. Petre Carp wanted Romania to join the Central Powers while Nicolae Filipescu preferred the Entente option and Alexandru Marghiloman strongly believed in neutrality until the outcome of the war became certain. Filipescu eventually joined Ionescu's camp while Carp retired from politics in 1918. Marghiloman sacrificed his popularity by accepting the King's appointment in the spring of 1918, when most of the country was occupied by foreign armies. After the war, the expropriation of over two million hectares of land from the large estates primarily owned by members of the PC damaged the party's economic power. The implementation of universal male suffrage without a preparatory period

damaged the party's political power which had been protected by the college voting system.

This thesis has explored the post-war attempts of the Conservative Party (later renamed Progressive-Conservative Party or PCP) to survive in the new political environment and to return to power. It argues that the PCP employed two strategies during this period. The first strategy was meant to maintain the party at the forefront of Romanian politics through the electoral process. The second one involved political collaboration within a coalition of parties or even an outright merger with another political entity.

During the first year of the post-war era, the PCP concentrated on the first strategy because it overestimated its strength and because it was politically isolated. The party's leader, Alexandru Marghiloman, believed that the PCP was strong enough to obtain a notable result in the first elections held under universal male suffrage especially after General Averescu, the most popular man in the country, and Take Ionescu chose to boycott them. After the disappointing result obtained under favourable circumstances in November 1919, but especially after the failure to win any seats in the 1920 elections, the party concentrated on its other survival strategy. Until the Liberals returned to power in January 1922, this consisted mostly of trying to build an anti-Liberal coalition which would have allowed the PCP to play an important role in any non-Liberal government. The PCP almost returned to power in December 1921 when it managed to form an alliance with the People's Party (PP) and the National Party (NP).

When this enterprise proved to be unsuccessful and the PCP once again failed to win any seats in the legislature, the party's strategy remained the same except that at this

juncture, the emphasis was on trying to find a merger partner rather than to simply form an anti-Liberal coalition. After the 1922 elections, the PCP's activity centered on outlining and popularizing a series of solutions meant to solve the country's economic and financial difficulties. Marghiloman hoped that this program and the experience of his colleagues, which was a precious commodity in the post-war era, would convince either the PN or the PP to merge with the PCP. After the remnants of the Democratic-Conservative Party (PCD) joined the PN was left with only one option, that of merging with General Averescu's party. When Constantin Argetoianu, the PP's main strategist left his party, Averescu realized the need to add experienced and capable politicians to his organization. By June 1924, he and Marghiloman had agreed in principle to a merger of the two parties. The illness and subsequent death of the PCP leader prevented the two politicians from settling the final details of the merger. The remaining PCP leaders decided to join the PP immediately after Marghiloman's death. Their decision proved to be a fortunate one as the King asked Averescu to replace the Liberals less than a year later and three PCP members became ministers in the General's Cabinet.

Throughout the entire post-war period (1919-1925), the PCP tried to cultivate an amicable relationship with the Crown. Knowing that the King retained most of his pre-war powers, Marghiloman made efforts to display his loyalty to the Crown and to appear as a viable political option. Although he realized that the King was a partisan of the PNL, Marghiloman hoped that his relationship with Ferdinand would not prevent him from coming to power if the opportunity presented itself.

The PCP proved incapable of adapting to the new electoral system. Its inability to expand in the countryside and the lack of enthusiasm displayed by most of its members

when it came to propagandistic activity ensured that the party could not compete with any of the new parties. However, Marghiloman's uncanny ability to compromise and the experience of its members allowed the PCP to survive even after it failed to win any seats in Parliament. Even though he failed to convince the King to appoint him as Prime Minister in December 1921, Marghiloman continued to negotiate with the other non-Liberal parties and eventually secured a merger with the PP, which allowed his partisans to continue to play an important political role after his death. From this point of view, it could be argued that the PCP leader proved successful in his attempt to survive and guide his friends and colleagues in the after-war period.

More broadly, the case of the PCP reflects broader patterns in the political transformation of agrarian societies. Samuel Huntington's observations are particularly useful in the Romanian case. Although the ruling elites were not able to prevent the massive peasant revolt of 1907, they understood the necessity of land reform and were able to avoid a peasant revolution in the post-war context. The reform took place when the strongest political force in the country, the Liberals, in collaboration with the King forced the landed elites to accept the confiscation of part of their land. The land reform in Romania was also aided by the fact that while the Liberals formed a strong and disciplined political and economic force, by 1918, the Conservatives had splintered into too many groups which were unable to unite in order to impede the process. The weakness of the Conservatives and the emergence of the Peasantists ensured that the reform would not be diverted from its original course. Huntington also argues that the impact of land reform is usually negative in economic terms in the short run but positive

in the long run.³⁶⁰ The Romanian example tends to disprove this in the sense that in both the long and the short term the economic impact was negative. Politically, however, as Henry Roberts corroborates the reform was instrumental in providing stability to a country which needed time to modernize its economy and to integrate the newly-acquired provinces.

It has been observed that once the peasantry receives land, it tends to become a conservative element in society.³⁶¹ Indeed, as Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan note, in Western Europe, Conservative parties have usually represented agrarian interests.³⁶² Yet in Romania, the PCP has been unable to win the peasantry to its cause. Marghiloman believed that given time, the peasantry could become the backbone of his party. However, the PCP did not have the time or the necessary resources to make inroads into the countryside. Also, the events of 1907, which caused a great deal of animosity between the two sides, were too recent for the peasants to forget. Moreover, the PCP simply could not compete with parties like the PP and especially the PT when it came to electoral promises made to the peasantry. Once Averescu's popularity disappeared, the Peasantists became the dominant political force of the Romanian village because they were able to effectively appeal to the continued thirst for land of the peasantry.

The issue of time or, in the PCP case, the lack of time reoccurs when the situation of the Romanian Conservatives is compared to similar political parties in other countries. As Barrington Moore points out, by the end of the eighteenth century the British landed elites had reached their zenith. During the nineteenth century they had to defend their power base and to make concessions to some of the other social groups emerging during

³⁶⁰ Huntington, Political Order, 379.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 376.

³⁶² Lipset and Rokkan, Party Systems, 44-45.

the industrialization of the country. However, this process was slow and the economic base of the land owners remained firm. They had the necessary time to adapt to the new economic and social conditions and continued to thrive politically. This in turn allowed the Conservative Party of Britain to remain an important political force into modernity.³⁶³ Their most considerable challenge took place just as in the case of the PCP right after World War I when Britain adopted universal suffrage. Although the expansion of the right to vote was not as dramatic in Britain as it was in Romania, the difficulties faced by the two parties were similar. Neal McCrillis describes how the Conservative Party of Britain adapted to the new era of mass politics. The British Conservatives focused on extending their political organizations to three crucial segments of the electorate. Their youth³⁶⁴ (Junior Imperial League and the Young Britons) and women's organizations (WUO) were the largest in Britain.³⁶⁵ They also made inroads with the proletariat grouped in the Conservative working-class NUA Labour Committee.³⁶⁶ In addition, the party emphasized the importance of propaganda and of educating its members. By the late 1920s, the British Conservative Party had fully adapted to mass politics.

In contrast, the PCP was unsuccessful in appealing to any significant social class or regional group in the age of universal male suffrage. Arguably though, the PCP faced more difficult circumstances than its British counterpart in 1918. First, the Romanian electoral reform was accompanied by a land reform which considerably weakened the economic base of the party. Second, the Romanian electorate was overwhelmingly rural and illiterate which meant that the propaganda resources needed were much more

³⁶³ Moore, Social Origins, 32-33.

³⁶⁴ McCrillis, The British Conservative Party, 83.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

considerable than in urban Britain. Third, the Romanian Conservatives had been splintering their forces repeatedly since 1908 and by the end of 1918 the party faced its most difficult challenge at its weakest point. Fourth, at the end of the war the foreign policy point of view of their main rivals, namely the Liberals, was accepted by the entire country and the Marghiloman government had not made internal allies while in power. Thus, while the British Conservatives could focus on one main obstacle, that of adapting to the new political conditions, the PCP had to deal with the expansion of the franchise, the land reform, its internal weaknesses and its damaged reputation. The avalanche of problems and the limited amount of time that the PCP had at its disposal ensured that the Romanian Conservatives could not duplicate the success of their British counterparts in the post-1918 era.

While in Britain the reforms that modernized the country were more a result of pressure from below, Japan is the country where the ruling elites undertook the social changes needed for industrial advance.³⁶⁷ During the latter stages of the nineteenth century, a regime of low taxes and a traditional close relationship between the landlord and his peasants ensured that Japan avoided major peasant revolts when the country became a regional power.³⁶⁸ While the reforms initiated after 1848 in Romania also came from above, the ruling elites were not able to industrialize the country fast enough in order to provide the rural society with a safety valve for its overpopulation problem and as a result could not avoid serious bloodshed. The relationship between the landlord and the peasant was not friendly and the high demands placed on the peasants by the large tenant trusts led to the revolt of 1907. After 1907, it became clear that a land reform

³⁶⁷ Moore, *Social Origins*, 229.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

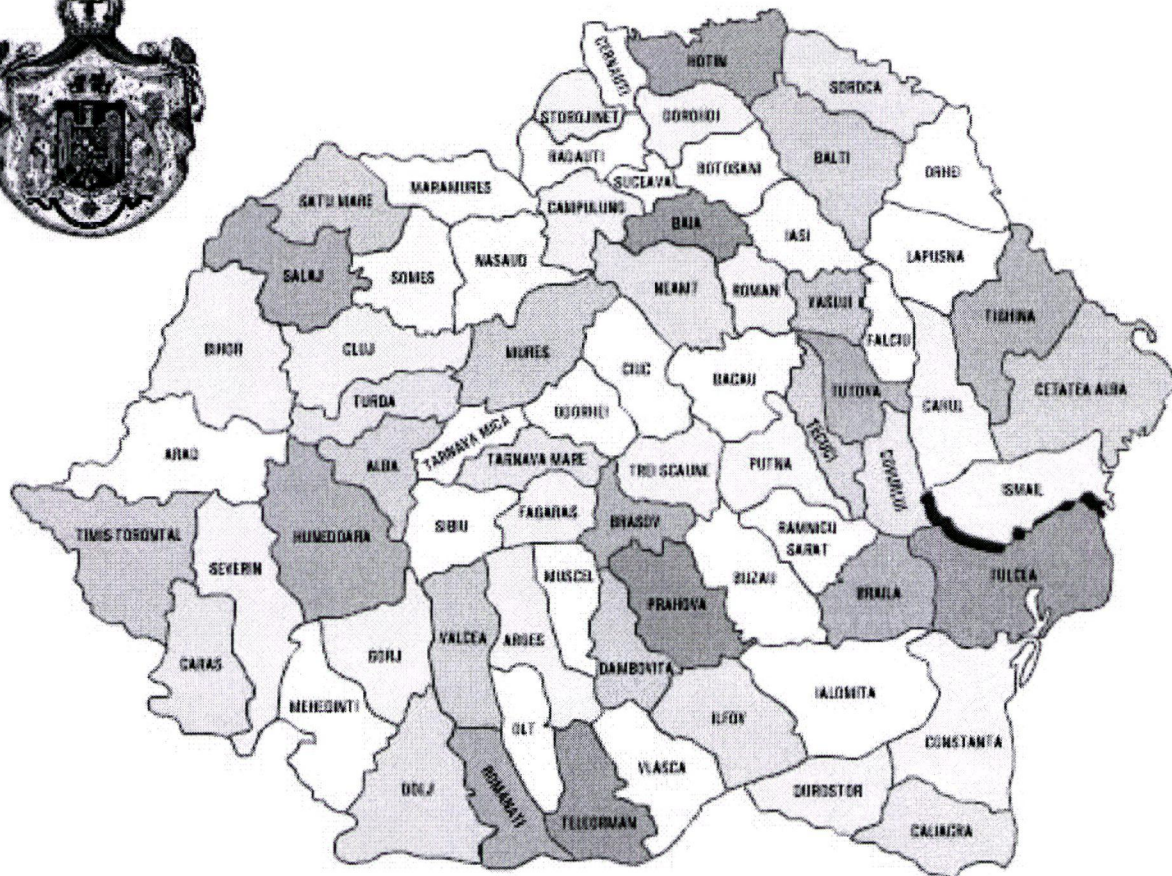
was necessary if Romania was to maintain social order. The process of reform was accelerated by the war but at the same time, the reform was forced upon the elites as a political compromise which did not ensure the economic prosperity of the peasantry but was rather meant to prevent internal strife. Thus, while in Japan the landlords had enough time to move into other branches of the economy such as industry, in Romania politically, the landlords lived and died by their land. Once again, the process of reforms from above failed because time caught up with the reformers who never exhibited long term goals and a pace of reform suitable to achieve those objectives.

The agrarian interests of the Romanian peasantry were represented during most of the inter-war period by the Peasantists. Lipset and Rokkan complete their analysis of agrarian interests by saying that although in Western Europe conservative or Christian parties represent these interests, in countries where the rural population is numerous agrarian parties eventually emerge. Since throughout the inter-war years the village dominated the city numerically, a party representing the peasantry was only natural. The Conservatives simply did not have the time and the auspicious political circumstances to morph from a landlord-dominated entity into a truly agrarian party meant to represent all those employed in the agricultural sector. Their only way out was to join the PP which was a party that needed their skills and that could still hope to exploit the popularity of its leader.

Appendix A – Maps of Romania

The Map of Romania during its various stages from 1881 to the present





Appendix B – Chronology

1859 – The modern Romanian state is formed when the principalities of Moldova and Wallachia unite under prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

1866 – A coalition of Liberals and Conservatives force Cuza to abdicate and replace him with Prince Charles of Prussia.

1878 – Romania gains independence from the Ottoman Empire.

1907 – A peasant revolt sweeps Romania. Eventually both the Liberal and Conservative parties agree on the need to use the army against the rebels.

1908 – The first major split occurs in the Conservative ranks. Take Ionescu leaves and forms the Democratic – Conservative Party (PCD).

1913 – Alexandru Marghiloman becomes the leader of the Conservative Party.

1914 – World War I begins but Romania remains neutral. King Charles dies and is replaced by King Ferdinand. During the war, Ion I.C. Bratianu is the Romanian Prime Minister.

1915 – Nicolae Filipescu, who wanted Romania to immediately join the war on the side of the Entente, leaves the Conservative Party over a disagreement with Marghiloman who wanted Romania to remain neutral.

1916 – After intense negotiations, Romania joins the Entente and attacks Austria – Hungary. By the end of the year about two thirds of its territory is occupied by the Central Powers.

1918 – In March, Romania is forced to sign the Treaty of Bucharest with the Central Powers. King Ferdinand summons Marghiloman to form a new government in Iasi. During the Marghiloman government, Romania unites with Bessarabia and occupies Bukovina. In November, the King forced Marghiloman to resign and after a brief military government Bratianu is returned to power in December.

1919 – Romania defeats the Hungarian Communist regime while negotiating the terms of the peace treaty in Paris. In September, Bratianu resigns and is replaced with a pro-Liberal military government led by General Vaitoianu. In November, the first elections held under universal male suffrage take place. The newly-formed Peasantist Party and the National Party of Transylvania win the elections and form a coalition government led by Alexandru Vaida – Voevod.

1920 – Due in part to the radicalism of some of the Peasantists, King Ferdinand dismisses the Vaida government and calls upon General Averescu to form the new government. Averescu and his People's Party win the subsequent elections organized in May.

1921 – In July, the Averescu government initiates the land reform. In December, Averescu is replaced by Take Ionescu whose government lasts only one month.

1922 – Take Ionescu is replaced by the Liberals who organize and steal the general elections in March.

1925 – On 10 May 1925, Alexandru Marghiloman dies and the remnants of his party join Averescu's PP.

1926 – After striking a deal with the Liberals, Averescu returns to power again and the ex-PCP members play an important role in his government.

Appendix C – Parties and Election Results

List of Abbreviations:

PNL – National Liberal Party

PP – People's Party

PN – National Party

PT – Peasantist Party

PCP – Progressive-Conservative Party

PCD – Democratic – Conservative Party

The number of seats obtained by the main political parties in the first four post-war elections for the Chamber of Deputies

Date	PNL	PP	PN	PT	PCP	PCD
1919	103	10	169	61	13	0
1920	16	206	27	25	0	17
1922	222	13	26	40	0	0
1926	16	292	69 (with PT)	69 (with PN)	N/A	N/A

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