



CUZA’S RULE, THE CORNERSTONE OF MODERN ROMANIA. SEVEN YEARS OF INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION. POLITICAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: *FROM THE MOMENT WHEN THE MOLDAVIAN UNIONISTS ELECTED HIM THE RULER OF MOLDAVIA ON 5 JANUARY 1859, ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA BECAME ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICIAN IN ROMANIAN HISTORY. EACH OF THOSE WRITERS, WHO FOCUSED UPON HIS PERSONALITY, WROTE OR SPOKE ABOUT EITHER ON HIS QUALITIES OR HIS DRAWBACKS, OR BOTH. CUZA WAS, AS EVERYBODY KNOWS, AMONG THE FEW HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES OF THE TIMES, WHO SUCCEEDED TO EXIST IN THE COMMUNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY. THE FACT IS DIFFICULT ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN, AT LEAST THEORETICALLY, AS LONG AS CUZA’S NAME RELATES WITH THE FIRST LAW, WHICH EFFECTED THE PEASANTS’ TAKING INTO POSSESSION OF THE LAND THEY WORKED. INTERESTINGLY, THE AUTHORITIES OF THE POPULAR REPUBLIC WALKED THROUGH THE REVERSE PROCESS TOWARD COLLECTIVIZATION, WHICH DISPOSSESSED THE PEASANTS OF THEIR LAND, WHOSE PROPRIETORS BECAME DURING CUZA. JUST LIKE THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES, WHICH GOVERNED ROMANIA, THE COMMUNISTS THOUGH THEY FOUND THE PERFECT SOLUTION TO SOLVE THE LONG-LASTING ISSUE, THAT AGRICULTURAL.*

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INTRODUCTION

Interestingly, it is likely that, in case the Moldavian Unionists had not elected him ruler of Moldavia and lately of Valahia, the name of Alexandru Ioan Cuza would have had the same historical resonance as any other headman of Galați before him or after. His double election transformed Cuza in „a man worthy of his legend and a legend created around himself worthy of him”, as Nicolae Iorga characterized him in his speech commemorating 100 years since the ruler’s birth. At least apparently, Cuza’s successful election on the throne of Moldavia is interesting enough. He did not descend from



a ruling family, nor was he a representative of the great boyars. On the other hand, Cuza met the conditions established by the Paris Convention, which were more lax than the previous ones regarding the candidates. Namely, the candidate should have been 35 years old and should have had a land income of 3,000 gold coins, seniority of at least 10 years in public office as well as that of citizenship (Ionescu, 2016, p. 307). In contrast, for exercising the election right, the prerequisites were very restrictive (Brăiloiu, 1865, p. 30).

MAIN TEXT

Cuza was the representative of an old boyar family in Moldavia. Two of his ancestors had tragic destinies. Thus, Dumitru Cuza who had reached the dignity of supreme commander of the army in the absence of the ruler was killed at the order of ruler Mihai Racoviță (Xenopol, p. 8). Ioan or Ioniță Cuza was beheaded with Manolache Bogdan at the order of Constantin Dimitrie Moruzi (Elitele puterii ..., 2018, p. 260) in 1778.

As Nicolae Iorga wrote, that who was to become the first ruler of the United Principalities “was in Paris, too, in that Paris of the great political and social violent troubles... studied law, yet did not learn too much there”. Studying law represented a custom for the young boyars in early 19th century, most of them choosing the destination Paris. When Iorga states that Cuza did not learn much in Paris, referred to the fact that the ruler did not achieve what the first generation of conservative members called “the spirit of French disobedience” (Ploscaru, 2013, p. 531). Iorga considers this an advantage because the ideas “fashionable” in France’s capital were not mostly proper for the political and social situation in the Principalities (Iorga, p. 27).

As for Cuza’s studies, A. D. Xenopol wrote that he completed his high school with the baccalaureate degree in Letters in Paris. Lately, unsuccessful yet, he tried to study medicine. Only after this unsuccessful attempt, Cuza chose legal studies, yet without earning a degree in this sense (Xenopol, 1903, p. 28).

Politically speaking, Alexandru Ioan Cuza was neither the “rustiest” of the conservative members, nor the most radical of the liberal ones. The moderate tendencies had certain importance in Cuza’s double election. Additionally, the fact that Cuza had no royal lineage was also important. Conservative and liberal members alike probably reckoned that it would be easier to negotiate eventual different political disputes with a Cuza rather than a Sturdza, Rosetti or Ghica.

Nonetheless, in the beginning, Cuza’s rule was extremely elated to explain if we think that the most important event in the Romanian took place. Vasile Boerescu describes the harmony underlying the union in the following terms, “Thanks to you, electors of Romania, who could defeat all your passions and forget about all the selfish interests, suppress any hatred and forget about any personal sympathy or antipathy in order to put on our country’s altar, as pure as possible this principle of general reconciliation and national power” (Boerescu, 1910, pp. 6-7).

Unfortunately, the situation has changed in time. The political dynamics during Cuza’s rule we find “portrayed” in some verses written in 1866, it seems:

“După ce ‘mpreună mi s’au tărbăcit,
Roșii și cu Albii s’au încumetrit;
Însă nu se scie, Roșii au albit,
Sau mai bine Albii au mai rumenit.
Roșii dicu că Albii legea ‘și.au călcat,
Albii dicu că Roșii lingu unde-au scuipat”. (Aricescu, 1884, p. 48)

(After they fought together,
The Red and the Whites befriended



Yet nobody knows, the Red turned White
Or even better, the White turned Red.
The Red said the White betrayed their law,
The White said that the Red licked their spat. (translator's note))

In the same speech, Boerescu recognized also the importance of the Protective Powers in accomplishing the Union (Boerescu, 1910, p. 7). Besides the first aim of Cuza was to obtain the agreement of these great powers and that of the sultan regarding the union, to this aim, making use of all the means he found available (Iacob, 2013, p. 65).

The historians considered as drawbacks of Cuza's rule, his Cesar tendencies of installing an authoritarian regime, his personal life marked by his extramarital affairs as well as the boom ascension of Cezar Librecht who became an important character of powerful and nefarious influence upon the ruler. As for the personal life, Cuza was not the only ruler with extramarital affairs, because many of the rulers in Moldavia and Valahia had descendants from extramarital affairs. Whether and how many descendants, Cuza had from extramarital affairs, is as important as it is how many descendants, another ruler had. Certainly, in the situation that the politicians considered Cuza's mandate as a transition period toward a monarchic system, which had at the top a foreign prince. Whereas this foreign prince's gesture to adopt Cuza's two sons resulted from his extramarital affair with Maria Obrenovici, interpreted as a tentative to install a Cuza's dynasty, which the Romanian political life considered a regress.

With respect to Cuza's authoritarian tendencies, we have to mention that they began to be manifest in the latter part of his ruling. Whereas in his first years of ruling, until the administration union, it was rather difficult for the ruler to impose, his political demand as long as he worked with two governments, two legislative assemblies and in addition with the Central Commission with the headquarters at Focșani, until its dissolution in February 1862.

After the accomplishment of the Union, the first chair of the Ministries Council appointed Barbu Catargiu, the spearhead (at the forefront) of the Conservative party. Courage is the most frequently utilized word in characterizing the first victim of a political murder in Romania. In talking about himself, about his behaviour in the political life, Barbu Catargiu said, "I think that I have always proved, in my deeds, I was courageous and I have never made use of charlatanism... As for the moral courage in the parliament, I think, during the 20 years, I have proven that I have never bent my head in front of the adversaries, but rather I looked them straight in their eyes" (Demetrescu 1914, p. 316). Mihail Kogălniceanu, his political and oratorical adversary, talked also about courage in a meeting of the Deputies Assembly, on 9 February 1863. "Honour to this man who was courageous enough to enunciate his opinions and loyalty to maintain the responsibility of his deeds... They would say that the ruler (Cuza) dignified and the ministries bend their heads out of convenience... Yet, why they did not have the courage to maintain their responsibility? Why they did not imitate Barbu Catargiu?" (Demetrescu, 1914, p. XX).

The courage, intransigence, verticality were not mere words in the case of Catargiu. His last political speech as a Prime Minister would prove that. Interestingly, questioned by C. Filipescu regarding the possibility to authorize a public manifestation to mark the events on 11 June 1848, Catargiu expressed his disagreement for organizing such a manifestation. As the author of approach, he reminded of the same manifestation, a year before, had unfortunate political consequences. Therefore, Barbu Catargiu concluded his speech with following words, "Peace, gentlemen, peace and rest is the country's solution, and I myself prefer to die before trespassing or let anybody trespass the institutions of the country!" (Demetrescu, 1914, p. 368). Shortly after concluding this speech, they



were to murder Catargiu while he was preparing to leave the headquarters of the Deputies Assembly upon Dealu Mitropoliei.

Soon after the assassination of Barbu Catargiu, an inquiry began led by the prosecutor Iancu Deșliu, who coordinated the inquiry “with an energy worthy of the crime magnitude” (Neagoe, 1992, p. 74). Among the procedures utilized by the inquirers was intercepting the correspondence of one of the most important politician of the times. They dismissed the prosecutor of the case, Iancu Deșliu, a month after he began the inquiry, and after the central press published an aggressive article about the magistrate on 11 July 1862 (Neagoe, 1992, p. 74).

The inquiry in the case of Barbu Catargiu’s murder has never completed and the author of the murder remained unknown. The fact arose many speculations. Not only was Catargiu the chair of the Ministries Council, but also the most important member of the conservative party. Besides, the shock among the conservative members was huge. Consequently, the hunch regarding the complot fell upon the political adversaries. The most floated names were the ruler Cuza as well as of the radical liberal leaders, Ion C. Brătianu and C. A. Rosetti (Neagoe, 1992, pp. 33, 74).

Moreover, the name of Cezar Librecht always connected with the corrupt system and the camarilla created around Cuza, especially in the latter part of his ruling. In characterizing the influence of that who would become the general director of the mail and telegraph, got to have in Romania, Dimitrie Bolintineanu wrote that the institution led by him “represented a state within a state; the ministry could do nothing...the director of the telegraph was the core of the real government...he appointed and dismissed ministries, when they did not comply with his requirements” (Bolintineanu, 1869, pp. 63-64). Surely, this description contains some exaggerations, especially that Bolintineanu himself acknowledged in the same article “the women’s camarilla is the most terrible...after 2nd of May we had women’s camarilla” (Bolintineanu, 1869, p. 64).

The first government constituted in Moldavia on 17 January 1859 consisted of Vasile Sturdza as the chair of the Ministries Council and Minister of Home Affairs, Vasile Alecsandri, Lascăr Rosetti, Manolache Costache Epureanu, Constantin Rolla, Constantin Milicescu and Dimitrie Scarlat Miclescu. The government was supposed to terminate its mandate on 6 March 1859, two months after investment (Xenopol, p. 24). Ioan Filipescu led the first government installed in Bucharest. The executive also comprised Barbu Catargiu, Ioan Cantacuzino, Grigore Filipescu, Barbu Vlădoianu, Nicolae Golescu and Dimitrie Brătianu. This one had a longer existence; it terminated its mandate on 27 March 1859 (Xenopol, p. 26).

Until terminating the unification process of the two principalities in the beginning of 1862, Alexandru Ioan Cuza had collaborated with seven governments in Moldavia and nine governments in Valahia in only three years. Of the governments, which activated in Moldavia, the government led by Ion Ghica had the shortest mandate, (8 March – 27 April 1859), while that led by Mihail Kogălniceanu was the longest (30 April 1860 – 17 January 1861).

In Bucharest, the government with the shortest period was that of Barbu Catargiu, who was to become lately, the first chair of the Ministry Council of the United Principalities. The government in Valahia activated from 30 April until 12 May, thus only two weeks. The longest was the government of Manolache Costache Epureanu, whose mandate lasted nine months (13 July 1860 – 14 April 1861), a real record for that period (Neagoe, 1995). After the accomplishment of the administrative unification, Cuza would work with five more governments until his abdication.

Interestingly, in a relatively equal interval with that of Cuza’s rule, Carol I faced the same political instability. Thus, ever since he came in the country until the incidents in Slătineanu room, which led finally to the installation of the order government of Lascăr Catargiu (10 March 1871), Carol worked with no less than nine governments, of which the shortest was the first government proper, that led by Lascăr Catargiu. The government was active in the period 11 May until 13 July 1866. The counterpart,



the longest was the government led by Dimitrie Ghica, the only, which resisted more than a year, since 16 November until 27 January 1870 (Mamina, Bulei, 1994).

Only after five years, Carol I succeeded in finding the governmental formula to remain in office five years. Until the end of his rule, Carol did not face periods of governmental instability as that in his first years. The fact was due to his political wisdom to rotate the two parties to govern. This pattern called the governmental rotating. Yet, did not Cuza attempt such a rotating the governing parties by replacing the conservative parties with those liberal and the other way round? Nonetheless, time was more patient with Carol I, while the pattern Cuza imposed that of “swing arm”, they considered unwise (Bolintineanu, 1869, p. 65).

It is worth mentioning, though that the legislative process was extremely complex. They legislated the most diverse organizational domains of the state. The most important of them were, certainly the constitutional regulations, represented by adopting the Developer State of the Paris Convention, 2 July 1864 (Ionescu, 2016, pp. 373-377). In the domain of justice, they adopted a law to organize the Court of Cassation and Justice. The evolution of the press not did only led to the emergence of censorship, but also to adopting a law to regulate this domain in 1862. Nevertheless, an important step forward was secularization of the monastery treasures.

Yet, the year 1864 was the densest speaking from the legislation point of view. In fact, it is about the latter half of the year, when Cuza had his vision imprinted upon it. The most important laws were that regarding education (public instruction), the law regarding the organization of the army, the law regarding the admission and promotion in judicial offices, as well as the law for constituting the body of advocates (Istoria ..., 1983, p. 143).

Although the parliament procedure was more accessible to the ruler, they adopted some regulations based on decrees framed by the State Council. The most important of them was the agrarian reform. Another important decree, adopted at the end of 1864 aimed at constituting a central ecumenical synod to enshrine the autocephaly of the Romanian church toward the Patriarchy of Constantinople (Istoria ..., 1983, pp. 143-144).

In 1860, they founded the first university in Romania at Iași. Four years later, on 4 July 1864, Cuza adopted a decree to found the Bucharest University.

Another, significant regulation was to replace gradually the Slavonian graphics with the Latin writing. Then, he also regulated the introduction of the metrical system in Romania.

All in all, these legislative provisions not did they only contribute to modernize Romania, but also to prepare it for the next steps, appointing a sovereign in a foreign dynasty, obtaining independence of the state and participating in the World War I which concluded with the adding Bessarabia, Bucovina, Transylvania, Crișana and Banat to the territory of the old kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Despite all these, Cuza's seven years of ruling represents a period very important for Romania's later evolution. We cannot talk about reforms, but of a true process of development, emergence of the main institutional structures of the country.

This process of institutional construction is so much spectacular as it took place in a period dominated by a powerful political instability, a period in which the governments succeeded in short intervals of time.

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