

# The Restoration of the Monarchy: A Topic of the Romanian Presidential Elections of 1990, 1992, and 1996

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**Rezumat:** După Revoluția anticomunistă care a avut loc în România în decembrie 1989, noua putere a fost preocupată de realizarea unei tranziții cât mai rapide din punct de vedere instituțional, astfel că primele alegeri au fost programate la mai puțin de șase luni de la căderea regimului comunist. Campania electorală din 1990 a inclus dezbateri despre modelul economic pe care țara trebuia să îl adopte, despre orientarea politicii externe etc., dar și teme conexe, propuse mai ales de puterea neocomunistă, precum posibilitatea restaurării monarhiei, intenția partidelor istorice de a reveni la modelul societății interbelice, retrocedarea pământurilor către foștii moșieri, răzbunarea împotriva celor câteva milioane de români care au fost membri ai Partidului Comunist. Un subiect care s-a evidențiat, inclusiv la nivel simbolic, a fost cel referitor la statutul fostului rege Mihai I, iar cercetarea de față își propune să analizeze modul în care această temă de campanie a fost utilizată în cadrul alegerilor din 1990, 1992 și 1996, scopul pentru care a fost promovată, care au fost mecanismele de apărare sau de răspuns, respectiv în ce mod a influențat rezultatul votului. Pentru a ajunge la o concluzie, vom face apel la cercetările unor istorici și analiști politici, precum și la zările perioadei.

**Cuvinte cheie:** monarhie, republică, alegeri, post-comunism, politică

**Abstract:** Following the anti-communist revolution in Romania in December 1989, the newly-established government was preoccupied with facilitating an expeditious institutional transition and securing public legitimacy. Consequently, the inaugural elections were scheduled to take place within a mere six months following the collapse of the communist regime. The 1990 election campaign included debates

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about the economic model that the country should adopt, the orientation of foreign policy, and so forth. However, it also encompassed related themes, which were proposed mainly by the neo-communist power. These included the possibility of restoring the monarchy, the intention of the historical parties to return to the interwar model of society, the restitution of land to former landowners, and revenge against the several million Romanians who had been members of the communist party. A particularly noteworthy topic, including from a symbolic perspective, was the status of the former King Michael I. This study aims to analyse the manner in which this campaign theme was utilised in the 1990, 1992, and 1996 elections, the objective for which it was advanced, the defensive and responsive mechanisms employed, and the extent to which it influenced the outcome of the vote. In order to reach a conclusion, this study draws on the research of historians and political analysts, as well as newspapers from the period in question.

**Keywords:** monarchy, republic, elections, post-communism, politics

### **Theoretical Framework, Objectives, and Sources**

Electoral campaigns often provide an opportunity to highlight, in a concentrated form, all the issues of interest that exist in a society at a given moment. In the case of Romania, the presidential and parliamentary elections held in the first decade following the anti-communist revolution of 1989 enabled the tracing of clear thematic directions. This was because the democratic process, which has resumed after forty years of communist dictatorship, resulted in the resurgence of political parties with historical roots in the interwar era, the most significant of these being the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the National Peasants' Party Christian and Democratic (PNȚCD), while new parties emerged, whose members originated from the former communist nomenclature, as was the case of the National Salvation Front (FSN).

In the early years of the post-1989 democratic era, debates encompassed a multitude of topics, including foreign policy, institutional and economic reforms, and the necessity for Romanian society to reconcile with its historical heritage. In this instance, we can discuss, on the one hand, the circumstances surrounding former Romanian Communist Party (PCR) members, particularly those who held prominent roles within the communist regime. The programmatic document known as "The Timișoara Proclamation" was the manifestation of straightforward anti-communist signals from society. In the first half of 1990, the 8<sup>th</sup> point of "The Timișoara Proclamation" sparked the most debate because

it suggested prohibiting former communist activists and Securitate<sup>1</sup> officers from running for office for three consecutive legislatures<sup>2</sup>. We now know that an article prohibiting those who had held positions in the communist regime—such as first secretaries, propaganda officers, Securitate officers, former heads of PCR sectors, ministers, ambassadors, etc.—from standing for election was included in the draft of the electoral commission that adopted the decree-law of March 14, 1990.<sup>3</sup> On the day of the vote, Ion Iliescu—the then president of the Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN)—announced that the executive bureau of CPUN<sup>4</sup> had decided to remove the passages referring to communists and the Securitate officers. On the other hand, the public debate also focused on how the communist regime was established in Romania, with the forced abdication of King Michael I on December 30, 1947, and the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic, which in fact marked a brutal break with the country's political and monarchical traditions. In 1990, more than 40 years had passed since that moment, and the memory of the monarchy in Romania was still preserved only by the elderly. This was a concept that could barely had resonance with the general population after 1989, because throughout the communist era national history had been rewritten, eliminating all traces of the royal family, and young people had been schooled in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. A contributing factor to the problem was the lack of relatable individuals linked to that era, such as the late King Michael I, who lived in exile.

Alina Mungiu draws attention to an intriguing subtlety in the dichotomy of making references to the past, since any political message has a potential meaning, especially in such a complicated political and social context: the call to refer to interwar history only served to vindicate one side, while those who pleaded for the adoption of an apolitical attitude actually urged the

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<sup>1</sup> The State Security Department, also known as the Securitate, was the Romanian intelligence service during the period of communist rule. Created in 1948, the Securitate played a significant role in the process of Sovietisation of Romania, and subsequently in the maintenance of the communist regime. To this end, a sophisticated system of surveillance and repression was established.

<sup>2</sup> Domnița Ștefănescu, *Cinci ani din istoria României: o cronologie a evenimentelor dec. 1989 – dec. 1994* [Five years in Romanian history: a chronology of events, December 1989 – December 1994] (București: Editura Mașina de Scris, 1995), pp. 55–56; 451–456.

<sup>3</sup> Virgil Zamfirescu, *15 ani de tranziție* [Fifteen Years of Transition] (București: Editura România Liberă, 2004), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Its members were Ion Iliescu, as president, and vice presidents Radu Câmpeanu, Ion Caramitru, Karol Kirali, and Ion Mânzatu.

populace to demobilise in the fight against the post-communist regime<sup>5</sup>. This was only polarising the public discourse even more and making it difficult for the population to understand the real meaning of politicians' speeches.

By analysing the electoral campaigns between 1990 and 1996, we can see that the elections for the office of President of Romania attracted the most public attention, as the candidate was often the leader of the party he represented in the elections, and he was a message-bearer for the entire organization. Most of the sources we have chosen for this study relate to the presidential elections because they personify politics and make it easier for the electorate to understand the political struggle. In fact, even the media is concentrating more on the candidates than the parties. It is also important to analyse the presidential elections, especially because the possible restoration of the monarchy threatened to dismantle the office of president held by Ion Iliescu at the time. In order to analyse the most relevant perspectives, we will focus on a limited number of politicians and parties, according to their popularity in the elections: for 1990–Ion Iliescu (FSN), Radu Câmpeanu (PNL), and Ion Raţiu (PNTCD); for 1992 and 1996–Ion Iliescu (Democratic Front of National Salvation; FDSN/Party of Social Democracy in Romania; PDSR) and Emil Constantinescu (Democratic Convention of Romania; CDR).

In light of these considerations, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the restoration of the monarchy was an important topic in the elections held during the first post-communist decade, especially in the 1990, 1992, and 1996 elections; which were the main channels for conveying messages for or against; how did the political class's relationship with the royal family develop; and to what extent King Michael I impacted Romania's political arena.

We have consulted the studies of Romanian historians and political analysts, including Florin Abraham, Alina Mungiu, Lavinia Stan, Vladimir Tismăneanu, and Michael Shafir who looked into issues pertaining to Romania's political life in the post-communist era, in order to address these research questions and gain a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics and changes that Romanian society underwent at that point in time. Regarding the state of the monarchy in Romania following the 1989 Revolution, we consulted historians like Alexandru Muraru, who examines how events transpired over a decade, analysing on the basis of press sources how politicians have reported to

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<sup>5</sup> Alina Mungiu, *Românii după '89. Istoria unei neînțelegeri* [Romanians after '89. The history of a misunderstanding] (Bucureşti, Humanitas, 1995), p. 30.

the royal family, from the ban on the entry of the king in the country in 1990 to the moment in 2001, when King Michael I was welcomed in Bucharest by President Ion Iliescu. Tudor Vișan-Miu examines how the opposition to the governing power exploited the idea of restoring the monarchy as a motif in the early post-communist era and how King Michael's image was later used to advocate Romania's entry into the European Union. From a legal and constitutional point of view, to understand the specifics of the laws, decrees, laws, and communiqués adopted by the new government, we consulted the works of Eleodor Focșeneanu and Lia Pop, as well as the corpus focused on the constitutional history of Romania, which is coordinated by Gheorghe Sbârnă. Finally, to test the research questions, we looked at the most relevant newspapers with the largest circulation throughout the studied era, like "Adevărul,"<sup>6</sup> "România liberă,"<sup>7</sup> and "Evenimentul zilei"<sup>8</sup>. The party newspaper "Azi" was also examined, as well as „Revista 22,” a weekly journal of cultural news and political analysis that had a pro-monarchy and anti-political power stance through articles written by some of the most important intellectuals of the post-communist era.

### **Historical and legislative background to the change of regime**

Shortly after the arrest, trial, and conviction of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, the issue of the country's form of government was settled by the Council of the National Salvation Front (CFSN), the revolutionary ruling body. This institution initially had enhanced powers, including similar prerogatives to a parliament: it appointed and dismissed the government, drafted decrees, appointed and dismissed the president of the High Court of Justice, approved the state budget, and ratified and denounced international

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<sup>6</sup> "Adevărul" was the successor of "Scînteia", the official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party. It had the largest circulation in the country, at 1.53 million copies in 1990. It was known for its biased attitude towards the FSN.

<sup>7</sup> Despite its publication during the communist period, beginning with the number 14.036 in 1989, the newspaper subsequently became known as "Newspaper of all patriotic and democratic forces in Romania" and later "Independent newspaper of opinion, information and reporting". Petre Mihai Băcanu was appointed as the newspaper's editor-in-chief. Despite lacking direct affiliation with any political party, the newspaper adopted a staunchly oppositional stance, criticising the policies of the FSN and Ion Iliescu.

<sup>8</sup> "Evenimentul zilei" was founded in 1992, becoming one of the most widely read newspaper in Romania, with Mihai Cărciog, Cornel Nistorescu and Ion Cristoiu among its founders. The newspaper stood out for its editorial policy, which was different from that of other dailies of the time: a mixture of news, politics, and tabloid-type information.

treaties<sup>9</sup>. According to Article 1 of a decree-law of December 27, 1989, signed by CFSN President Ion Iliescu, the country's form of government is a republic, while Article 10 states that "all the power structures of the former dictatorial regime are and remain dissolved."<sup>10</sup> Legal experts such as Eleodor Focșeneanu critiqued the ruling, arguing that the CFSN was not qualified to make decisions on constitutional issues as it was a provisional governing body<sup>11</sup>. In practice, the new authorities legitimised the form of organisation of the country established since December 30, 1947, when King Michael I abdicated under pressure from communists who were backed by the Soviet government through the army and advisors stationed in Romania.

There are various explanations that might be explored in relation to the post-revolutionary rulers' decision. First, certain authors, like Tudor Vișan-Miu, contend that the new authorities, who derived their legitimacy from the Revolution, could not have benefited from a legal annulment of the 1948–1989 state<sup>12</sup>. The claim is supported by the arguments offered by Alina Mungiu who offers examples from press articles published by the newspaper "Adevărul" in early 1990. One such article indicates, "The FSN Platform is written with the blood of the Revolution (...) against them (the supporters of the FSN) was fired in full in the cities and city squares of the Romanian martyrdom."<sup>13</sup> Even the journalists of this publication, such as Cristian Tudor Popescu, note this predominant theme when he says, "Ion Iliescu evoked, slightly nostalgically, the short history of the Front, not neglecting to specify—once again—its status as a spontaneous emanation of the revolution"<sup>14</sup>. The official statements invoked the same idea: "The legitimacy

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<sup>9</sup> Florin Abraham, *Romania since the Second World war: a Political, Social and Economic History* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> "Decret-lege nr. 2 din 27 decembrie 1989 privind constituirea, organizarea și funcționarea Consiliului Frontului Salvării Naționale și a consiliilor teritoriale ale Frontului Salvării Naționale" [Decree-Law No. 2 of 27 December 1989 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the Council of the National Salvation Front and the territorial councils of the National Salvation Front] in *Monitorul Oficial* [Official Gazette], no. 4, December, 27, 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Eleodor Focșeneanu, *Istoria constituțională a României (1859–2003)* [Constitutional history of Romania (1859–2003)], 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (București, 2007), p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> Tudor Vișan-Miu, "Regalitatea în republică: o prezență care dăinuie" [Royalty in the republic: a lasting presence], in *Panorama postcomunismului în România* [The post-communism in Romania], Liliana Corobca (ed.), (Iași: Polirom, 2022), pp. 184–185.

<sup>13</sup> Mungiu, *Românii*, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Cristian Tudor Popescu, "Cronica telealegătorului" [Televoter's Chronicle], în *Adevărul*, Year 1 (90), April 10, 1990: p. 2.

of the National Salvation Front cannot be questioned by anyone. It was given by the popular revolution"<sup>15</sup>. Secondly, we can also talk about a lack of reaction from the opposition, especially in the context of the creation of the CPUN, whose composition was unequal, as the FSN had as many members as all the other parties put together. Given that, as Alfred Bulai quoted by Teodora Stănescu-Stanciu says, "the political scene was complicated in the context in which the FSN was acting both as a party and as a legislative body, through the CFSN,"<sup>16</sup> we can refer to an "experiment" accepted by the leaders of the opposition parties, cloaked under the pretence of its provisional nature. For this reason, the CPUN structure was considered by Ion Rațiu as a "concession" and "a sign of good faith" by Ion Iliescu, while Radu Câmpeanu was satisfied that they "have achieved more than had hoped for at the beginning of the meeting"<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, both representatives of the historical parties, the PNȚCD and the PNL, accepted a compromise proposed by the authorities, who claimed legitimacy from the work carried out in the days of the Revolution.

The rallies organised by the FSN and historical party supporters led to the compromise. As a result, an agreement was reached on February 1, 1990, to establish the CPUN, an organisation that served as the initial model for a parliamentary. However, until the election of the new Parliament on May 20, 1990, its prerogatives were the same as those of the CFSN, which meant just a formal change of name and symbolically marked the representativeness of all political parties. The Decree Law of March 14, 1990, on the election of the Romanian Parliament and President also played the role of a "mini constitution," which established a bicameral parliament made up of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in place of the unicameral parliament as was the CPUN. The executive office of the CPUN was eliminated, and a prime minister-led government was established in its place. The role of President of the Republic likewise took the place of President of the CPUN.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Comunicat din 25 ianuarie 1990 din partea Consiliului Frontului Salvării Naționale" [Statement of January 25, 1990 from the Council of the National Salvation Front], in *Monitorul Oficial* [Official Gazette], no. 15, January 25, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Teodora Stănescu-Stanciu, „Constituția din 1991” [The Constitution of 1991], în *Constituțiile României. Studii* [Romania's Constitutions. Studies], coordinated by Gheorghe Sbârna (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), p. 115.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Abraham, *Romania*, p. 136.

Lia Pop argues that the office of President of Romania was established by a pre-constitutional act<sup>19</sup>, but she does not evaluate the correctness of that choice. In contrast, Focșeneanu makes it clear that, according to constitutional principles, a constitution should have been adopted first and then elections for the office of President of the State should have been organized. Nevertheless, the same author also recalls the December 27, 1989, decision that calls for "the dissolution of the power structures of the former dictatorial regime" and concludes that the office of President of the Republic, which was established by the communist regime in 1974, should be among those to be dissolved. This meant an infringement of the CFSN Communiqué itself<sup>20</sup>. Under these conditions, as Varujan Vosganian says, "throughout the entire period of functioning of the CFSN and CPUN, Ion Iliescu, as their president, had quasi-discretionary powers."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea argue that the choice to keep the office of President of the Republic signifies a continuation of the communist government because it puts a great deal of authority in the hands of one individual soon after Nicolae Ceaușescu's execution. The two authors dispute as to the reasons for this choice, referring to ties to the previous regime of those who drafted the constitution, an intent to give Iliescu some leverage over the opposition, a refusal to work with anti-communist forces, and a wish to avoid the restoration of the monarchy<sup>22</sup>.

Regarding the possibility of restoring the monarchy, Marian Enache, a member of the commission for the adoption of the 1991 Constitution and a member of the parliament from 1990 to 1992, states that "there was no proposal in the CPUN to reinstate the monarchy or to organise a referendum to determine the form of government" during the discussions leading up to the adoption of the decree-law of March 14, 1990<sup>23</sup>. Ion Iliescu advanced an

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<sup>19</sup> Lia Pop, *Despre Președinte în democrație* [About President in democracy], (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2014), p. 289.

<sup>20</sup> Focșeneanu, *Istoria*, pp. 238–239.

<sup>21</sup> Varujan Vosganian, "Echilibrul puterilor: Parlament versus Guvern" [Balance of powers: Parliament versus Government], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 3 (13), January 1994: p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea, "House of Cards. The Presidency from Iliescu to Bănescu" in *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five. Linking Past, Present, and Future*, Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea (eds.) (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 194.

<sup>23</sup> Marian Enache, "Procesul adoptării Constituției din 1991 – o veritabilă școală a constituționalismului românesc" [The process of adopting the 1991 Constitution – A veritable school of Romanian constitutionalism], in *Juridice.ro*, [https://www.juridice.ro/essentials/5084/procesul-adoptarii-constitutiei-din-1991-o-veritabila-scoala-a-constitutionalismului-romanesc#\\_ftnref15](https://www.juridice.ro/essentials/5084/procesul-adoptarii-constitutiei-din-1991-o-veritabila-scoala-a-constitutionalismului-romanesc#_ftnref15), accessed on July 19, 2024.



analogous argument in a 1992 speech, asserting that during the discussions for the 1990 Electoral Law, "there was no monarchist in Romania, so it was clear what was the spirit after the December Revolution and what was the political thinking of everyone"<sup>24</sup>.

On the other hand, we can discuss a favourable attitude towards the royal family, especially on the part of the historical parties, and an unfavourable attitude on the part of the FSN, expressed mainly through articles in the press that supported the ruling party. As for Michael I, the exiled former king of Romania, in January 1990 he proposed that the 1923 Constitution—when Romania was a constitutional monarchy—could serve as a useful foundation for the newly elected parliament. In February 1990, he wrote to CPUN stating that he was in favour of holding a referendum to decide on Romania's form of government.<sup>25</sup>

Florin Abraham<sup>26</sup> appreciates that there were three distinct approaches to institution-building projects in the early 1990s: the first was drawn by the historical parties who sought to restore the pre-communist political order, a view that was abandoned due to popular pressure; the second concept, of liberal inspiration, considered that society could be transformed without a project by the elites, but by following an "invisible hand" of individual will; and the third perspective was that of a social engineering project, which was to be assumed and carried out by the elites through state institutions. Ion Iliescu was a key proponent of this idea.

### **The 1990 elections**

The first democratic elections to be held in Romania in fifty years, the May 20, 1990, elections, were regulated by the March 14, 1990, electoral law. Political tensions, which manifested in rallies organised by historical parties against the FSN, preceded the campaign, as we have shown. During the two months of the campaign, social, ethnic, and political conflicts escalated, including interethnic tensions in Târgu Mureş<sup>27</sup>, the occupation of University

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<sup>24</sup> "Preşedintele-candidat rămâne totuşi optimist – interviu cu dl. Ion Iliescu" [The President-candidate remains optimistic – interview with Mr. Ion Iliescu], in *Adevărul*, no. 194 (753), September 15, 1992: p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Vişan-Miu, *Regalitatea*, p.184.

<sup>26</sup> Abraham, *Romania*, pp. 117–118.

<sup>27</sup> The interethnic conflict in Târgu Mureş was a significant confrontation between the Romanian and Hungarian communities. It occurred between 19 and 21 March 1990 in Târgu Mureş and was triggered by the dissemination of truncated or erroneous information, including rumours of a Hungarian plan to take over Transylvania.

Square<sup>28</sup> by the populace disgruntled with the way power was seized following the Revolution, and the establishment of a "neo-communist" regime.

The election campaign's central themes, which included fighting the effects of leaving the socialist economic system, liberalising prices, adjusting to capitalism, and institutional reorganisation of the state, were very much in line with the start of the shift to democracy and the market economy. However, a campaign of delegitimisation of the protest movements was launched in response to the increasingly vocal opposition. This led to the protests being classified by the authorities as actions intended to disturb public order, while the leaders of the historical parties were charged with seeking to avenge those who had ties to the communist party and take the nation back to the interwar period.

Ion Iliescu of the FSN, Radu Câmpeanu of the PNL, and Ion Rațiu of the PNȚCD were the three candidates who entered the race for Romania's presidency. Ion Iliescu had a beforehand moral advantage compared to the other two candidates because he was perceived by the public as the embodiment of the 1989 regime change and the transfer of power to the people, whereas the other two were less known by the Romanians: Ion Rațiu left the country in the 1940s, and Radu Câmpeanu left in the 1970s after a period of political imprisonment.<sup>29</sup>

Ion Iliescu emphasised the need for a break with the communist past, proposing a step-by-step transformation of the economy – and, by extension, therefore, of society – in order to avoid social imbalances. Throughout the two months of the campaign, he repeatedly reiterated a number of favourite themes in his speeches: criticising communism as a political system without mentioning those who had participated in it prior to 1989, advocating for a gradual transition to a market economy, and emphasising social issues and the steps that should be taken to address them. Throughout the two months of the campaign, the FSN leader made the most of his media endorsement and the notoriety he had earned during the Revolution.

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<sup>28</sup> The University Square Phenomenon, also known as the University Square Demonstrations, originated from a general discontent with the evolution of political life in post-communist Romania. These mass events commenced on April 22 and concluded on June 15, 1990, during which protesters occupied the University Square in Bucharest.

<sup>29</sup> Marius Mureșan, *Destinația Cotroceni. Alegerile prezidențiale în România 1990-2014* [Destination Cotroceni. Presidential elections in Romania 1990-2014], (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2019), p. 24.

As for the other two candidates, Ion Rațiu proposed a political discourse centred around the concepts of freedom, prosperity, and national reconciliation; however, he encountered hostility during his electoral actions, and pro-FSN newspapers fostered mistrust regarding both his good intentions and his past and work done in exile. The FSN used the catchphrase "we are not selling our country"<sup>30</sup> to push this negative campaign, which was motivated by the years spent away from Romania's communist experience. This campaign led to chants at rallies in support of Ion Iliescu, attacks in the press close to the ruling party, and references to the Royal House, the latter being considered a danger to the country's progress. On the other hand, Radu Câmpeanu ran on a political platform emphasising adherence to liberal ideals<sup>31</sup>. Formally speaking, though not officially, the liberal agenda of 1990 was seen as a compromise between the PNȚCD's progressivism and the FSN's protectionism.

Although the two parties had a common history, being antagonistic during the inter-war period and collaborating during the Second World War, and both being victims of communism, there were some reservations among the PNȚCD about collaborating with the Liberals, due to the fact that Radu Câmpeanu was a member of the CPUN, together with Ion Iliescu, and because of some rumours that there was an agreement between the two before the start of the electoral campaign<sup>32</sup>.

As for their views on the monarchy, the two parties disagreed with each other. While the PNȚCD publicly expressed their support for King Michael I, the PNL believed that the monarchy was not a principal issue for Romania in the context of the 1990 elections<sup>33</sup>. Radu Câmpeanu stated at a press conference that, despite having met the king in exile, he was unsure whether he supported or opposed the monarchy, because he believed that only the Romanian people should make that decision. Upon his return to the country in 1990, Câmpeanu assert without providing any supporting

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<sup>30</sup> Bogdan Teodorescu et. al., *Cea mai bună dintre lumile posibile. Marketingul politic în România – 1990–2005* [The best of all possible worlds. Political Marketing in Romania – 1990–2005] (București: Editura Comunicare.ro, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Codrin Scutaru, *Partide politice românești între tranziție și criză: Partidul Național Liberal 1990-2010, Teză de doctorat* [Romanian political parties between transition and crisis: the National Liberal Party 1990-2010, PhD Thesis], (Timișoara: Universitatea de Vest, 2010), pp. 148–149.

<sup>32</sup> Ion Rațiu, *Note zilnice. În fine, acasă* [Daily notes. Finally, home], (București: Editura Univers, 1999), p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Dobrescu, "Vești importante de la Conferința pe țară a PNL" [Important news from the PNL National Conference], in *Adevărul*, Year 1 (82), March 31, 1990: p. 3.

evidence that "he was surprised to see the rejection of the monarchical idea, a categorical rejection"<sup>34</sup>.

Nonetheless, the ruling party's affiliated media attempted to lump the two parties together starting from their common history. A particular reading of the events that transpired in 1937—the signing of the "electoral non-aggression pact" between the PNȚ under Iuliu Maniu, the PNL's young wing under Gheorghe Brătianu, and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's "Totul pentru Țară" party—was provided by the journalists of the "Azi" newspaper. There is a warning—although not an explicit one—that the monarchy might be restored if the opposition wins the elections, which links the signing of the 1937 pact to the foundation of King Carol II's royal dictatorship in 1938<sup>35</sup>.

Subsequently, the "Azi" editorial board raised some concerns about Ion Rațiu's background prior to 1989 and his involvement in post-communist politics through a series of questions regarding his 1940s departure from the country, about his financial situation, his activities while living in exile, his relationship with the former Securitate, the source of funding for his own party, the assets he will gain from privatisations and retrocedes, and his perspective on a republican system<sup>36</sup>. As in the case of Ion Rațiu, the PNL candidate was asked to explain the source of the financial support provided to his own party, the assets he will acquire as a result of privatisations and retrocedes, and the idea of Romania being a monarchy or a republic<sup>37</sup>. The same newspaper compared the behaviour of the PNȚCD in 1990 with that of the PNȚ in 1928, when it organised campaigns to overthrow the then liberal government, their action then culminating in the accession of Carol II to the throne, asking rhetorically whether a "sensational surprise" is in the making, culminating in the moment when "former King Michael will descend like a *deus ex machina*".<sup>38</sup>

A tense event that brought the topic of monarchy into political discourse occurred in April 1990, following reports of King Michael I's potential visit to Romania. Even Radu Câmpeanu, one of the opposition candidates, said on Romanian national television that the visit was inappropriate for

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<sup>34</sup> "Conferință de presă" [Press Conference], in *Tribuna*, No. 101, April 24, 1990: p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> CLIO, "Istoria ca martor" [History as a witness], in *Azi*, Year 1 (2), April 1990: p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> "Câteva întrebări pentru doi candidați la președinția republicii" [Some questions for two candidates for the presidency of the republic], in *Azi*, Year 1 (5), April 1990: p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> CLIO, "Mijloace vechi – scopuri noi?" [Old means – new goals?], in *Azi*, Year 1 (2), April 1990: p. 2.

the time<sup>39</sup>. However, the visit did not take place as the government decided not to grant a visa to the former monarch<sup>40</sup>, asking him to postpone the visit until after the elections<sup>41</sup>. The government made public its willingness for the King to make a private visit to the nation in a statement to the press, but also stated that the announcement of the visit sparked "reactions of opposition from many political forces in the country," including those represented in the CPUN. Threats of violent protests and the King being "unwillingly involved in obscure manipulations that could affect his dignity"<sup>42</sup> were cited by the government as reasons for concern. In a 1992 interview, Ion Iliescu said about this moment that "I remember the very discussion about the first attempt of the king's return to the country, when everyone rejected it, including the representatives of the PNT and PNL (it was the eve of the elections), as a disturbing factor."<sup>43</sup>

In a telegram published by "Revista 22," the Romanian dramatist Eugene Ionesco conveys his profound sadness and grief over the decision, which he deems "shameful for Romania."<sup>44</sup> In his analysis, Andrei Pippidi refers to the pressures and the "real attitude of the government" considering the public's lack of awareness regarding the letter sent by King Michael I to the CPUN in February 1990. This letter is regarded as a "historic document." Similarly, the author asserts that the Romanian government's antagonistic stance is further evidenced by Prime Minister Petre Roman's remarks to the French channel Antenne 2, in which he described the monarch as "a relic of history."<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, the Prime Minister characterised the aforementioned letter as a "political action," interpreting it as a petition for a referendum from the King<sup>46</sup>. Regarding the public's disapproval of the monarchy, which the government has referenced, Pippidi recalls the government's call for the nation's citizens "to take

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<sup>39</sup> Andrei Pippidi, "Cel care vine" [The one who comes], in *Revista 22*, No. 13, April 13, 1990: p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> "Comunicat" [Statement], in *Revista 22*, No. 14, April 20, 1990: p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Vișan-Miu, "Regalitatea," 185. See footnote p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Declarația Guvernului României" [Statement by the Government of Romania], in *Tribuna*, No. 12, April 12, 1990: p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> "Președintele-candidat rămâne totuși optimist...".

<sup>44</sup> See *Revista 22*, No. 14, April 20, 1990: p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Andrei Pippidi, "Nu sînt monarhist" [I am not a monarchist], in *Revista 22*, No. 14, April 20, 1990: p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Alexandru Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică? Regele Mihai, românii și regalitatea după 1989* [How does a monarchy survive in a republic? King Michael, Romanians and royalty after 1989], (București: Curtea Veche, 2015), p. 99.

to the streets and express their attitude towards the issue of the visit" at the conclusion of a government meeting on April 12<sup>47</sup>. A recent analysis by political analyst Alexandru Muraru posits that the government's opposition can be attributed to two factors: firstly, the emergence of a more popular discourse in Romanian society regarding the ideal form of government, and secondly, the lack of electoral legitimacy of the FSN.<sup>48</sup>

Public reaction to the government's decision included demonstrations in support of and against the proposal. Royalists questioned the legitimacy of the new power, while the Romanian Antimonarchic League declared its opposition to both historical parties and royalty. The PNL claimed that the political parties had no role in organising the two separate demonstrations, although Romanian television portrayed them as pro- and anti-monarchic and related to the election campaign. By expressing its disapproval of the evening news coverage of the 16 April rallies, the PNL is trying to distance itself from the label of being pro-monarchy. Through such media strategies, especially pro-authority television and newspapers tried to project links between the historical parties and their support for the monarchy.

The unfolding of events raises several questions regarding the potential political calculations of the ruling party. Was there ever any intention to grant the King a visa? What could the FSN have gained from this situation? If the first question is challenging to respond to, given the existence of advanced formal and informal discussions between the royal family and the Romanian authorities so we don't know where they got stuck, Paul Gheorghiu presents a potential key to elucidating the second question, which invokes a government diversionary tactic aimed at discrediting the most dangerous political opponents by associating them with the person of King Michael I. Conversely, upon recognising that the king could have benefited from popular support and thus initiate a new theme in the political campaign, the decision was taken to halt his return to the country<sup>49</sup>.

Despite the responses in the domestic and foreign press to the government's decision to prohibit the return of King Michael I and the protests of some Romanian cultural figures, the topic did not emerge as a pivotal issue in the electoral campaign. This may be attributed, in part, to the

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<sup>47</sup> Pippidi, "Nu sînt monarhist": p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Gheorghiu, "Liga Monarhică – o nouă diversiune", in *România liberă*, Year 48 (14.131), New Series, No. 97, April 18, 1990: 6.

absence of reactions from the then-president of the CPUN, Ion Iliescu. Those who advocated for the decision were primarily Prime Minister Petre Roman and media outlets affiliated with the FSN. Nevertheless, some political figures, like Radu Câmpeanu, who was viewed as Ion Iliescu's main rival, were forced to retract their support for the monarchy, particularly given the circumstances surrounding his known relationship with King Michael during the exile.

### **The 1992 elections**

Prior to the 1992 elections, Romanian society was confronted with several socio-political challenges, the most notable of which was the Mineriada of June 13–15, 1990<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, in December of the same year, King Michael I was once again refused entry into the country. On December 25, the king arrived in Bucharest, whereupon he proceeded to the Curtea de Argeș Monastery, the final resting place of Romania's kings and queens since 1914. However, the authorities had organised a roadblock on the route, comprising an oversized truck and armed vehicles, which Princess Elisabeth, the King's daughter, described in an interview as a 'Kafkaesque sequence'<sup>51</sup>. The King's passport was confiscated, and he was expelled from the country by military plane.

Despite the private nature of the visit, the authorities invoked the same arguments as those used in April 1990. Alexandru Muraru has suggested that this moment marked the beginning of a symbolic struggle between the authorities and the return of the King to the country<sup>52</sup>. The polemics surrounding this decision were even more intense than those of April 1990. The authorities' decision was contested by numerous organisations, including the Civic Alliance, the Alliance of Former Political Prisoners, the World Union of Free Romanians, and several political parties, such as the PNL, PSD, and PNȚCD. Additionally, an influential group of intellectuals associated with the Social Dialogue Group, which published the journal "Revista 22," also expressed opposition. Prominent figures within this group included Andrei

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<sup>50</sup> The event in question occurred in June 1990 in Bucharest, when the police intervened in force against protesters in University Square. The name of the event derives from the miners who were called to Bucharest to assist the authorities in restoring order. The incident resulted in six deaths and more than 700 injuries, and President Ion Iliescu is noteworthy for a speech in which he thanked the miners for their response to the authorities' call.

<sup>51</sup> "El știe cine este. Scurt dialog la București cu Principesa Margareta" [He knows who he is. Short dialog with Princess Margareta in Bucharest], in *Revista 22*, Year 2 (1), January 11, 1991: p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, p. 105.

Pipiddi, Andrei Cornea, and Vladimir Tismăneanu. Tismăneanu explains the decision of the authorities, noting that the King's visit represented a "defiance of their own claim to legitimacy" for Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman, as they positioned themselves as "guardians of national values."<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the government adopted a clear-cut attitude, expressed by its spokesperson, who invoked the contempt with which the royal family had always treated the Romanian people<sup>54</sup>.

On the other hand, one of the most significant changes in Romanian society has been the ratification of the new Constitution of Romania in September 1991, which established the republican nature of the Romanian state. As a result, the constitutional transition period ended in 1991, when the new fundamental act was approved by referendum. This delineated the principle of the separation of powers within the state apparatus, with the Parliament designated as the exclusive legislative authority, comprising two chambers with four-year terms. The initial intention of the Constituent Assembly was to establish a unicameral parliament; however, the decision was taken to adopt a bicameral system. Following the elections held on May 20, 1990, a debate began concerning the definition of the political regime rather than the form of government. The presidential model was deemed unsuitable, as it was perceived to evoke the Ceaușescu regime. The parliamentary model was not favoured by Iliescu, who was aware that his political legitimacy would be diminished if he were elected by Parliament. It was therefore thought that the French semi-presidential regime would be the ideal model, as it also corresponded to the traditional French influence in Romania. Furthermore, a soft model of semi-presidentialism with an elected president was also used in former communist states such as Bulgaria, Poland, and Ukraine<sup>55</sup>.

From a political perspective, between 1990 and 1992 a significant transformation of the political landscape took place, indicating a growing interest in participatory democracy as well as the maturation of politicians and the establishment of more distinct ideological boundaries. The most significant and unexpected changes involved the FSN itself, which in 1990 resembled a monolithic entity until splitting into two groups in February

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<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, „Pălmuirea istoriei” [Slaping the history], in *Revista* 22, Year 2 (1), January 11, 1991: pp. 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Abraham, *Romania*, p. 144.



1992, one associated with Petre Roman and the other with Ion Iliescu<sup>56</sup>. The formation of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR), a diverse coalition of opposition parties led primarily by the PNȚCD<sup>57</sup>, was the second significant development. Its rise to prominence prior to the 1992 local elections coincided with the FSN's internal issues, which helped it secure most seats in local government. It also made a solid reputation for itself as the leading political opposition group.

Another significant event occurred between April 25 and 27, 1992. King Michael and Queen Anne, in response to an invitation from the Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți, attended Easter celebrations at Putna Monastery. This visit was strictly private and not a political one. In the following days, the itinerary included visits to Bucharest and Curtea de Argeș. Following this visit, Radu Câmpeanu, the leader of the PNL, proposed to the king that he should run for president of Romania. This proposal was rejected by the monarch, which resulted in a cooling of relations between the Liberals and the King, as the latter had not been consulted beforehand<sup>58</sup>. However, it provided the party that had won the 1990 elections with new political tools. Additionally, in August of 1992, a new visit by the King was scheduled, also in private and still under the pretext of attending religious events. In light of the imminent electoral campaign, it is noteworthy to examine the stance of the political parties. The FDSN highlighted the danger of a coup d'état, whereas the PNL, while expressing reservations about the King's itinerary, urged a more mature approach towards King Michael I from the political elite. Despite negotiations between the Royal House and government representatives, the decision was taken not to permit the King to proceed with the visit<sup>59</sup>. Once again, the government's proposal was to postpone the visit until after the elections, as was the case in 1990. Given the popularity of the King during the April 1992 visit and the CDR's consistent support for him, it was evident that the Coalition would have benefited the most from this event.

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Jugănar, Alexandru Radu, *FSN – Un paradox politic (1989–1992). România postcomunistă. O istorie a partidelor politice în interviuri și documente* [FSN – A political paradox (1989–1992). Postcommunist Romania. A history of political parties in interviews and documents], Volume I (București: Editura Pro Universitaria, 2013), pp. 123–124.

<sup>57</sup> Dan Pavel, "O analiză asupra Convenției Democratice din România" [An analysis of the Democratic Convention in Romania], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 1 (1), December 1992: p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, pp. 114–115.

Regarding the electoral campaign, Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu emerged as the most significant contenders upon entering the second round of the presidential elections. Ion Iliescu and the FDSN discussed topics that had been effectively addressed in the previous campaign, including the monarchy, the landowners' issue, which was connected to CDR supporters, Hungarian irredentists, and the activities of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) in the nation and among its supporters overseas<sup>60</sup>. The main contender to succeed Ion Iliescu as president was Emil Constantinescu, the CDR candidate. He had no prior political experience and came from an academic background, being unknown to the public in 1992. The parliamentary campaign was strongly associated with the presidential campaign, partly due to Constantinescu's lack of popularity and partly because the CDR had already secured a significant victory in that year's local elections<sup>61</sup>.

Considering the more robust positioning of the CDR in comparison to the divided opposition in 1990, the themes through which this coalition and its candidate were assailed were markedly more resonant. They were advanced by a multitude of supporters of the FDSN, in addition to Ion Iliescu himself. Moreover, the subject of restoring the monarchy played a more pivotal role than in previous elections.

In "Adevărul," a newspaper that mostly upheld the same positive view of the ruling party, Constantinescu was referred to as a puppet of the PNȚCD leaders, and it was stated that the CDR's objective was unquestionably the restoration of the monarchy<sup>62</sup>. Ion Iliescu actually embraced the same line of argumentation when attempting to convince the Romanian people that the true goals of the united opposition were those published in an analysis of the French press: "the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the restitution of real estate and land to former owners and their successors, and unlimited privatisation in all areas of economic life."<sup>63</sup> In fact, both Ion Iliescu and the FDSN brought up a number of historically significant topics during the four weeks of the campaign, including: the monarchy (by bringing up

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<sup>60</sup> "Campania electorală – Ion Iliescu" [Electoral Campaign – Ion Iliescu], in *Adevărul*, No. 202 (761), September, 24, 1992: p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> CDR won the elections in big cities (Bucharest, Timișoara, Brasov, Craiova, Iasi, Pitesti, Targu Jiu, etc.), while FSN won important majorities in small towns and rural areas.

<sup>62</sup> Andrei Alexandru, "Campania electorală – Ion Iliescu" [Electoral Campaign – Ion Iliescu], in *Adevărul*, No. 186 (745), September 5–6, 1992: p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ion Iliescu, "Campania electorală – Ion Iliescu" [Electoral Campaign – Ion Iliescu], in *Adevărul*, No. 202 (761), September 24, 1992; p. 5.

the idea of a referendum on the type of government); landlords (by stating that the CDR intended to revive the inter-war Romanian society model); and Hungarian irredentists (by talking about the activities of the UDMR against the Romanian state).

In an electoral debate held at the editorial office of the newspaper "Adevărul"<sup>64</sup> during the final week of the campaign, Ion Iliescu identified three distinct categories of political parties in Romania. He described the first as "the forces of restoration," which he defined as parties aligned with the CDR. He further elaborated that this category of parties seeks to return Romania to the socio-political and economic conditions that prevailed during the interwar period. He concluded that such a return would inevitably lead to significant discrepancies in Romanian society. The second category, as identified by the President, comprises parties that advocate the implementation of Western models. This approach, in his view, would result in significant discrepancies between a wealthy minority and an economically disadvantaged majority. The final category is represented by centre-left parties, the only ones seeking to achieve equilibrium within a dynamic, modern, and competitive market economy.

A document purportedly belonging to the FDSN, published by the newspaper "România Liberă," outlines the party's electoral strategy, which included the promotion of specific themes: the CDR advocates the restoration of the monarchy and the return to the interwar democracy model; in its rhetoric, the past is invoked as a means of seeking revenge against the communist period; the coalition leaders are trained in their activity by "an aggressive and primitive anti-communism." Given the focus of the campaign on the presidential race, it was simple for Ion Iliescu's campaign team to establish a network of associations between the CDR and a range of labels, including "PNȚCD supporters," "monarchists," "right-wing," "landlords," and "violence."<sup>65</sup>

The fact that this was a political discourse held during an electoral campaign that revolves around specific campaign themes, such as the threat of "restoring the monarchy" and the implications of King Michael I's presence in Romania, exposes the FDSN politicians' obsession with and fear of this idea. As Alexandru Muraru also asserts, it is paradoxical that the party in question refers to the extremely small number of supporters of the monarchy,

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<sup>64</sup> "Viitorul președinte față în față cu viitoarea politică" [Next president face to face with future politics], in *Adevărul*, No. 202 (761), September 24, 1992: pp. 2–3.

<sup>65</sup> Pavel, "O analiză asupra Convenției": p. 7.

yet "when it came to granting a visa for the monarch and his family to enter the country, things immediately rushed," which hyperbolised the subject of the king's return<sup>66</sup>.

As a result of the political attacks and media pressure, Emil Constantinescu was compelled to adopt a defensive stance, although he did not consistently succeed in articulating a clear and unambiguous position. In an interview published by the newspaper "Adevărul" on September 15, the candidate provided his views on several current issues, including his overseas visits, the proposed change of form of government, his stance on communism, the national debate, interethnic tensions, and economic challenges. In response to the question of the monarchy, he declined to provide a direct answer, asserting that a president is duty-bound to respect the democratic system and that any such decision must be made by referendum, reflecting the will of the majority. However, Constantinescu was compelled to qualify his answer, finally emphasising that the past 45 years of history could not be disregarded and that the circumstances of December 1947 could not be reinstated<sup>67</sup>.

Concurrently, CDR leaders have articulated in press conferences that the Coalition holds the Constitution in high regard and that the form of government can only be determined by the collective will of the Romanian people, as evidenced by the referendum that approved the Constitution<sup>68</sup>.

In mid-October 1992, King Michael I made a further attempt to visit Romania, but the government refused to grant him a visa, citing the electoral process. This refusal followed a critical article published by King Michel I in the publication "The European," in which he questioned the legitimacy of the regime in Bucharest, spoke of an imposed Constitution, and claimed that Ion Iliescu was a political leader who, while calling himself the head of state, thanked the miners for the violent actions of June 13–15, 1990<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Alexandru Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, p. 112; p. 114.

<sup>67</sup> Constantin Lupu, "«Voi fi un președinte al celor ce m-au ales, dar în special al celor ce nu m-au ales» – interviu cu dl. Emil Constantinescu, candidat din partea Convenției Democratice din România la președinție" ["I will be a president of those who elected me, but especially of those who did not elect me" – interview with Mr. Emil Constantinescu, candidate of the Democratic Convention of Romania for the presidency], in *Adevărul*, No. 194 (753), September 15, 1992: p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Un apel la logică și eleganță" [A call for logic and elegance], in *România liberă*, Year 50 (14.780), New Series, No. 746, September 15, 1992: p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Muraru, *Cum supraviețuiește monarhia într-o republică*, p. 118.

Ultimately, the presidential elections were won by Ion Iliescu. Many analysts and historians were intrigued by the circumstances surrounding Emil Constantinescu's defeat, particularly given the CDR's apparent advantage following the local elections and the recent split within the FSN. The anti-communist message that had been conveyed in the 1990 elections was reiterated two years later, but at that time, the electorate was more preoccupied with economic concerns than with the fact that Iliescu was a member of the Communist Party. Mara-Ileana Galat and Mircea Kivu highlight that in the latter stages of the electoral campaign, Iliescu put forward a plan for change based on combating corruption and fostering job creation, whereas Constantinescu confined himself to criticising the trajectory of the initial post-communist years without proposing a viable alternative<sup>70</sup>.

As for the subject of monarchy, it has been approached in several research studies. On the one hand, argues Alina Mungiu, the monarchist discourse, used by some politicians of the historical parties as a solution to solve problems, was idealistic rather than pragmatic. On the other hand, the CDR's message was quite easy to dismantle, because although they were perceived as "democrats," they were labelled as trying to bring the monarchy on an unholy path; although they were considered "patriots," their reference to foreign political and economic models was questioned<sup>71</sup>. Also, Gabriel Ivan argues that shortly after the regime change, the feeling of insecurity can become a collective experience; thus, nostalgia for communism intervenes, while the CDR promoted not only democracy but also the restoration of the pre-war situation, a period when many people were lower on the social ladder<sup>72</sup>.

### **The 1996 elections**

The 1996 elections were organised at the end of the four years of Nicolae Văcăroiu's term as Prime Minister and Ion Iliescu's term as President. During this period, when the PDSR held exclusive power, Romania experienced an economic crisis and a lack of progress in the implementation of reforms. One of the reasons for this was the implementation of a program of economic transformation in extremely gradual stages, with the intention of

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<sup>70</sup> Mara-Ileana Galat, Mircea Kivu, "Schimbarea care nu s-a produs" [The change that didn't happen], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 1 (11), November 1993: p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> Alina Mungiu, "De ce am pierdut alegerile" [Why we lost the elections], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 1 (1), December 1992: p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Gabriel Ivan, "În căutarea normalității" [Searching for normality], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 1 (1), December 1992: p. 8.

preventing social imbalance and thus alienating specific social groups. From a diplomatic perspective, Romania has made notable progress, including consensus among political leaders on the country's accession to NATO and integration into the European Union. The normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries, such as Hungary, has also been a crucial factor in the success of these two projects.

Tensions between the royal family and the political establishment persisted during this period, as evidenced by the King's repeated travel bans, even though the electoral argument that had been raised in 1990 and 1992 had theoretically vanished. When the King intended to visit the country in April 1993, the government referred to the likelihood of strikes and protests. In the autumn of 1993, the King wanted to take part in the celebrations organised on December 1st, the Romanian National Day, but he was criticised by the authorities for having kept May 10 as the date for the celebration of the Romanian National Day, so the government claimed that in granting a visa to Michael I, he would be receiving a special treatment, different from that of an ordinary Romanian. In April 1994, a few dozen opposition MPs called for national reconciliation during the Easter holidays, claiming that the King would not challenge the constitutional order on his return to the country — despite negotiations between the government and the royal house, the visit was eventually cancelled, with officials alleging that the King might be in danger as security forces were reportedly overwhelmed by possible clashes between supporters and opponents of the monarch. In the summer of 1994, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of August 23, 1944, several organisations sent invitations to the King to visit the country; the authorities intervened preemptively, trying to minimise the King's and Romania's contribution to the end of the Second World War, and the King was turned back at the airport. Furthermore, in the autumn of 1995, when the funeral of Corneliu Coposu took place, the King was not allowed to enter the country<sup>73</sup>.

A distinctive feature of the 1996 elections was the formation of political coalitions, although the most influential entities remained the PDSR, representing the incumbent government, and the CDR, representing the opposition. Despite the presence of sixteen presidential candidates, the primary contenders were Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu, as in 1992.

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<sup>73</sup> Muraru, *Cum supravieţuieşte monarhia într-o republică*, pp. 133; 137; 146; 163.

President Ion Iliescu's image changed during his four years in office. The Western press praised him for Romania's foreign policy, which was clearly directed towards the West. First among the former communist nations to sign NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994, Romania also filed its application for membership in the European Union in 1995<sup>74</sup>. In addition, reform and modernisation characterised domestic policy, with a focus on privatisation—a notable change from earlier years—as well as support for agriculture, among other things.

The pre-election opinion polls showed a decrease in support for candidate Ion Iliescu<sup>75</sup>, which might be the explanation for why the PDSR's electoral marketing strategy included a significant negative campaign against the other candidates. This time, the topic of "restoring the monarchy" was pushed even harder and with more approaches, including speeches by party leader and prime ministerial candidate Adrian Năstase, television commercials, posters, flyers<sup>76</sup>, leaflets dropped from aircraft<sup>77</sup>, and phone campaigns disguised as opinion polls.

The foreign press took note of the electoral campaign's use of "media violence," with "France Presse" highlighting a broadcast by Romanian TV

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<sup>74</sup> "Reuters: «Iliescu a renunțat la limbajul epocii comuniste»" [Reuters: 'Iliescu has abandoned the communist-era rhetoric'], in *Adevărul*, No. 1963, September 4, 1996: p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Mureșan, *Destinația Cotroceni*, pp. 115–116.

<sup>76</sup> As the electoral campaign drew to a close, a series of messages were distributed in Bacău, a provincial city, which sought to draw parallels between the current political situation and historical events. These messages, which were disseminated through electoral materials, highlighted perceived similarities between the current political landscape and that of the past, particularly in relation to the monarchy, the Constitution, and the restoration of large properties. One such message read, "After 50 years, history repeats itself: the former King Michael, Emil Constantinescu, and the PNȚCD are once again handing us over to Russia." Another stated, "They want monarchy; they want the Constitution annulled; they want the restoration of the boyar estates and the recovery of the large properties." See: Cristina Roșca, "La Bacău au fost răspândite foi volante în care se spune că: «Ex-regele Mihai, Emil Constantinescu și țăraniștii ne dau din nou pe mâna Rusiei»" [In Bacău, flyers have been distributed saying that "Ex-King Michael, Emil Constantinescu and the PNȚCD are once again handing us over to Russia"], in *Evenimentul zilei*, Year 5 (1325), October 30, 1996: p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> During a CDR electoral rally held in Revolution Square in Bucharest, the area was subject to leaflet drops from aircraft, which distributed printed material outlining the potential "dangers" of a CDR government. The material in question highlighted concerns regarding the monarchy, the possibility of land being reclaimed, pensions, and the prevention of the purchase of nationalised houses. See: Oana Iurașcu, "În Piața Revoluției, CDR a ținut mitingul certitudinii victoriei" [In Revolution Square, CDR held the rally of the certain victory], in *Adevărul*, No. 2013, November 1, 1996: p. 3.

stations that aired in the advertising space reserved for candidate Ion Iliescu and the PDSR. "Constantinescu's face is displayed on the screen and gradually transitions to that of the former King Michael, who was forced to abdicate by the communists in 1947 and has been residing in exile in Switzerland ever since."<sup>78</sup> On the same episode, Ion Iliescu's image director, who later resigned from this position, Eugen Mihăiescu characterized the clip as offensive, "banal, tasteless, and cheap," appreciating that "this is what happens when you let go of primitive ideas, unfiltered through the act of creation"<sup>79</sup>. On the other hand, the CDR responded with a similar clip in which the figure of Ion Iliescu turns into that of Nicolae Ceaușescu<sup>80</sup>. Despite these circumstances, as observed by journalists such as Cristian Tudor Popescu, the anticipated media effect did not materialise. This was because the population was not preoccupied with the matter of restoring the monarchy; instead, their concerns centred on the high cost of living and the prevalence of corruption. Consequently, the monarchist coup d'état foreseen by Adrian Nastase did not occur, and the rhetoric that instilled fear of the "return of the landlords and the king" failed to exert any discernible influence on the political or electoral landscape<sup>81</sup>. The same politician also invoked the figure of Corneliu Coposu<sup>82</sup>, who he said, "made a contract with His Majesty King Michael to bring him back to the country," and the CDR would be the executors of the former PNȚCD president<sup>83</sup>.

Another highly controversial moment related to the PDSR and Ion Iliescu's campaign emerged in the press in early October 1996. Several journalists, in collaboration with representatives of the "December 21"

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<sup>78</sup> "France Presse consideră campania electorală din România «de o violență mediatică fără precedent»" [France Presse calls Romanian election campaign "of unprecedented media violence"], in *Evenimentul zilei*, Year 5 (1325), October 30, 1996: p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Răzvan Mitroi, "Războiul clipurilor electorale" [The war of election videos], in *Adevărul*, No. 1970, September 12, 1996: p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> Cristian Tudor Popescu, "Trei, Doamne, și toți trei!" [Three, Lord, and all three!], in *Adevărul*, No. 1964, September 5, 1996: p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Corneliu Coposu served as president of the PNȚCD from 1990 to 1995, as well as the leader of the CDR. He was a prominent figure within the party, with close ties to its interwar history. He had been imprisoned in communist political jails and emerged as a leading opponent of Ion Iliescu after the Romanian Revolution of 1989. Additionally, he was a vocal supporter of King Michael I's return to Romania.

<sup>83</sup> Lia Bejan, Răzvan Mitroi, "Din lipsă de «combatanți», defilarea PDSR-iștilor a fost anulată" [For lack of "combatants", the PDSR-ists' parade was canceled], in *Adevărul*, No. 2013, November 1, 1996: p. 3.



Association, made an incursion into a space where, according to official data, an opinion poll was being conducted. The telephones used were provided by Romtelecom, a state-owned enterprise. This information is relevant because the questionnaire used by the employees included nine questions, three of which enquired about voting intentions, and the remaining six were designed in a way that prompted the interlocutor to learn about a negative aspect of the other candidates and then be asked to opine on the matter<sup>84</sup>. One of the questions addressed the subject of this study and was phrased as follows: "Constantinescu, president of the CDR, has stated that his first act upon becoming president would be to reinstate King Michael to the throne. Considering this assertion, would you say that your confidence in Emil Constantinescu has increased or decreased?"<sup>85</sup>

Emil Constantinescu's campaign in 1996 differed from his previous one in several respects. The anti-communist rhetoric that had previously characterised his campaign was absent, and the issue of the rural world played a significant role in his program. The four years spent in opposition allowed Constantinescu to identify himself with the idea of a "united opposition candidate," thereby becoming a fully-fledged politician and being perceived as such<sup>86</sup>. Regarding the matter of the "restoration of the monarchy," a topic that the PDSR has sought to link with the CDR candidate, each time the question was posed to Constantinescu, he provided a definitive response. From these statements, two key elements emerge: firstly, that should the king return to the country, he would do so as a citizen, not as a monarch; and secondly, that there is no intention to hold a referendum on the form of state<sup>87</sup>. It is noteworthy that the opposition candidate has demonstrated a greater inclination to disseminate the positive aspects of his campaign program. This has involved a focus on the reform projects he intends to implement, coupled with a minimal engagement with the campaign themes of the PDSR and Ion Iliescu.

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<sup>84</sup> Marius Mureșan, "Politică și presă: reflectarea campaniei electorale din 1996 în ziarul «Evenimentul zilei»" [Politics and press: the 1996 election campaign reflected in "Evenimentul zilei" newspaper], in *Revista Philohistoriss*, New Series, Year 2 (4), December 2016: p. 87.

<sup>85</sup> "PDSR manipulează electoratul pe firul scurt" [PDSR manipulates the electorate on the short thread], in *Adevărul*, No. 1986, October 1, 1996: p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Camelia Beciu, *Politica discursivă. Practici politice într-o campanie electorală* (Iași: Polirom, 2000), pp. 71-72.

<sup>87</sup> Oana Iurașcu, "Emil Constantinescu: Dacă regele va reveni în țară, o va face ca simplu cetățean" [Emil Constantinescu: If the King returns to the country, he will do so as a private citizen], in *Adevărul*, No. 1979, September 23, 1996: p. 1.

With the beginning of the campaign for the second round of elections, Michael Shafir observed a change in the tone of Ion Iliescu's messages. Iliescu presented himself as the only candidate capable of guaranteeing a balanced policy and counterbalancing the excesses of the government, thus playing the extremist and nationalistic card, mainly because the PDSR had lost the parliamentary elections, and most political parties chose to support his opponent<sup>88</sup>. The most notable shift in rhetoric occurred in a speech delivered in Alba Iulia towards the conclusion of the campaign. Media outlets widely disseminated this speech, which saw Ion Iliescu departing from his previously moderate stance and adopting a more aggressive tone. He vehemently criticised the opposition and Emil Constantinescu, citing concerns such as the autonomy of Hungarians and revisiting historical topics like monarchy, the issue of nationalised houses, and state pensions<sup>89</sup>. On the other hand, he referred to the association of Emil Constantinescu with Petre Roman, about the latter claiming that "he has no real roots among the Romanian people,"<sup>90</sup> a claim that was seen as being particularly controversial given Roman's Jewish origins. In analysing this episode, Ion Cristoiu identified a shift towards a more radicalised left-wing discourse and observed that the themes deployed in the previous elections were being reiterated, indicating a lack of capacity to present a positive electoral offer<sup>91</sup>.

Conversely, Emil Constantinescu concentrated on a discourse concerning the necessity of constructing a new Romania<sup>92</sup>, a constructive, future-orientated message designed to instill confidence. Consequently, the triumph of the CDR candidate was also influenced by a notable disparity between the two candidates' visions: Constantinescu's constructive and Iliescu's critical, unaccountable, and reminiscent of the campaigns of the early 1990s.

The 1996 presidential elections were won by Emil Constantinescu. Paradoxically, the PDSR and Ion Iliescu lost the elections on a political platform that was similar to the ones that had been successful for them in

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Shafir, "Alegerile din România: un sufragiu istoric" [Romanian elections: a historic vote], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 5 (45), 1996: p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Teodorescu, *Cea mai bună dintre lumile posibile*, p. 79.

<sup>90</sup> Shafir, "Alegerile din România: un sufragiu istoric": p.27.

<sup>91</sup> Ion Cristoiu, "De ce trebuie să nu mai fie ales Ion Iliescu" [Why Ion Iliescu should no longer be elected], in *Evenimentul zilei*, Year 5 (1338), November 14, 1996: p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Sfârșitul excepționalismului românesc: epitaf pentru a treia cale" [The end of Romanian exceptionalism: epitaph for a third way], in *Sfera Politicii*, Year 5 (45), 1996: p. 23.

1990 and 1992<sup>93</sup>. The approach of the opposition and its candidate changed. While in 1992 the CDR had no response to the intimidation tactics of the ruling party, in the 1996 campaign they opted for a rather positive message: one of the most visible solutions was the "Contract with Romania," modelled on the 1994 US Republican campaign, a document that promised to solve the problems of the country in 200 days, otherwise the government would have to resign. Gradually, with these changes, analysts have appreciated that the CDR proposed an even more left-wing program than that of the PDSR<sup>94</sup>. In other words, in the second round, Constantinescu's speech was addressed not only to the electorate that voted for him in the first round (large and medium-sized cities), but also to those who voted for Petre Roman, i.e., the rural areas, which led to important changes in his rhetoric, and the speech took on populist, symbolic accents<sup>95</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

As has been demonstrated, the political party that seized authority in Romania following the 1989 Revolution rapidly resolved the question of the country's form of government, including from a legal standpoint. In this regard, the CFSN Declaration of December 1989, the Electoral Law of March 1990, and the Constitution of September 1991 are of particular significance. Notwithstanding the aforementioned circumstances, the possibility of reverting to the monarchical traditions of the interwar period constituted a recurrent theme in the discourse of politicians affiliated with the ruling party, particularly during the electoral campaigns for the presidency. The research undertaken for this study underscores the perception of a lack of political and electoral legitimacy on the part of Ion Iliescu and his party.

In light of the numerous instances when King Michael I was forbidden from entering the country, and in alignment with the stances of Romanian politicians and intellectuals, a symbolic conflict emerged between the royal family and the political group led by Ion Iliescu. Consequently, two contrasting perspectives emerged, one perceiving the authorities' stance as a means of safeguarding the achievements of the revolution and the other, that of the opposition, viewing the conflict as a struggle between the neo-communist authorities and democratic parties.

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<sup>93</sup> Dan Oprescu, "Despre înfrânți și învingători" [About losers and winners], in *Sfera politicii*, Year 5 (44), 1996: p. 21.

<sup>94</sup> Shafir, "Alegerile din România: un sufragiu istoric": p. 25.

<sup>95</sup> Dan Oprescu, "Despre înfrânți și învingători": p. 22.

Despite the fact that the theme was referenced in 1990, 1992, and 1996, it is evident that the Romanian electorate has matured over time. Additionally, it can be observed that the population has become more concerned with immediate issues. With the advent of pragmatic problems of immediate necessity, such as economic problems—including a lack of jobs and difficult living conditions—as well as economic crises, the anti-monarchist discourse became less and less relevant. Similarly, the anti-communist discourse of the opposition lost its importance. In conclusion, the subject of the "restoration of the monarchy" was not a topic in itself, as the question of the form of government had already been settled. Rather, it referred to a return to a model of society specific to the first part of the 20th century. It was for this reason that another sub-theme was permanently linked to it, namely the retrocession of land to the former owners of the interwar period, who were referred to as "moșieri"<sup>96</sup> in communist discourse.

It is therefore evident that, despite the inability to ascertain the precise impact of the promotion of this theme on the political choices of the electorate, it played a role in the creation of a meticulously crafted scenario by the political party that held power between 1990 and 1996. This party successfully used specific themes and capitalised on the fears and anxieties of a population that had been held captive for four decades by the communist regime.

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<sup>96</sup> i.e. *Landlords*.

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