

POLITICAL OPTIONS AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE CASE OF THE ARAD ROMANIAN ELITE AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

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Cuvinte cheie: Austro-Ungaria, comitatul Arad, elite politice, fenomene electorale, strategii politice.*

(Abstract)

Our study aims at capturing some aspects of political behaviour and attitudes of the local elites, in the county of Arad, during the parliamentary elections from 1884, starting from a series of events that profoundly influenced the direction of political action of the Romanian intellectuals in Arad.

The purpose was to approach the internal political context surrounding the 1884 elections, the origins of the two political directions in the county of Arad in this period, the kinship relations of the major political figures, as well as their involvement in the campaign and the elections themselves. We tried to achieve a detailed image of the political opinions, electoral strategies and the particular and group interests that dominated the political class in Arad in the last decades of the 19th century.

The penultimate decade of the nineteenth century brought a number of significant changes in the political life of the Romanians in Hungary. The leaders of the national movement in the Romanian provinces under the authority of Budapest gradually grew aware of the necessity of establishing unity at a decisional level, giving a collective voice to all the Romanians in these territories. Moreover, these leaders struggled to find a common position in regards to the most appropriate attitude that was to be adopted by the Romanian population in the matter of their participation in the political life of Hungary. The disputes between the adherents of activism and those of passivism had already affected the national movement for more than a decade and were gradually causing a pronounced split within it.

Within this framework and during the final decade of the nineteenth century two new political parties of the Romanians in Hungary would be established, each of these adhering to one of the two abovementioned orientations.

In 1881, following the National Conference in Sibiu, the 141 delegates from Transylvania, Banat, and Bihor decided to establish the National Romanian Party (NRP), whose main goal was to organize and coordinate the political life in all the Romanian-inhabited territories in Hungary. Its

members opted to continue the political tactic of passivism, but made an exception for the Romanians in Banat and Bihor who, due to favourable circumstances that enabled success for Romanian candidates in the parliamentary elections, were allowed to pursue an activist orientation¹.

In the same year, during the archdiocesan Synod in Sibiu, the metropolitan Miron Romanul heavily campaigned among the Romanian adherents of activism for the establishment of a Romanian Constitutional Party with moderate views, which would seek to involve itself in the political life of Hungary². If at the time the metropolitan's efforts did not enjoy support, three years later the balance would shift in his favour. With the nearing of the new elections for the diet, a certain segment of the Romanian political class in Transylvania began to see the need for entering "the practical field of a rational activity". Thus, the metropolitan and a group of Romanian representatives from the Budapest Parliament, who had managed to attract

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¹ Hitchins 1999, 124–125.

² Josan 1997, 137; Georgescu 1935, 55.

the support of a number of activist-adhering Romanian intellectuals, founded a journal that aimed to raise awareness regarding the ideas of the Romanian moderate circles. These ideas centred around the central necessity of collaborating with the Hungarian authorities in order to improve the political, social, cultural, and economic situation of the Romanians in Transylvania. The leadership of the *Viitorul* gazette, which was issued three times a week in Budapest, would fall to the governmental representative and great landowner Iosif Gall, who would also ensure its financial support³.

The next step after the founding of this gazette was to draw those around it into establishing a political formation. Following the Budapest conference, which took place in 1884 on March 15th–16th, and which was attended by around 50 Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania, the founding of the Romanian Moderate Party (RMP) – of activist orientation – was decided. This formation aimed to remain within the boundaries drawn by Hungarian constitutionalism, and from this perspective, to militate for the upholding of the Romanian language, the appointment of Romanians in public offices, the establishment of cultural institutes for Romanians, the extension of Hungarian electoral legislation to Transylvania, for confessional equality, as well as for church and educational autonomy. The party's leadership was assumed by an executive committee which included the governmental representatives Iosif Gall, George Szerb, Leontin Simonescu and alongside them C. Diaconovici, D. Borcea, L. Ciato, D. Ionescu⁴.

The most important debate centred on the issue of the party's involvement in the June 1884 elections. Two distinct opinions were advanced: the first aimed for the Romanian Moderate Party's involvement in the elections with its own candidate lists – and was preferred by the activists who had left the NRP – while the second saw as beneficial the inclusion of the RMP's candidates on the lists of the Magyar Liberal Party, which was governing at the time. The second option, strongly supported by Iosif Gall, would finally prevail⁵.

The political divisiveness of the Romanians in Hungary would also mark the elections that took place in the county of Arad in 1884. These would take place almost a decade after the Hungarian authorities had banned the so-called “National

political reunion of all the Romanians in the county of Arad”, the formation which had previously and temporarily coordinated the political activity of the Romanians in this administrative unit. After its prohibition in 1875 and following the Arad gathering of July 23rd 1878, the Romanian voters in the county had opted for passivism, having regarded their adequate political representation in the Budapest Parliament as impossible and their rights as infringed upon⁶. The 1884 elections thus gave the Romanian political class in this county the chance to reconsider their choice of political strategy in the case of the ongoing political campaign, which had begun in the spring.

To this purpose, several meetings of the county committee of the NRP took place in April. Their members decided to keep to the lines drawn by the national programme from Sibiu, and also elected an executive committee whose main purpose was to organize the voters from Arad and to ensure that it would not stray towards other political formations without the central committee's approval⁷. However, although the Arad voters had acquiesced to the national programme, in practice they chose to wait until the second National Conference in Sibiu, which was to take place in June and which would decide on the precise political tactic to be employed in the coming elections.

At this time, various solutions for the forging of an alliance between the Romanian voters in the county and the Hungarian parties were sought. Ioan Popovici-Desseanu, the president of the committee, was heavily involved in these attempts, using his own influence and without involving the committee. He had also led the “National political reunion of all the Romanians in the county of Arad”, had represented Arad at the National Conference in Sibiu in 1881, had served two terms as a Parliament MP of the electoral constituency of Radna – in the parliamentary cycles of 1865–1868 and in 1874 as a result of Alexandru Mocioni's withdrawal⁸ – and had thus amassed considerable political experience. The president of the committee was increasingly drawn by the idea of the Arad voters' re-entry in the political life of Hungary through participation in the parliamentary elections with a programme that did not exclude the collaboration with the Hungarian county-level authorities. Popovici-Desseanu was a fervent supporter of the ideas put forward by the representatives of the Romanian Moderate Party and was

³ Pușcariu 2004, 70.

⁴ *Viitorul*I (1884), no. 30, March 6th/18th; *Viitorul*I (1884), no. 32, March 10th/22th.

⁵ Pușcariu 2004, 74.

⁶ Popeangă 1978, 18–25.

⁷ Eppel 2004, 27.

⁸ Rotaru 1979, 478–480.

closely acquainted with the bishop of Arad, Ioan Meşianu, a member of the high clergy who often emphasized the necessity of cooperation between the Romanians and the Hungarians in the county. In the spring of 1884 the Arad politician endeavoured to begin a series of political negotiations with the local-level Hungarian authorities in order to establish electoral collaboration for the electoral benefit of the Romanian candidates with a national programme⁹. Thus, accompanied by the bishop Meşianu, he took part in a series of secret meetings with Tabajdi Károly, Lord Lieutenant of the Arad County, aiming to reach a compromise between the governing party and the Romanians in the county in the matter of electoral collaboration. By virtue of his position as president of the executive county-level committee, tasked with influencing the attitude of the Romanian voters during the elections, Desseanu hoped to be able to facilitate a Romanian-Hungarian collaboration in the matter of the electoral process¹⁰.

Certainly, both Desseanu and Meşianu on the one hand, and Tabajdi on the other hand, were aware of the difficulty posed by the acceptance of such a collaboration by the executive county committee, which included many Romanians who were averse to governmental politics. For this reason Popovici-Desseanu tried to strengthen his position within the committee so as to be able to impose his own viewpoints. He concentrated his entire authority and the social capital that he had accumulated in the previous years as part of the national Arad political class in order to gain the presidency of the executive committee, and then fervently opposed the election of a vice-president, thus avoiding the potential for rifts occasioned by the opposition of those who did not agree with his views on the collaboration with the governmental spheres. Popovici-Desseanu managed to obtain what he had aimed for in the meeting of the executive committee of April 15th, without however damaging the unity of the national movement and avoiding factionalism in the group of the Romanian voters of Arad. Only a few days previously, on April 10th 1884, he had announced the potential for a collaboration at local level with the governmental party, though emphasizing his allegiance to the national programme from Sibiu¹¹.

To this same purpose, Desseanu delayed the organisation of a new meeting of the Arad voters despite the numerous requests he had received

from the members of the executive committee. This tactic aimed to delay any kind of activity until briefly before the elections, when, due to a lack of clear organisation that would enable the success of Romanian candidates, a crisis measure would be taken, namely the decision to collaborate with the local Hungarian authorities from the governmental party. This would have both ensured that at least some Romanian candidates could have won mandates, and that the main opposing forces in the committee would have been easier to persuade by the necessity of the implementation of this last-minute compromise¹².

The conference of the Romanian voters in Arad, led by Ioan Popovici-Desseanu, only took place on the 10th of May. During this event, the approximately 400 participants reaffirmed their allegiance to the national programme of 1881, decided the formation of an executive committee and that of several subcommittees based on the level of each electoral constituency. Moreover, the participants expressed their opposition to the ideas promoted by the *Viitorul* circle, namely the collaboration with the Hungarian authorities in the aid of the nation's goals¹³.

The meeting of May 10th did not go as the Desseanu-Meşianu-Tabajdi group had planned. Consequently, the president of the executive committee organized a new meeting on May 14th/26th 1884, during which he again tried to attract its members towards cooperation by presenting the offer that had been made by the Lord Lieutenant in regards to a potential electoral collaboration between the Arad county committee of the NRP and the local-level Magyar Liberal Party. The cooperation was thus only valid on a local level, and held no implications for the central leaderships of the two parties. More concretely, the Lord Lieutenant had offered the following: "two-three electoral circles for the Romanian candidates, who were received by him even if they adhered to the Romanian national programme, on the condition that they entered the governmental party"¹⁴. The pact proposed by the Lord Lieutenant was difficult to accept because, although he did not exclude the adherence of the candidates to the national programme, he conditioned their participation in the elections by their entry on the lists of governing party. While this situation could be theoretically justified, it proved impossible at a practical level. The programmes of the two parties con-

⁹ Lupaş 1936, 45–46.

¹⁰ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 48, June 16th/28th.

¹¹ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 48, June 16th/28th.

¹² *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 48, June 16th/28th.

¹³ Eppel 2004, 28.

¹⁴ Glück, Roşuţ 1978, 21.

tained political ideas that could not coexist, even in the perspective of a Romanian governmental representative.

During this same conference, the lawyer Mircea V. Stănescu – a leading figure of the political scene in Arad, a declared opponent of the bishop Mețianu and implicitly of I. Popovici-Desseanu¹⁵ – made a counterproposal. He argued for the election of a commission that would be mandated by the executive committee to negotiate with the leaders of all the local-level organisations of the Hungarian parties, so as to include in the decision-making process the offers of the Hungarian opposition. He emphasized the necessity of maintaining the adherence of the Romanian candidates to the national programme of Sibiu, regardless of how attractive the offers might have seemed. The majority of the county committee declared themselves for M.V. Stănescu's proposal, and thus the mandated commission tasked with handling the negotiations with the Hungarian party included George Venter, David Nicoară and Mircea V. Stănescu¹⁶. It should also be highlighted that, beyond the political strategies and the individual beliefs of the members of the Arad political class in the matter of attaining national goals, an important role in the decision-making process was played by personal disputes and animosities that were ever-present, even in the framework of the national movement.

Only a day later, the county committee met again, and M.V. Stănescu presented the results of the negotiations with which he had been tasked to the 20 members that had gathered. The updated proposal made by the Lord Lieutenant seemed better than that which had been previously made to I. Popovici-Desseanu, in the sense that Tabajdi had accepted that, if the Romanians would not name candidates who adhered to a governmental orientation, then candidates adhering to the national programme could run in the elections. This was regardless of the particular lists on which these individuals would be placed – either their own or those of the opposition parties. He requested however that “the right to candidacy be exerted only by the voters from their respective constituency, without the involvement of the central committee of the Romanian party”, in exchange promising that “he would in no way influence the candidacy, either directly, or indirectly, through its organs”.

Tabajdi's attitude revealed his ardent wish to obtain the collaboration of the Romanians in the county, as, in exchange for the two electoral circles

that would be “ceded” to them, it was required that they “give their votes to the governmental candidates running in all the other circles in the county”¹⁷.

M.V. Stănescu then presented the political offer of the Hungarian opposition parties. These were just as willing to cooperate with the Romanians, seeing as this group made up the majority of the county's population¹⁸, and proposed the mutual support of candidates for the mandate of representative. They did not have the pretence towards a fusion with the Romanian party, thus allowing the candidates to run on their own lists. The collaboration was limited to a common struggle against the government, and implied the division of electoral constituencies between them so that there would be no situations wherein a Romanian would have as a counter-candidate a member of the opposition. Moreover, the Romanians were offered three electoral circles, one more than the two which had been proposed by the Liberal Party. Following this exposition, the county committee decided by vote to “develop the activity with the oppositional programme against the actual regime, and thus to offer moral support to the candidates of the Hungarian opposition, regardless of faction, in those circles where the Romanian National Party would not be able to impose its own candidates”¹⁹.

In the context of the decisions taken in the meeting of May 15th/27th, I. Popovici-Desseanu realized that his entire political plan would potentially be ruined. In order to avoid this situation, he delayed the authentication of the meeting's minutes. While these were to be authenticated at meeting of May 17th/29th, under various pretexts, Desseanu avoided signing them, as the committee's president. By these delays, Desseanu wanted to gain sufficient time to organize a new meeting in which to disavow the conclusions that had been reached on May 17th/25th. On the 27th of May he thus called for the organisation of a new conference of the voters from Arad for the 4th of June, without however previously notifying the members of the committee of his intentions²⁰.

Despite the attempts to keep his purposes secret for as long as possible, the actions of the Arad leader were discovered by the members of the executive committee, who, understanding their president's strategy, rushed to publish the results of the 15th/27th May meeting and to denounce

¹⁵ Lupaș 1936, 46.

¹⁶ Glück, Roșuț 1978, 21–22.

¹⁷ Glück, Roșuț 1978, 23–24.

¹⁸ Rotariu *et alii* 1997, 26–49.

¹⁹ Glück, Roșuț 1978, 24–25.

²⁰ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 49, June 20th/July 2nd.

Desseanu's activity against "the solidarity and the national programme" in the pages of the journals *Tribuna* and *Gazeta Transilvaniei*²¹.

As a result of the prompt reaction of his political adversaries, the conference that was to be held on the 4th of June in the meeting room of the "White Cross" hotel had to be postponed for the next day. During this time, Desseanu, cooperating with the Hungarian authorities, managed to solve the situation. Thus, the conference took place on the 5th of June without the participation of his opponents, the reason advanced for this being that those voters were "turbulent individuals" who would affect the proper unfolding of events. Although this abuse was heavily criticized by the Romanian nationalist press, the decisions made during the meeting could not be prevented²².

Having eliminated the opposition, the conference proceeded in the direction envisaged by I. Popovici-Desseanu. Firstly, the county committee's actions against the political negotiations of its president were denounced, described as mutinous, and as a result, the 11 members who had openly declared themselves as Desseanu's adversaries were excluded from the decision-making process. The president was then also assured by the conference participants of their full trust. Enjoying the support of the Arad voters, Popovici-Desseanu's party thus proposes as a strategy for the coming elections the collaboration with the local governmental circles, relying on the support of the Lord Lieutenant Tabajdi and that of his administrative framework. In this sense, Constantin Gurban, a former representative in the Parliament, archpriest of Buteni and temporary director of the Theological Pedagogic Institute in Arad, had been tasked with leading a representation sent to Tabajdi, which was supposed to offer the cooperation of the Romanians. The Lord Lieutenant's reply was presented by Gurban during the conference on the 5th of June: „We did not doubt that His Illustriousness would receive us well, us the envoys of the Romanian people; his goodwill and the generosity with which he greeted us oblige us however to be thankful to him, not only us, but the entire Romanian people. We went only to propose alliance, for which we asked nothing, but he rushed to express those desires which we had not expressed, that the liberal party would launch its candidates also from the bosom of our people.” The voters embraced the political options of their leaders and chose as candidates the Arad

lawyer Ion Beleş, the son of the vicar general from Oradea – in the constituency of Radna – and Constantin Gurban, in the constituency of Iosăşel.

On the 4th of June however a meeting of the members of the executive committee who had opposed Desseanu had also taken place. As a result of the situation caused by their president's dissidence, they proposed to recreate the committee, and consequently, Nicolae Philimon was elected as temporary president and Demetriu Majdu served as vice-president. However, three members – Ioan Beleş, Terențiu Rațiu and Ștefan Tămășdan – left the committee and joined Desseanu's party, believing the former's action to be illegitimate. During the meeting which took place on the 5th of June, the Romanian candidates with an oppositional programme were also selected: George Popa in the Radna constituency, George Lazăr in the Ineu constituency and Vasile Mangra in the Iosăşel constituency²³. These developments thus announced an electoral campaign that would bring face to face, in two of the electoral constituencies in the county of Arad, opposing Romanian candidates, some adhering to the national oppositional programme, and some to the national governmental programme.

Desseanu's action was not without echo both in the Romanian press and at the level of the leadership of the National Romanian Party's leadership. In a letter dated 8th June 1884, this central leadership required the president of the county organisation to explain himself regarding his political options and most of all, to justify his actions²⁴.

Thus, the Romanian voters in the county had split into two groups, each with a distinct leadership, which began to prepare for the electoral campaigns, and each enjoying the support of either the Hungarian opposition parties, or that of the governing party. It should also be highlighted that both Romanian political organisations opted to collaborate with the Hungarians. Both sides believed that any political engagement in the elections would have been doomed to fail if the Romanians had chosen to stand alone. The collaboration was also highly beneficial for the Hungarians due to the majority held by the Romanian voters in the overall county voter group.

Each of these two groups was supported politically by their respective Hungarian parties to the extent that these were able. Thus, if initially the Hungarian opposition had promised to offer financial backing to the sum of 15 000 Florins for

²¹ *Tribuna* I (1884), no. 37, May 31th/June 12th; *Gazeta Transilvaniei* XLVII (1884), no.93, June 12th/24th.

²² *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 49, June 20th/July 2nd.

²³ Glück, Roșuț 1978, 28–30.

²⁴ Glück, Roșuț 1978, 38–39.

the organisation of the electoral campaign in the three constituencies where Romanian candidates with an oppositional programme would run, as a result of the situation created by Desseanu's dissidence, which divided the Romanian voter group, this sum was reduced to 3000 Florins²⁵.

On the other side, I. Popovici-Desseanu had obtained the support of the county head and that of his entire electoral framework, constituted primarily of clerks employed in the local administration. These had proven their efficiency in the previous elections both at the level of the county of Arad, where in 1881 the governmental representative George Constantini had won the elections²⁶, and in the other electoral constituencies from Banat and Bihor, which had a significant proportion of Romanian voters. The role of this support for the candidates Ioan Beleş and Constantin Gurban would prove to be decisive. Beside the activities of the administrative clerks who often breached the boundaries of legality in their vote-gaining activities for the candidates of the national governmental orientation, a significant role was also played by the county clergy. They managed to direct the votes of the Romanians towards these abovementioned candidates by zealously supporting them²⁷.

The financial backing awarded by the opposition to the Romanian candidates proved to be insufficient compared to the presence and aid of an experienced electoral framework, which was in possession of the right levers of power at the local level. Moreover, the selected candidates did not have a significant political background, with the exception of George Popa, and were not sufficiently known in their electoral constituency²⁸.

During the entire electoral campaign, both Ioan Beleş and Constantin Gurban emphasized their allegiance to the national programme of Sibiu, an aspect which weighed heavily in their attempts to persuade the voters that, by collaborating with the governmental party, they were only establishing a necessary compromise for electoral success, without however disregarding the guidelines put forward by the leaders of the national movement from Sibiu²⁹.

The parliamentary elections took place on the 13th of June 1884. In the two electoral constituencies where Romanian candidates were opposed, the mandates were won by Ion Beleş – who was elected

in Radna, against George Popa – and Constantin Gurban – elected in Iosăşel, against Vasile Mangra. These two would represent the county of Arad in the parliamentary cycle of 1884–1887³⁰.

Finally, we may draw a series of conclusions regarding the causes and the consequences of the political behaviour adopted by the political elites of Arad during the parliamentary elections of 1884.

Firstly, it should be noted that the state of divisiveness that was observable among the Arad political class was characteristic for the entire Transylvanian and Banat area, both as far as the disputes between the activists and passivists and those between the nationals and the moderates were concerned. With the emergence of the moderate *Viitorul* group, these ideological gaps widened. However, it should also be mentioned that the founding of the Moderate Party also occasioned a split within the confines of the governmental party, which was strikingly visible on a local level. If, initially, the adherents of the moderate *Viitorul* group had enjoyed the support of the Prime Minister Tisza Kálmán, his increasingly reserved attitude towards the moderate Romanians made the county-level Hungarian liberal political clubs question the utility of such a party for the government. The Romanian activism, even if of moderate orientation, was regarded with suspicion by many Hungarian political figures. Precisely because of this situation there were cases when Romanian governmental candidates were supported by differing factions from the same Hungarian liberal electoral club, thus leading to instances when two Romanian governmental candidates were opposed in certain electoral constituencies. This type of situation occurred for instance in the case of parliamentary elections in the county of Maramureş, where, in the boundaries of the same electoral constituency, two Romanian candidates with a governmental programme – Sigismund Ciplea and Vasile Jurca – entered the race for a mandate in the Hungarian parliament³¹.

Ioan knight of Puşcariu argues that a similar situation occurred during the elections in the county of Arad. According to Puşcariu, the Lord Lieutenant Tabajdi – who was not well-disposed towards the Romanian Moderate Party (RMP) – would rather offer his support to the governmental candidates who adhered to the national programme as he preferred this impossible-to-implement political hybrid, and thus also avoided

²⁵ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 49, June 20th/July 2nd.

²⁶ Popeangă 1978, 27.

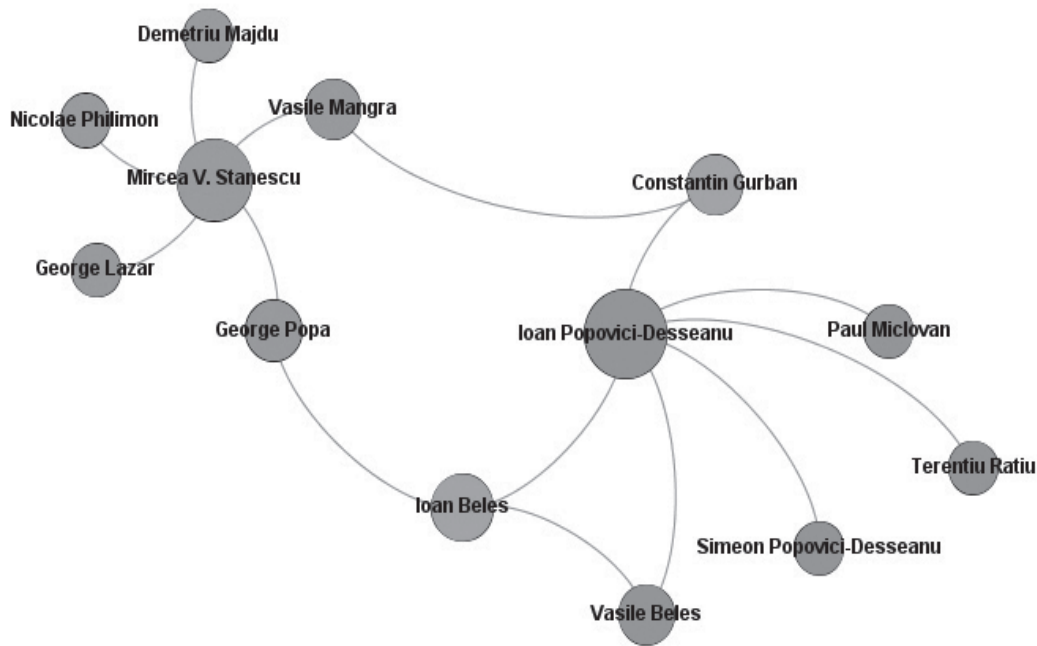
²⁷ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 50, June 23th/July 5th.

²⁸ *Luminatorul* V (1884), no. 50, June 23th/July 5th.

²⁹ *Tribuna* I (1884), no. 63, July 1st/13th.

³⁰ *Tribuna* I (1884), no. 39, June 2nd/14th; *Tribuna* I (1884), no. 40, June 3rd/15th.

³¹ *Viitorul* I (1884), no. 62, May 24th/June 5th.



Graph 1. Network graph depicting political and kinship ties between candidates, NRP and Moderate Party affiliates. Generated with Gephi, Forced Atlas 2 layout.

their adherence to the *Viitorul* group³². Pușcariu’s hypothesis is somewhat supported by the historian Teodor Păcățian, who argued, in a work dedicated to Iosif Gall, that the failure of the moderate party was due to the lack of support from the Hungarian government³³. This possibility is worth mentioning at least for the fact that the works of the two historians were written not many decades after the events discussed in this article took place. Moreover, the political programme of the two representatives elected from the county of Arad was entirely unclear precisely because of what they had declared to the press. While, as we have shown in the preceding lines, both Gurban and Beleş expressed their support for the national programme from Sibiu during their electoral campaigns, the Hungarian press described their orientation as a purely governmental one. In an excerpt from an article published in a Hungarian journal, the Romanian gazette *Luminatorul* quoted a declaration made by Constantin Gurban: „Regarding those newspapers, which consider that the undersigned is not a part of the liberal party, I ask you Mr. editor to notify them that I have run in the elections on the basis of the principles of the liberal party, have been elected on this basis, and will represent the constituency of Radna as a member of this party.”

³² Pușcariu 2004, 76.

³³ Păcățian 2012, 109–110.

However, in order to be able to offer a clearer perspective on the political options of the two representatives it suffices to analyse their activity in the Budapest Parliament. Even in this respect we may identify differences in the attitudes taken by the two representatives regarding different issues. While Ioan Beleş limited himself to attending the works of the Parliament without speaking out in any situation that might have reflected his adhesion to the national programme, Constantin Gurban had an intervention in a parliamentary session when the budget of the ministry of cults and public instruction was debated, an intervention that caused profound reactions on the side of the Hungarian politicians. Gurban requested – albeit on a moderate tone – a series of cultural and educational rights for the Romanians in Hungary³⁴. Likewise, the political evolution of the two representatives would prove to be highly divergent: while Ioan Beleş was repeatedly elected and continued to act as a governmental representative until the parliamentary cycle ending in 1901, Constantin Gurban would not win a second mandate, preferring instead to return to the bosom of the national movement and to continue his activity on a local level.

Beyond the divisions caused by the differing political orientations present at the time, a significant factor that led to this breach within the Arad political life was constituted by personal

³⁴ Păcățian 1913, 248–252.

and group interests, grafted on existing kinship relations (Graph 1). The fact that the Romanian national press heavily emphasized these aspects – as opposed to the moderate press – makes it necessary to focus especially on the situation in the circle of I. Popovici-Desseanu, but we do not consider the situation to have been entirely different in the oppositional camp.

From the 20 members of the newly elected executive committee at the conference of June 5th 1884, the majority were clergymen (11), followed by a lower number of lawyers and notaries (8) and one teacher. The majority of these were related to I. Popovici-Desseanu: Simeon P. Desseanu (the president's brother, substitute notary in Otlaca), Terențiu Rațiu (the president's brother-in-law, a lawyer), Paul Milovan (the president's brother-in-law, a notary). Vasile Beleş (the representative's brother, who would become an archpriest) was included in the committee also on the basis of kinship relations. On the other side, a significant segment of the executive committee was made of lawyers – nine of the 18 members, including the two leaders, Nicolae Philimon and Mircea V. Stănescu. The list was completed by the addition of three clergymen, two professors, one physician and one bank clerk³⁵.

Even a brief analysis of these pieces of information offers a glimpse into the political confrontations between the two levels of the Romanian social elite at the end of the nineteenth century: the members of the clergy and the laymen. This confrontation was also rooted in a struggle for social ascendancy, the safeguarding of group and kinship interests, beyond the purely political debate. The nationalist press highlighted and criticized the particular interests of the main leaders of the dissidence who aimed to gain offices meant to enable their social climbing: the appointment of I.P. Desseanu's brother as notary; Ioan Beleş's intention of occupying the position of judge after the completion of his mandate and his attempt to facilitate his father's ascension in the church hierarchy; Gurban's appointment as full director of the Theological-Pedagogic institute of Arad and his continued occupation of the position of archpriest of Buteni and editor of the diocesan paper. However, these issues should be approached in a more nuanced manner: while in the case of the appointment of Desseanu's brother as notary the situation was somewhat clear, in the case of Ioan Beleş things were less so – during his political

activity, he would not fulfil any of the “predictions” made by the nationalist press. As far as Constantin Gurban was concerned, the press would seemingly forget his behaviour during the 1884 elections and, with his return to the bosom of the national movement, would begin to praise his activity in the same offices that had drawn its criticism in 1884³⁶.

Thus, the political events that took place in the county of Arad during the first half of 1884 are edifying and to a great extent also apply for the entire national movement in Transylvania at the end of the nineteenth century. Common features included the causes that dictated individual and group behaviours of the Romanian elites, their divergent adherences to various political orientations, and the strategic re-positioning that often took place. Cases of pragmatic political compromise between certain members of the Romanian political class and the Hungarian parties were a constant hallmark of the period between 1881 and 1918, if one takes into account the fact that Romanian representatives with a governmental orientation were constantly elected to the Budapest Parliament during this time. The Romanian political life in late nineteenth century Hungary should also be regarded from this perspective if one aims to write a more objective and veridical historical account.

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