



1/2021

THE NSF AND ITS TRANSFORMATION INTO A POLITICAL PARTY

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Abstract: *THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT WAS A POLITICAL PARTY THAT EMERGED AS A RESULT OF THE INTENTION EXPRESSED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT COUNCIL THAT THE PROVISIONAL BODY OF STATE POWER CREATED ON THE EVENING OF 22 DECEMBER 1989 SHOULD BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY. THE NEW PARTY WAS REGISTERED AT THE BUCHAREST MUNICIPAL COURT ON 6 FEBRUARY 1990. AS A RESULT OF THIS PROCESS AND THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, A NEW BODY WAS FORMED TO PROVISIONALLY ENSURE THE STATE GOVERNMENT UNTIL THE FIRST FREE ELECTIONS, THE PROVISIONAL COUNCIL OF NATIONAL UNION. GRADUALLY, TWO CAMPS WERE FORMED WITHIN THE PARTY WITH DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON THE TYPE OF REFORMS TO BE CARRIED OUT, ONE SUPPORTING PRESIDENT ION ILIESCU AND THE OTHER PRIME MINISTER PETRE ROMAN. THE INTERNAL CRISIS WAS RESOLVED FOLLOWING THE SPLIT OF THE ILIESCU GROUP ON 29 MARCH 1992. FOLLOWING THIS SPLIT, THE NSF WAS LEFT WITHOUT ELECTORAL SUPPORT, GOING INTO OPPOSITION AFTER THE AUTUMN 1992 ELECTIONS. AFTER THE MERGER BETWEEN THE NSF AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ON 31 MARCH 1993, A NEW LEGAL ENTITY, DP-NSF, WAS CREATED, FORMALISED BY DECISION NO. 13 OF THE BUCHAREST MUNICIPAL COURT ON 23 MAY 1993*

Keywords: *NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT, POLITICAL PARTY, ION ILIESCU, PETRE ROMAN, DEMOCRATIC PARTY, OPPOSITION, MINERIADA*

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The working hypothesis is that the political actions of the NSF were manipulative from the very first days of its emergence until it became a political party, even though all along it maintained that it would not become a political party.

The National Salvation Front appeared as a provisional organ of state power on the evening of 22 December 1989, with the intention of "establishing democracy, freedom and dignity of the Romanian people". In the "Communique to the Country" issued that same evening, the first elements of this body's programme were announced: political pluralism, separation of powers in the state,



organisation of free elections, restructuring of the national economy etc. There are many views on the legality and constitutionality of this political construction¹. In any case, any revolutionary formation that overthrows a political regime is illegal within the legal system of that political regime. That is why from the perspective of the communist regime the NSF is an illegal construction, but in the logic of a revolution it was obligatory for such an organ of state power to appear and have constitutional prerogatives, as the NSF did when it established a political programme containing: political pluralism, separation of powers in the state, organisation of free elections, market economy, etc. In spite of this democratic programme, the aim of the newly formed political group was to put down the communist nomenclature and replace it with opponents of Ceausescu, second-tier nomenclaturists or fallen nomenclaturists. In the first days of the revolution, Ion Iliescu and the new leadership were still addressing each other with the old formula "comrade" on live TV, signalling that they only wanted to exchange bad communists for good communists.

Among the 39 founding members, announced on Romanian television by Ion Iliescu on the evening of 22 December, were opponents of the communist regime such as Doinea Cornea, Mircea Dinescu, Ana Blandiana, Laszlo Tokes, Ion Caramitru, but also members of the nomenclature, opponents of the Ceausescu regime or marginalised by the regime: Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Dan Marțian, Ion Iliescu, Corneliu Mănescu, Silviu Brucan, Dumitru Mazilu, etc. (see *National Salvation Front Council*).

On 27 December, the structure of the Executive Bureau of the NSFC was also announced, with Ion Iliescu being elected President.

Delaying the election of the president of the NSFC seemed to be the expected result of the crystallization of a leader in the new political structure. In fact, things were already settled, Ion Iliescu was preparing a group to take over the leadership well before December 22. That is why he was expected to become the leader.

The popularity of Ion Iliescu and his team was so great and manifest that it was expected that at any moment they would want to take over the country's leadership in the long term. However, it is unclear why Ion Iliescu claimed that he did not want to turn the NSF into a political party. Probably in a manipulative totalitarian scenario he wanted the population to mobilize to support them and "ask" them to come to the leadership of the country as if it were the only political solution.

Although on 3 January 1990 the NSF announced that it was not and would not become a political party, on 23 January, with 128 votes in favour, 8 against and 5 abstentions, the CNSF decided to transform the NSF into a political party. This provoked protests and the resignation of personalities such as Doina Cornea, Ana Blandiana, Ion Caramitru and Mircea Dinescu. These were people of culture who entered the revolutionary game with good intentions and good faith and realized that their good image was taken advantage of to facilitate the goals of the NSF and Ion Iliescu.

On 28 January, the newly established political parties, led by the PNT-CD and PNL, staged a large protest against this decision. The next day, the NSF organised a counter-demonstration, during which the opposition parties' offices were ransacked. Ion Iliescu wanted to give an important lesson to the opposition parties, on the one hand that they could not be measured by the NSF force and on the other hand that they could always be physically suppressed.

In order to stop a progressive degeneration of these events, a meeting was held on 1 February between representatives of the NSFC and the opposition parties. As a result of the discussions, a communiqué was issued² agreeing on the establishment of a Provisional Council of National Unity, made up by restructuring the current NSFC and by equal representation, with 3 members each, of the

¹ Adrian Gorun, 1989

² PRESS RELEASE on the establishment of the Provisional National Union Council and the transformation of the National Salvation Front into a political party



parties constituted up to that date in the proportion of 50% of the total membership. Ion Iliescu threw a "bone" to the opposition political parties, drawing them into a government of national unity that legitimized him and the NSF as the real leaders, gave him time to discredit to the point of demonization the opposition leaders and win the elections by a landslide.

Thus, the National Salvation Front eventually becomes a political party with its own structure and platform, participating on an equal footing with the rest of the political forces in the elections, while the Provisional Council of National Union becomes the new provisional body of state power, awaiting the establishment of new institutions as a result of free elections.

On 6 February 1990, the National Salvation Front registered as a political party with the Bucharest Municipal Court. Ion Iliescu was elected as provisional president until the first National Conference. At the same time, by decree-law of 9 February, the CNSF was reorganised into the Provisional Council of National Union, with Iliescu elected president of the new provisional body of state power.

The first National Conference of the NSF took place on 7/8 April and as a result Ion Iliescu was elected President of the party and was nominated as its candidate for the presidential elections. The election campaign that followed was a highly disputed one and marked by the phenomenon in University Square. Believing that the new power resulting from the Decembrist revolution was mimicking democracy and was in fact nothing more than a rotation of the former nomenclature, a group of young students from Bucharest universities occupied Bucharest's University Square, chanting and demonstrating against the authorities. They were immediately joined by thousands of people, students, intellectuals and representatives of civil society, as the area was declared *free of neo-communism* and *ground zero of democracy*.

Holding all the levers of power in the state, the NSF secured a clear victory in the first free elections of 20 May 1990: 66.31% of the votes for the Assembly of Deputies and 67.53% of the votes for the Senate, sending 263 deputies and 91 senators to Parliament out of a total of 395 and 118 respectively. Ion Iliescu also won an overwhelming victory in the presidential elections, with 85.07% of all valid votes cast.

Having obtained an absolute majority in Parliament, the NSF appointed the first presidents of the two legislative bodies, Dan Mărțian for the Assembly of Deputies and Alexandru Bârlădeanu for the Senate. On 20 June 1990, Ion Iliescu was sworn in before Parliament as President of Romania, and on 28 June the government led by Petre Roman was formed.

The most striking events that took place between the elections and the formation of the new institutions were caused by the June 13/15 miners' riot. Although after 24 May most of the demonstrators in University Square had left the area, those who remained refused to vacate it. On the morning of 13 June, the forces of law and order had to intervene forcefully against the demonstrators, resulting in bloody clashes between the protesters and the authorities. The following day, the miners from the Valea Jiului, led by Miron Cozma, arrived in Bucharest, and they liberated the area through violence and physical aggression, devastating the offices of public institutions and those of historical parties (see *Mineriada of 13/15 June 1990*).

Since the Decree-Law no.92/14 March 1990 prohibited the President of Romania to be part of a political party, on 26 July 1990, the leadership of the NSF was taken over by Petre Roman under the title of national leader. Over time, two groups with divergent positions began to form within the party, the supporters of President Iliescu and those of Prime Minister Petre Roman.

The NSF Convention of 16/17 March 1991 marked the confirmation of Petre Roman at the head of the party and the adoption of the Statutes. At the same time, the programme "A Future for Romania" was adopted, which foresaw "a radical and profound reform of Romanian society", through the formation of the labour market, the market for products and services, the restoration of property or



the elimination of the financial blockade. The first tensions arose on this occasion, with some NSF MPs considering the programme too radical and accusing Petre Roman of having turned to neoliberalism. They founded a new party called NSF - 20 May.

The crisis within the party was deepened by the political crisis that followed the miners' strike of 24/28 September 1991. Following the failure to resolve some of the union's demands, the miners from the Valea Jiului arrive in Bucharest for the fourth time, resulting in further violent clashes between the police and the miners. On 26 September, Petre Roman resigns as Prime Minister. The political crisis is resolved with the appointment of Theodor Stolojan as Prime Minister and the formation of a new government on 16 October.

The culmination of the differences between the two groups was Petre Roman's announcement on 26 November 1991 that the NSF had withdrawn its political support from President Ion Iliescu, who was accused of violating the Constitution and of "capitulating to actions against the law in September". Supporters of the two groups began to accuse each other of irreconcilable positions.

The split between the two groups was formalised at the Convention of 27/29 March 1992. A group of 65 deputies and 60 senators, 5 ministers and 18 prefects, supporters of President Iliescu, left the NSF and a month later founded a new political party called the Front for Democracy and National Salvation (FDSN). Among the leaders of the new group were Oliviu Gherman, Adrian Nastase, Octav Cozmâncă, Doru Ioan Tărăcilă, Dan Mircea Popescu.

At the same Convention, the motion "Viitorul-Azi" was adopted and Petre Roman was re-elected President of the party. Roman's supporters included: Victor Babiuc, Traian Băsescu, Radu Berceanu, Adrian Severin, Bogdan Niculescu Duvăz.

The parliamentary elections of 27 September 1992 marked the entry of the NSF into the opposition. The party came third in the elections, winning 10.2% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 10.4% of the votes for the Senate (43 deputies and 18 senators). The party's candidate for the presidential elections, Caius Traian Dragomir, also came fourth, obtaining 4.75% of the total valid votes cast.

Following this reconfiguration on the political scene, the NSF merged with the Democratic Party on 31 March 1993, resulting in a new legal entity, DP-NSF, formalised by decision no. 13 of the Bucharest Municipal Court of 23 May 1993.

In conclusion, the National Salvation Front appeared in a revolutionary moment when the population seemed to have overthrown the communist regime, taking over the state power and turning into a political party with strong communist mentalities. The NSF used all known manipulation techniques, many of them ethically unacceptable, but it achieved its goal, remaining the main Romanian political party until 1996, with the addition that there have been several splits and mergers over the years.



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