

The Anti-System Candidates at the 1996 Presidential Election in Romania

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Abstract. The 1996 Romanian presidential elections represented the end of the transition to democracy in post-revolutionary Romania, because for the first time, the elections were won by an opposition candidate. The 1996 elections were the third ones, after the Revolution of 1989. During the six years the parties perfected a range of communication techniques so that besides print, television began to play an increasingly role thanks to the appearance of private stations, voters could compare and an incipient form of political culture was materializing. Also, the political spectrum was much more diversified than 1990 or 1992. Therefore, in 1996 the attention is drawn by those candidates who stand out, like Adrian Păunescu, Gheorghe Funar and C.V. Tudor. The three are representing parties which supported the government formed in 1992, but later adopted a political platform which aimed to mobilize those dissatisfied with the living standards, ethnic issues and the lack of authority. Despite declaring their attachment for principles like democracy or the rule of law, a few program elements, speeches and public appearances reveals a different image regarding their political vision.

Keywords: Presidential election, anti-system, populism, nationalism, communism nostalgia

Rezumat. Candidații anti-sistem la alegerile prezidențiale din 1996. Alegerile din 1996 au marcat sfârșitul tranziției în România post-revoluționară, deoarece, pentru prima dată, alegerile au fost câștigate de un candidat al opoziției. Acestea au fost cea de-a treia rundă a alegerilor generale după Revoluția din 1989. De-a lungul celor șase ani, partidele au perfectat o gamă largă de mijloace de comunicare, astfel că pe lângă presa tipărită, televiziunile, în special cele private, au început să joace un rol important. Astfel, votanții puteau compara ofertele politice, iar o formă incipientă de cultură politică începea să se formeze. De asemenea, spectrul politic a fost mult mai diversificat decât în 1990 și 1992. De aceea, în 1996 atrag atenția acei candidați care se evidențiază în raport cu discursurile celorlalți, precum Adrian Păunescu, Gheorghe Funar și C.V. Tudor. Cei trei sunt reprezentanții unor partide care au susținut guvernul format în 1992, dar care au adoptat o platformă politică contestatară, menită să mobilizeze acele categorii ale populației nemulțumite de nivelul de trai, problemele etnice, vidul de autoritate. În ciuda declarării atașamentului pentru principiile democrației și ale statului de drept, elemente ale programului, discursuri și apariții în spațiul public relevă o imagine diferită referitoare la viziunea lor politică.

Cuvinte-cheie. Alegeri prezidențiale, anti-sistem, populism, naționalism, nostalgie pentru comunism

Introduction

The 1996 general election has been one of the most important political moments after the fall of Communism, because until then Romania has been ruled by the same political family, meaning Ion Iliescu and the Party of Social Democracy in Romania¹ (PDSR). The main novelty recorded on the Romanian political scene in the 1992-1996 electoral cycle was the constitution of party coalitions. Even though the struggle for power continued to take place between the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) and PDSR, political groups such as the Great Romania Party (PRM) or the Social Democratic Union (USD) started to show up in polls. Virgil Nemoianu notes that the Romanian political spectrum can be delimited in four orientations: a populist one - that is, parties promoting an authoritarian doctrine, whether it is the extreme right or left, and distrustful of change and the West: The Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), The Socialist Labor Party (PSM) and PRM; a Christian Democrat one: represented almost exclusively by the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD), but whose ideology was unclear, relying more on the ideas of political leaders who began their career in the interwar period; a liberal one - with the greatest tradition in the history of Romania but disputed by many parties, so unlike the PNȚCD, they lack institutional organization, while promoting clear programs; a social-democratic one: disputed since 1992 by two parties, and in 1996 by PDSR and USD².

Unlike the 1990 elections when only three presidential candidates competed and 1996 when six politicians registered their candidacy, in 1996 no less than 16 candidates joined the electoral race. They were Ion Iliescu from PDSR, Emil Constantinescu from CDR, Petre Roman from USD, C.V. Tudor from PRM, Gyorgy Frunda from the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, Tudor Mohora from the Socialist Party (PS), Gheorghe Funar from PUNR, Adrian Păunescu from PSM, Nicolae Manolescu from the National Liberal Alliance (ANL), Ioan Pop de Popa from the Center National Union, Radu Câmpeanu from the National Liberal Alliance, Constantin Niculescu

¹It appeared after a scission in the National Salvation Front which took place in 1992. The politicians loyal to Ion Iliescu created the Democratic National Salvation Front, which afterwards became the Party of Social Democracy in Romania.

² Virgil Nemoianu, „O narațiune explicativă” în *Sfera politicii*, Anul V, nr. 44/1996, p. 18.

from the Romania's Motorists Party, George Muntean from the Party of Pensioners in Roman, and also three independent candidates: Gheorghe Mudava, Nuțu Anghelina and Nicolae Militaru³.

The result confirmed the forecasts of the opinion polls, meaning the fight was mainly one between Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu, the latter winning it. This moment marked the first exchange between power and opposition after 1990 and, at the same time, the end of the political transition after the fall of Communism. Still, it also revealed that there is a public which is attracted by candidates with a different kind of speech than the Romanians were used to. Some candidates have been delineated according to the issues addressed in the electoral campaign, as well as by the doctrinal identity adopted by the political parties that supported them. Antoine Roger, referring to the parties that participated in the 1996 elections, has distinguished three political formations that adopted an anti-system platform: PSM, PUNR and PRM. Their candidates for the presidential elections, Adrian Păunescu, Gheorghe Funar and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, were characterized by populism, nationalism and nostalgia for the Communist regime.

In this paper we will look at how each of the three candidates presented themselves to people and to what extent the anti-system discourse was part of their strategy.

Adrian Păunescu

Adrian Păunescu was the PSM's candidate for the presidential election. This party was born after a merge between the Romanian Socialist Party – formed by former communists and the Democratic Party of Labor. After winning a few seats in the Romanian Parliament after the 1992 elections, IlieVerdeț – former prime-minister before 1989 – was reconfirmed as its president, while Adrian Păunescu was elected as first vicepresident. PSM's first scission happened when Tudor Mohora and Traian Dudaș created The Socialist Party. Public attention to PSM increased in intensity after the 1996 local elections, when it ranked forth⁴. From an identity point of view, the party identified itself with the Freiburg School, arguing that the Marxist model continues to provide pertinent answers to the problems of Romanians. The party's program criticizes international creditors, but also their supporters in Romania. The PSM advocated for the maintenance of collectivism among the

³ Marius Mureșan, „Politică și presă: reflectarea campaniei electorale din 1996 în ziarul «Evenimentul Zilei»” in *Revista PHILOHISTORISS*, An II, Nr. 4, decembrie 2016, p. 81.

⁴Bogdan Teodorescu, „Campaniile electorale din România. Prezentare cronologică” in Bogdan Teodorescu, Dorina Guțu, Radu Enache, *Cea mai bună dintre lumile posibile. Marketingul politic în România – 1990-2005*, Ed. Comunicare.ro, București, 2005, p. 224.

state structures and called for the necessity of a strengthened control over food production and distribution, seen as the only way to ensure the food security of the country⁵.

The candidate was born in 1943 in the present Moldavia and attended the courses of the Faculty of Philology at Bucharest University, after which he started a career in the written press. During the Communist period he held the post of Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the "România Literară" magazine and Editor-in-Chief of "Flacăra"⁶. He became popular between 1973 and 1985 when he coordinated the "Flacăra" Cenacle which organized thousands of performances all over the country. This movement revealed his appetite for the exaltation of nationalism through the intermingling of the patriotic texts with shows of lights and sounds. Moreover, in the spirit of this orientation, meetings took place near some historical places to amplify their effect⁷.

The post-communist political career began in 1992 when he was elected as senator in Dolj County⁸. Even though he officially launched its candidature on the 6th of September 1996, during his first public appearance Păunescu motivated that he is running because those who ruled Romania "have robbed the national wealth" and "they have demolished industry, culture places, prices, gratuities"⁹. Its program aims at implementing an economic socialism, thus presenting itself as the promoter of the third path, besides liberalism and social-democracy. This vision presupposes centralism and etatism regarding the state property, because it must be strengthened and defended by law if it has to coexist with the particular one. Adrian Păunescu tried to individualize himself from other candidates who claimed a left-wing economic policy by criticizing their actions so far: Petre Roman was presented as "the architect of the national disaster" due to his government, while Ion Iliescu was attacked for supporting the 1996 Romanian-Hungarian Treaty, accusing him of "selling the country"¹⁰. At the beginning, his foreign policy vision was a pro-Euro-Atlantic and pro-democracy one, but he also favored privileged relations with the "Great China"¹¹, an important economic partner of Romania before 1989. Still, a short time after being named as the party's candidate, Păunescu

⁵ Antoine Roger, „Les partis anti-système dans la Roumanie post-communiste” în *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, vol. 31, 2000, n°2, p. 110.

⁶ „3 în 1990 – 6 în 1992 – 16 în 1996” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr.1989, 4 octombrie 1996, p. 3.

⁷ Michael Shafir, „Antisemitic Candidates in Romania's 1996 Presidential Elections” in *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1996, p. 97.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Floriana Jucan, „Adrian Păunescu: Guvernările de după 1989 au întors România în Evul Mediu” in *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1275, 2 septembrie 1996, p. 3.

¹⁰ Rodica Ciobanu, „Adrian Păunescu și-a început campania atacându-l pe Ion Iliescu” in *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1961, 2 septembrie 1996, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

attacked Richard Holbrooke, the United States Undersecretary of State, accusing him of accepting the Hungarian revisionism, after the American official called for the ethnic tensions generated by the Treaty of Trianon to be forgotten. More so, the candidate accused the United States of wanting to take Transylvania from Romania, while Holbrook was named „an anti-Romanian extremist”¹². Some speeches like the one cited above reveal the main themes that were going to be addressed during the campaign and also an inconsistency of ideas: Păunescu used an anti-system discourse, criticizing those who were in power until 1996, even though PSM and PDSR – the ruling party – signed a protocol to support the Văcăroiu Government; the candidate also had an adversely attitude towards the Romanian-Hungarian relations, talking from the beginning about the danger of chauvinism and his intention to fight against it.

The candidate’s political program, which was presented during the Socialist Labor Party’s National Council Plenary on 31st of August 1996, started by criticizing those who had the power in Romania after 1989. Regarding their activity, Păunescu used verbs like “to spoil [the country]”, “to demolish”, “to lose”, by doing so trying to reveal the FSN-FDSN-PDSR Governments’ incapacity to deal with the country’s most important issues. The slogans that the PSM campaign had at their disposal were: “Sun for all”, “By ourselves, for ourselves, for the good of the world and of man”, “It’s up to us”, “Freedom, dignity and balance”, “Let’s do justice so it can depend on us”, “Equal rights, equal obligations”, “Live, live, live, Moldavia, Transylvania and the Romanian Country”. Păunescu set himself in a permanent antithesis with Ion Iliescu, whom he called “a Revamped Menshevik” and whose program was described as a “social-democratic-liberal bluff”. The PSM candidate speech was presented as an imaginary dialogue with the Romanian people, which he calls “Your Majesty” and in whose service he was put through the presidential candidacy. The program itself consisted of a series of proclamations, such as equal rights for all citizens, respect for democracy, republic and the constitution, the necessity of creating the basis of Great Romania. Păunescu assumed commitments like attachment to the Church, a strong army inside NATO and “banning poverty and misery”. Closing the speech, he critiqued the so called foreign interventions whose purpose is that Romania to be ruled by the right wing parties¹³.

During a meeting with his supporters, which took place at the Nottara Theatre in Bucharest while in Timișoara the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty was signed by president Iliescu, patriotic songs were played. In this context, Adrian

¹² Michael Shafir, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

¹³ „Adrian Păunescu: Program pentru bătălia prezidențială prezentat la Plenara Consiliului Național al Partidului Socialist al Muncii din 31 august 1996” in *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1277, 4 septembrie 1996, p. 8.

Păunescu referred to the Nicolae Ceausescu regime and this became a leitmotif of the electoral campaign. While criticizing the mistakes made by the communist regime, without naming them, the PSM candidate evoked Ceausescu's struggle to defend Romania's national sovereignty¹⁴. Thus, the PCR leader was compared to Ion Iliescu, who became a target because, according to Păunescu, wasn't capable to continue what the Communist leader started¹⁵. Due to these remarks, Michael Shafir called Păunescu an artisan of attempting to empower "the national communism". The argument has a real basis, because, in an interview, Păunescu argued that the communist ideal is not a dead idea¹⁶. Moreover, during his political career, he was noted, through controversial actions, like the request for a presidential amnesty for former PCR members imprisoned after 1989 and the rehabilitation attempt of Marshal Ion Antonescu, accused, among other things, of the measures taken against the Jews, and the Roma population between 1940 and 1944¹⁷.

His electoral campaign also included visits through the country, which were not free of incidents. For example, after visiting the "Gerom" and "Laminorul" factories from Buzău, Adrian Păunescu was stopped by the PDSR supporters to visit the «Fermit» and «Elars» factories from Râmnicu-Sărat. Păunescu responded by refusing to meet Aurel Gubandru, the Prefect of Buzău County¹⁸. Another electoral action retained by the 1996 press was a rally held in Oradea, attended by approximately 15,000 people. The event followed the model of the "Flacăra" Cenacle from the communist period, being re-titled as "Numai iubirea" Cenacle. Among the people's chants were "Păunescu, Peace, without you what would we do?", "Păunescu we love you, as President we want you"¹⁹.

At the end of the campaign, Păunescu looked like a resigned candidate knowing that his chances of winning were very low. He identified those responsible for the probable failure: false opinion polls, which revealed that the skills are not important in the campaign, but "the assets, the showcases, and the ability of each candidate to be on the national post or on other television stations"²⁰.

¹⁴Floriana Jucan, „Adrian Păunescu a evocat lupta lui Nicolae Ceaușescu pentru suveranitatea României” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1288, 17 septembrie 1996, p. 5.

¹⁵„Adrian Păunescu apreciază că Ion Iliescu nu-l va ajunge nici în 200 de ani pe Ceaușescu” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1307, 9 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

¹⁶ Michael Shafir, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁷*Ibidem*, p. 99.

¹⁸Floriana Jucan, „Adrian Păunescu a fost împiedicat să viziteze câteva fabrici din Râmnicu-Sărat” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1308, 10 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

¹⁹Eadem, „15.000 de oameni au strigăttimp de 30 de minute la Oradea <<Păunescu te iubim, Președinte te dorim!>>” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1314, 17 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

²⁰„Adrian Păunescu a declarat că jocurile pentru Cotroceni sunt făcute” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr.1319, 23 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

Gheorghe Funar

The PUNR mayor of Cluj-Napoca has participated for the second time in the presidential elections, after the 1992 experience. During 1992-1996, his party supported the PDSR Government, ruled by Nicolae Văcăroiu. During his mayoral mandate of the Transylvanian city he made controversial decisions like the prohibition of Hungarian inscriptions or the engraving of a quote belonging to the historian Nicolae Iorga on the statue of Matthew Corvinus, which spoke about the victory of Stephen the Great against the born in Cluj Hungarian king²¹. Gheorghe Funar compromised himself by supporting the Caritas Business²² which started in Cluj. The head of the program, Ion Stoica, offered money to the city hall for funding monuments dedicated to the national heroes. In this respect, Funar presented Caritas as a way “to help the Romanians in Transylvania becoming richer than the Hungarians”²³. The mayor even offered Stoica a place to work in the City Hall building, which helped to increase the credibility of this business²⁴. By a Government decision, Caritas was over, so Funar considered that PDSR should be held accountable for its failure and the bankruptcy of several thousand Romanians who invested their money. He further accused members of the party, some government officials or employees of the presidential cabinet for “having raised bags full of money from Stoica”²⁵.

The program presented to the voters can be summed up in a few main ideas: bringing the truth about December 1989 to the knowledge of the nation, the abolition of the illegally constituted Hungarian state structures, the abandonment of the wrong austerity budgets policy, the change of the customs system policy, increasing the salaries of the public employees, recovering the treasury deposited in Russia in 1917. By developing these ideas,

²¹ Antoine Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

²² Caritas was a pyramidal game, started in Cluj-Napoca in 1992 and promoted intensively by the press. By 1993, by promising to multiply eight times the amount invested, about a million people were convinced to do so. Given that the limits of the business were observed until 1994, an amendment to the Penal Code was discussed in Parliament such games were prohibited. On May 19, 1994, the Caritas closure was announced publicly. Cristian Delcea, Mihai Voinea, „25 DE ANI DE CAPITALISM. Falimentul Caritas. Schema care a arătat gradul de prostie și de hoție al românilor” in *Adevărul*, 7 aprilie 2015. Available at adev.ro/nmg164, accessed on April 20, 2017.

²³*Ibidem*, p. 113.

²⁴ Katherine Verdery, „«Caritas»: And the Reconceptualization of Money in Romania” în *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Feb., 1995), p. 2.

²⁵ Victor Bratu, „Potrivit lui Gheorghe Funar, Ioan Stoica va face dezvăluiri despre «Mini-Caritas» circuit destinat doar privilegiaților” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1303, 4 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

the candidate's program reveals an authoritarian view of the presidential powers, because he intends to participate in all Government sessions where topics such as the economy, foreign policy, country defense, public order, etc. were to be discussed. Regarding the promotion of presidential officials and advisers, the selection criteria set out do not cover skills, but "perfect morality", "vision in cultivating the country's interests", "holy love for nation and country". An important part of the program was devoted to the dangers to national identity, which are due to the involvement of the Hungarian state in Romania's internal policy. In this respect, it mentions the punishment of those who were involved in actions directed against the united national state, as well as those who supported ideas such as autonomy and ethnic separatism. UDMR is directly named as being involved in these approaches. Gheorghe Funar's program, as in 1992, makes a distinction between Hungarian politicians and "Romanians of Hungarian ethnicity", so the second category is the subject of an attempt to identify solutions to the discontent over the rights granted by the Romanian state. UDMR is directly named as being involved in these approaches. Gheorghe Funar's program, as in 1992, makes a distinction between Hungarian politicians and "Romanians of Hungarian ethnicity", so the second category is the subject of an attempt to identify solutions to the discontent over the rights granted by the Romanian state. From an economic point of view, the PUNR candidate's vision is a state-centered one, which must be subjected to a process of "strengthening its role as a guardian and controller of the use of the country's wealth, national heritage, national currency and Romanian finances"²⁶.

Despite the fact that the start of the campaign was at the end of August, Gheorghe Funar launched its program 20 days later, thus close to the date of the elections. That is why it is important to follow what has characterized the promotion of the PUNR candidate up to that moment. The first example we want to present happened in early September when Funar outlined the main directions of his vision for the Presidency: he proposed to use the president's attributions, such as the initiation of a referendum whenever a decision needs to be made, talked about rebuilding the national economy by exploiting crude oil, natural gas and developing the mining industry²⁷. The referendum is one of the most important prerogatives of the head of state, but it is used usually in case on delicate problems. The fact that

²⁶ „Gheorghe Funar s-a angajat să oprească procesul început în decembrie 1989, pe care l-a denumit «Prăbușirea prin noi înșine»” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1293, 23 septembrie 1996, p. 2.

²⁷Silviu Achim, „Gheorghe Funar promite: 100 de idei pentru 4 ani de președinție” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1961, 2 septembrie 1996, p. 4.

Funar plans to use this medium as a tool of propaganda reveals the weaknesses of his political platform, as well as a well to decline responsibility in certain cases and also populism. Beyond the anti-Hungarian messages he noted, in this speech Funar which form of nationalism is going to promote: supporting the "Vatra Românească" organization and others as such which are defending the national interests, building statues to embody personalities from Romanian history and culture such as Mihai Eminescu, Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave, Avram Iancu, Al. I. Cuza, Ion Antonescu²⁸. The PUNR candidate has made very few references to the economic decline Romania has experienced since 1989 and his program contains only a point about "stopping the process that has taken place since December 1989, which can be synthesized as follows: the collapse by ourselves, but legally" along with "giving up the wrong policy of austerity budgets"²⁹.

The first part of the campaign was marked by the actions and positions taken by the PUNR candidate regarding the signing of the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty. By press releases he warned about the danger this treaty presents to the unitary national state, the sovereignty and territorial independence of Romania³⁰. Moreover Funar organized a funeral march in Cluj-Napoca³¹, which CDR compared with the Ku-Klux-Klan shares in the United States. The reason is the use of Christian symbols and the parody of the funeral ceremony, which is a sacrilege and an offense against the Church³², as they said. A similar reaction came from the Prefecture of Cluj and the Romanian Government, which took into consideration the possibility of the dismissal of Funar as mayor. The main reason was that the images of the symbolic burial were taken over by international media Euronews, who resumed every half an hour "the images of the coin and the coffin that crossed

²⁸*Ibidem*.

²⁹ Victor Bratu, „Gheorghe Funar: Prăbușire prin noi înșine, dar în mod legal” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1275, 2 septembrie 1996, p. 3.

³⁰Dumitru Tinu, „Ungharia - NATO, România - feliicitări” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1973, 16 septembrie 1996, p. 1.

³¹ The rally began at 10.30 a.m. along the Statue of Memorandists - the Avram Iancu Square - Turzii Street - the Central Cemetery itinerary. In front of the funeral convoy against the signing of the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty, there was a mortuary car, accompanied by the city hall employees, who had on their back the names of Gyula Horn, Ion Iliescu, Nicolae Văcăroiu and Teodor Meleşcanu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Funar said that this march represented the funeral of the Romanians' tranquility in Transylvania. In a statement made by the PUNR leader, he said the treaty "is nothing but the loss of Transylvania". „Gheorghe Funar a organizat un marș funebru în centrul Clujului” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1974, 17 septembrie 1996, p. 2; Bogdan Eduard, Sandu Mureșan, „Gheorghe Funar a înmormântat, în cimitirul central din Cluj, Tratatul româno-maghiar” în *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul V, nr. 1287, 16 septembrie 1996, p. 3.

³²Cristian Mihai Chiș, „Gh. Funar - acuzat de practici tip KU KLUX KLAN” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1975, 18 septembrie 1996, p. 2.

Cluj”³³. The Prosecutor’s Office attached to Cluj County Court opened an investigation about Funar’s participation in the events that happened on the day of signing the treaty with Hungary. The candidate attacked Ion Iliescu by saying that his regime „has come to investigate those who go to a funeral”, while the Prosecutor tries to eliminate him from the presidential race³⁴.

After launching the electoral program and the conclusion of the discussions on the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty, Funar focused on other ways of retaining public opinion. Starting from the ideas announced in the political platform regarding the involvement of UDMR in the process of Magyarization of the Romanian population in the counties of Transylvania, the candidate launched an appeal to the political parties for collaboration in order to appoint candidates in the Harghita and Covasna counties who can obtain seats in the Romanian Parliament. The message also addressed the Romanian population in these counties, who were asked to vote for the unique candidate that the “Romanian political forces”³⁵ would designate.

Another favorite subject of Funar was the threat of Iliescu's imprisonment if elected president. During the Moldovan electoral tour in early October, the candidate invoked a 55-day countdown, after which he promised Iliescu would get the “mandate he deserves - the arrest”³⁶. The theme was resumed in the last days of the campaign, when both Iliescu and Petre Roman were threatened to “finish their days in Cluj County, collecting potatoes” because they will be imprisoned at the Gherla Penitentiary³⁷. These kinds of statements reveal the lack of interest in the democratic principles of the separation of powers in the state. Also, it exposes an authoritarian vision in which the head of state has both executive and judicial powers, and he can decide, from the position he holds, who and why should be sent behind bars.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor

The third candidate we present is Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the president of PRM. The PRM was born on June 20, 1991, as a result of an initiative

³³Bogdan Eduard, Sandu Mureșan, „Juriștii Prefecturii Cluj și Guvernul României studiază posibilitatea demiterii din funcția de primar a lui Gheorghe Funar” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1289, 18 septembrie 1996, p. 4.

³⁴Victor Bratu, „Gheorghe Funar protestează: «A ajuns regimul Iliescu să-i cerceteze pe cei care merg la o înmormântare?»” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1299, 30 septembrie 1996, p. 4.

³⁵„Funar propune o coaliție antimaghiară în Harghita și Covasna” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr.1981, 25 septembrie 1996, p. 2.

³⁶Bogdan Eduard, Sandu Mureșan, „Funar a declarat că Ion Iliescu și Petre Roman sunt niște asasini care își vor petrece restul vieții la Gherla, în haine vărgate” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1326, 31 octombrie 1996, p. 5.

³⁷Antoine Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

initiated by the editors of the "România Mare" magazine, which became the means for the dissemination of the platform. Initial management structures included Corneliu Vadim Tudor as president and Eugen Barbu as honorary president³⁸. In the first years of its activity, the PRM remarked through the harsh criticism of any foreign entity in the country: it described the reform attempts since 1989 as "criminals" ones that brought Romania under the control of foreign banks, while the economy was "colonized" by Western powers. According to the representatives of this party, the purpose of the "occult forces" supported and controlled from abroad was to dismantle the Romanian state. In the same vein, the IMF has been called a "mafia organization"³⁹. A characteristic of PRM was its attitude towards communism, because the party dissociated the ideology from the person of Nicolae Ceausescu, considering that the communism was brought to Romania by "Jews, Hungarians, Russians and Gypsies"⁴⁰. This nostalgia for the pre-1989 leader will also be found in the presidential candidate's campaign.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor was born in Bucharest in 1949 and he graduated in sociology from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest. In the Communist period he professed as a journalist, but he was especially noted through the poems dedicated to the leaders of the country, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, being perceived as a "bureaucrat poet". After 1989 he held the trust that published the weekly "România Mare" and "Politica". He joined the political life by founding the PRM in 1991⁴¹. Following the 1992 elections, he was elected as a senator of Bucharest, and his party supported the Văcăroiu government.

Similar to Gheorghe Funar, Tudor launched its program two weeks after the start of the campaign, but unlike his opponent, he joined the electoral race only on September 16th, having the support of 130,000 people. The date and time were concise with the signing of the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty in Timisoara, but the PRM candidate claimed it was a coincidence⁴². On September 18th, Corneliu Vadim Tudor presented the electoral program for the presidential elections at the Romanian Opera House in Bucharest. The event was organized under the slogan "A Christian President for the 21st Century Romania". Among the speakers were Mitzura Arghezi - the head of the presidential campaign and the spokesperson for the candidate, Titus Raveica - a philosophy professor and senator on the FSN lists between 1990 and 1992,

³⁸Bogdan Teodorescu et.al., *op.cit.*, p. 222.

³⁹ Antoine Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

⁴⁰*Ibidem*.

⁴¹ „3 în 1990...”, p. 3.

⁴²Corina Drăgotescu, „C. V. Tudor a venit la BEC pe jos și a plecat cu Mercedesul” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr. 1974, 17 septembrie 1996, p. 2.

Leonida Lari – a poet and militant for uniting Bessarabia and Romania, Martin Maled – an American preacher. The latter's speech sparked public applause, claiming that “the PRM Senator is not against Americans, Hungarians, Jews, but against the American, Hungarian or Jewish scams”. Tudor began his speech by highlighting the amount of factors that would influence the outcome of the election, comparing the situation with that of the Phanariot regime: “opinion polls, electoral agents, foreign multipliers who have certain tasks, some TV stations”⁴³. However, Tudor has evoked the intention to present a moderate speech, and he motivates the lack of an “electoral offer” by the fact that the tragedy of a country cannot be reduced to political-economic terms⁴⁴.

As for the program, it was presented as the 60-point "lightning strategy" of the PRM and the candidate C.V. Tudor. In summary, the platform declares the candidate's attachment to the rule of law, democracy, separation of powers. One of its goals was to make Romania a great power in areas such as economy, science, culture, tourism, sports, by appealing to the “unmistakable genius of the Romanian people”. Tudor has already committed himself to taking the necessary steps for the unification of Romania and Moldavia, while in the economic field he has proposed a revitalization of the industry, the abolition of the underground economy, investment, energy independence and monetary stability. On the list of the 60 necessary measures, was the establishment of the Propaganda Ministry, without giving further details. Also, among the ideas were the references to the tensions between the Romanians and the Hungarians. Thus, on the assumption that “tens of thousands of Romanians were expelled by the fanatical elements of the Hungarians”, it is hoped to restore the state authority in the counties of Harghita and Covasna. In addition to this measure, UDMR would be outlawed on the grounds that it is an “anti-Romanian organization”⁴⁵.

Despite the promises of a moderate campaign, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, following the editorial lines of the "Romania Mare" magazine, used public appearances to attack opponents, weather they were representatives of the political world or the press. The representatives of the "Adevărul" newspaper were the protagonists of such a moment, following an article that reported a PRM candidate's visit to Resita, during which he was booed. According to the article published by the daily Rompres news agency and quoted by “Adevărul”,

⁴³ Floriana Jucan, „C.V. Tudor a promis că va duce o campanie electorală civilizată” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1287, 19 septembrie 1996, p. 3.

⁴⁴*Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ „Un președinte creștin pentru România secolului XXI. Senatorul Corneliu Vadim Tudor – singurul om capabil să facă ordine în țară!” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1303, 4 octombrie 1996, p. 11.

Tudor's visit was delayed due to the fact that Nicolae Drăgan, the president of the Caraș-Severin Branch of BNS and Bruno Szwatsynka, the vicelider of the Independent Free Trade Union at the Reșița Machine Works Plant SA, supported by Cornel Nițoiu, the president of the local branch of the CNSLR - Frăția, opposed the arrival of the PRM leader in the House of Culture building⁴⁶. The candidate reacted, accusing the newspaper of being illegally privatized and inheriting by fraud the patrimony of "Scânteia", the former official communist newspaper⁴⁷. An unnecessary attack on the PDSR candidate was made during a rally organized at the Union House of Culture in Cluj-Napoca where, besides claiming that Ion Iliescu "is not a Christian, he did not do military service, he participated in a coup d'etat, he made a colony of flats and took all the thieves in his arms". Tudor also made some remarks about his mother, whom he compassionates because he claims she regrets giving him life⁴⁸. This kind of speech attracted a series of defamation trials against him, but Tudor has portrayed them as revenge attempts for his fight against corruption. Thus, in the electoral campaign, Corneliu Vadim Tudor tried to assert himself as a rioter, revolted against those who were enriched in the first post-communist years "on the back of the people"⁴⁹.

The anti-system discourse, impregnated by the theme of the outside plot, as well as the nationalist one, determined the start of a collaboration with the French National Front. Tudor attended the Strasbourg National Front Congress in 1996, and Jean-Marie Le Pen was the guest of honor at the PRM Congress in the same year⁵⁰.

Conclusions

The three candidates that were the subject of this study have promoted a critical discourse on the PDSR government, although each represented parties that upheld the executive at one point. PRM, PUNR, PSM and PDSR were partners and this coalition was named the "red quadrilateral", because of their leaders' ties with the communist regime.

In the middle of the first post-communist decade, Romania was in the

⁴⁶ „C.V. Tudor – huiduit la Caraș-Severin” în *Adevărul*, seria a cincea, nr.1991, 7 octombrie 1996, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Remus Radu, „Corneliu Vadim Tudor a tunat și a fulgerat împotriva ziarului <<Adevărul>> mai tare ca împotriva ungarilor” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1307, 9 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Bogdan Eduard, Sandu Mureșan, „Corneliu Vadim Tudor a compătimit-o pe mama lui Ion Iliescu” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1314, 17 octombrie 1996, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ion Cristoiu, „Parada TVR a candidaților la președinție. 4. Imaginea” în *Evenimentul zilei*, anul V, nr. 1321, 25 octombrie 1996, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Antoine Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

situation of choosing a unique foreign policy direction. The closeness to the West, meaning the European Union integration and NATO membership, could only be achieved by providing clear evidence of the government's attachment to the principles of democracy and respect for human rights. Thus, the three parties, due to the controversial platform based on xenophobia, nationalism and nostalgia for the old regime, were gradually removed from power. This generated and amplified a conflict between the former allies, which led to a discourse against the PDSR and against the entire political system because this party was the only representative of the power, thanks to winning the general elections of 1990 and 1992.

An interesting aspect is related to the political evolution of the three candidates after 1996. Despite the similar discourse, only C.V. Tudor remained in public attention. Antoine Roger, referring to this path, found that the PRM laid the foundations for a "national doctrine" - characterized by xenophobia manifested and promoted in public discourse - continued by an economic project motivated by "regaining prosperity and dignity", with specific objectives and clear steps: macroeconomic planning, state control over prices, domestic capital development, consolidation of forms of co-operation in agriculture⁵¹. Therefore, using this kind of rhetoric and because of the country's economic problems, in 2000, the PRM candidate has won the second place in the presidential election.

⁵¹*Ibidem*, pp. 115-116.