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**Political and cultural representations of Germans and Germany in Romania
after the First World War**

Abstract of Habilitation Thesis

My habilitation thesis is entitled *Political and cultural representations of Germans and Germany in Romania after the First World War* (Reprezentări politice și culturale asupra germanilor și asupra Germaniei în România după Primul Război Mondial). In my attempt to reconcile the administrative perspective and that which is strictly academic of a scientific thesis, I have divided my approach into two somewhat distinct parts. The first part is structured according to the instructions from the official procedure. Within it, in the three relevant sections, I have attempted to present a view of my own scientific and professional development, highlighting my career prospects. In the second part, which scientifically covers the title of the dissertation, with the view of becoming qualified as a doctoral supervisor, I have brought together several studies that reflect one of the most recent directions of my professional research: across five studies, I present how the Romanian imaginary regarding Germany and Germans in the first years after 1918 was structured.

My didactic and scientific activity, presented in overview, is based upon my status as professor at the University of Iași's Faculty of History. Formed within the environment of the country's oldest higher education institution, I was constantly concerned with my continuous training as a teacher and as a professional historian. There was, moreover, an interpermeation between the two layers: although focused on the history of the Romanians between the two world wars, the seminars and courses that I held throughout this period integrated conceptual and methodological tools from other fields of social science, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism. Several academic programs in which I took part, the most important being those supported by Central European University (then located in Budapest), and the training courses in various institutes and universities in the Western academic environment (especially in Vienna and

Montpellier), have allowed me to place my own historical knowledge within a comparative grid of interpretation, thus broadening my understanding of facts and phenomena of the past. This double opening, both methodological and conceptual, towards the other social sciences (and other domains), in the need to understand history on a wider scale, as well as the shedding of discourse inherent to this area of the autonomous history of the Romanians, constitutes the direction I have impressed upon the relevant disciplines, and the research I have undertaken after 1998. The research-teaching connection comes from the shaping of the university environment in my double role: the production of specialised knowledge (in this case, historical knowledge) and its dissemination, in the sense of training students as historians capable of autonomously structuring their own research. In fact, this is also the reason for my seeking this qualification: the belief that I can help, through my expertise as a historian and as a professor, by participating in multiple academic validation commissions (bachelor's, master's, didactic grade I, doctorate), in order to train other historians and to produce valuable work on historical facts and events.

Affirming the need to teach academically based on my own scientific activity, I realised (even during my student career) the need to organise my fields of research through the identification of topics, their methodological framing, through rigorous documentation, and by interpretively sharing the results. Being in a center of traditional academic activity, I have had to take on various research topics, based both on historiographical need and for civic or cultural motives: the history of communism, Romanian liberalism in the interwar period, political life between the two world wars, local history (of Iași), the evolution of the Jewish community of Iași, the Romanian rural world, and the representation of Germany and Germans in the immediate post-war period.

After the 1990s, I became interested in the communist approach to propaganda, which sought to provide legitimacy and authority to the regime established in the Romanian space after 1945. I later turned to political realities between the two world wars. My doctoral research involved analysis of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal) between 1927 and 1933, a period in which the formation, traditionally led by the Brătianu family/dynasty, found itself in opposition. The term *opposition* also defined my analysis of the subject: beyond a factual and causal reconstruction of the National Liberal Party's evolution, I was interested (in terms of sociology of the political party) in understanding the reorganisation of this formation as a modern form of the structuring of the political and of establishing public solidarity. It was at the same time a way of

reinterpreting the evolution of Romanian political life since the end of the 1920s, highlighting a certain mutation in the reputations, behaviours, and practices articulated towards the conquest of power and the discussion of the social good — aspects related to what we would today call cultural politics. Insidious, given that it escaped historians of the period, this transformation is, in my opinion, extremely significant to Romanian *democracy*. In my work I showed that, for the first time, another way of undertaking *oppositional politics* had been imposed on the Romanian political system, based on practices closer to the formulas of Western democracy, in which succession to power was no longer negotiated behind the scenes. The Carlist restoration of June 1930 slowed and subsequently perverted this transformation of Romanian society by establishing an autonomous pole of power outside of the democratic political game. Having become king, Carol II left his mark on the system, his political project placing the person of the monarch (somewhat traditionally) at the centre of decision-making regarding political change.

The completion of my doctoral work and its publication as a book in 2013 (*Construind opoziția. Istoria politică a Partidului Național Liberal între anii 1927 și 1933* / “Constructing the opposition. The political history of the National Liberal Party between 1927 and 1933”) did not halt my scientific preoccupation with liberalism between the two world wars. New documentary fonds, in addition to partial answers to questions regarding the political dynamics of the National Liberal Party after 1918 and the identity of the Romanian liberals, led me to carry out a complementary study to the doctoral thesis, entitled *Liberalii. Structuri și sociabilități politice liberale în România interbelică* (“The Liberals. Liberal political structures and sociabilities in interwar Romania”). The proposed discussion on the complex system of hierarchies and solidarities specific to the Liberal Party, in a predominantly rural Romanian world, which was anchored in a traditional system of values and reluctant to innovation with regard to democratic political participation, was likely to complete the ensemble termed Romanian liberalism (liberalism românesc).

Furthermore, devising a synthesis of liberalism in Romanian society between the two world wars was one of my immediate objectives. After 25 years of documenting and reflecting upon the subject, I am of the belief that I can produce a volume that represents, both through its publication by a significant publishing house and its inclusion in a circuit of specialised criticism, a historiographic landmark in the recapturing of political history in the period between the two world wars.

My research on the formation of the Romanian liberals between the two world wars was set against the background of interwar political life. New methodological and interpretive perspectives brought to the discussion of the National Liberal Party, which sometimes invalidated common knowledge on the subject, were also reflected in my approach to some topics related to the actors, practices, and nature of political regimes after 1918. In this way, I attempted to understand parliamentary elections in Romanian society as a whole, organised according to the principle of universal male suffrage, with its inherent limits in a peripheral society like that of post-WWI Romania, whose population was mostly rural and largely illiterate. On another level, overcoming the intentionalist paradigm with regard to King Carol II and his personal/authoritarian regime of the 1930s, I reject the assessments of most historians who have analysed this interwar political phenomenon, with the monarch as the dissolver of post-WWI proto-democracy. My conclusions refer to the fact that, alongside the new king's representations of power and his efforts to replace traditional factors of power (political parties), the imposition and form of the new regime instead bore the sign of conjuncture, and of the public circumstances of Romania at the time. Thus far approached retrospectively, from the perspective of a king preoccupied with domination and of the regime established in February 1938, Carol II's political thought was defined gradually, his actions often adapted to the larger context. The royal project of "dictatorship" was constructed along the way. Beyond his own voluntarism, the King's inclinations towards authoritarian models of government, whether fascist or Yugoslav, and the political representation of several groups of society coalesced in the direction of a strong-arm regime. As a system of power until 1938, at which point the royal authoritarian regime was institutionalised administratively and formally, Carlism was rather a jointure of attitudes and practices structured around the imagination of Carol II as a "saviour king"; Carol depended on public, political, and cultural figures of the 1930s, and on their readiness for authoritarianism. The end of a Romania of interwar politics, if we can accept such a phrase, was not exclusively due to Carol and his tendency towards domination, but also the propensity of others towards a parochial regime.

My research on this major theme supports the conclusion that interwar democracy — as it took shape as an electoral system around 1930, in which the holding of governance and the right to legislate should express the will of the majority of voters at a certain moment — could not be sustained by an elite that had not cultivated the values of citizens' participation in that system. The phenomenon of fragmentation experienced by political parties in the 1930s, a consequence of their

inability to democratically structure their own organisational culture, as well as the lack of an effective internal counterweight to authoritarian or revolutionary tendencies (to which were added the difficulties of transitioning towards economic and social modernity) made public life in this decade chaotic and violent, marked by numerous crises and scandals of all sorts. Under these conditions, the idea of royal authoritarianism, being seen as a way to restore political order, tempted many Romanians.

Another direction my research has taken is that of local history, more precisely that of interwar Iași, its daily life, and its political dynamics. Understanding the city also necessitated the deconstructing of the “Ieșean”, who lent the place an urban significance and who defined the modernity of the area, at an ethnic or confessional level (Moldovans/Romanians, Armenians, Germans, Jews, Russians, Poles, etc.). Jews have become a special subject of my analysis, both from the perspective of their investment in the university, as well as from the perspective of associations formed under economic, cultural, or charitable auspices. Moreover, the reconstruction of this community’s evolution over a period of three centuries is a project that I am currently undertaking alongside Professor Carol Iancu (University of Montpellier), in an effort to integrate this history into a wider discussion of the role of Jews in the structuring of the modern world in Central and Eastern Europe.

Following my involvement in an interdisciplinary research team which brought together historians, sociologists, and writers, the investigation of the rural world has constituted my most recent subject of research. The need to correct the peasant’s absence within autochthonous historiographical analysis has also manifested itself in my studies, especially with regard to the construction of the modern state in its institutional forms. Historians have previously been too little concerned with explaining transformations within the rural universe and the impact of the process of political and economic modernisation upon the peasantry. The integration of village inhabitants into the political community of Romania after 1918 constitutes an open field of research. Multiple questions related to the degree to which negative perceptions after 1918 by various groups in Romanian society on the adoption of universal suffrage influenced the transformation of the peasant into a citizen persist: both on the specific policies of political education of those formally called upon to become responsible partners of the elites, and on the peasantry’s responses to the messages and promises of political actors, under conditions in which, being unfavourable to their

effective enrolment in party structures, they felt reluctance towards civic involvement, activism, and discipline.

The final scientific level illustrated through my studies is the connecting element between the two parts of this habilitation thesis. Having taken part in the international research program on Germans in Romania after 1918, titled *Limbă și cultură germană în România (1918-1933). Realități postimperiale, discurs public și câmpuri culturale* (“German language and culture in Romania, 1918-1933. Post-imperial realities, public discourse, and cultural fields”), coordinated by Andrei Corbea-Hoișie and Rudolf Gräf, we outlined themes of Romanians’ representations of Germany in the first decade after the Great Union. Further, together with Philippe Blasen, I coordinated a volume on this subject titled *Rumänisch-deutsche Spiegelungen. Die diskursive Darstellung Deutschlands und der Deutschen in Rumänien (1918–1940)* (“Romanian-German reflections. The discursive representation of Germany and the Germans in Romania”), published this year (2024) by Verlag Friedrich Pustet in Regensburg.

The 5 studies that have materialised on this subject concern the substantiation of decisions by those factors in Bucharest to enter the World War against the Central Powers in August 1916 (“Alături de germani sau împotriva lor, opțiune politică sau opțiune culturală? Chestiunea dinastică în România anilor 1916-1918” / “With or against the Germans, the political option or the cultural option? The dynastic question in Romania, 1916-1918”); the characteristics of the German military’s occupation of a large part of the country after Romania’s defeat in autumn 1916 (“Elite și mase / germanofili și antantofili în România. Opinia publică și ocupația militară germane-austriacă” / “Elites and masses / Germanophiles and Ententophiles in Romania. Public opinion and the German-Austrian military occupation”); and especially the way in which the imaginary of various groups of Germans in post-war Romanian society was instrumentalised. I have also analysed the discourse of some socio-professional groups (“„Reprezentarea germanului și a Germaniei după Război în presa centrală românească. Studiu de caz: cotidianul Adevărul și alte publicații” / “Representations of the German and Germany in Romania after the First World War: A study of Adevărul and other Romanian writings”), but also of some political formations (“Liberalii români și problema culturii germane în România primului deceniu de după Unire: între necesitate și amenințare civilizațională. *Democrația*, revista Cercului de Studii al PNL” / “Romanian liberals and the problem of German culture in Romania in the first decade after the Great Union: between necessity and civilisational threat. *Democrația*, the journal of the PNL Study

Circle”; and “Influențe ideologice germane în liberalismul românesc interbelic” / “The influence of German ideologies on interwar Romanian liberalism”).

The conclusions I have reached in these particular approaches show that, alongside a natural empathy for the sacrifices and suffering of the Romanians in battle, under occupation, etc., the way in which hostility towards Germany and German civilisation/culture was established in the public space and prolonged in the historiographical environment involved the exacerbation of domestic political competition in 1920s Romania. This shift was the result of historians prioritising the valorisation of the conjunctural publicistic approach (often memorialistic) of some actors of the era, who had directly participated in the events of 1914–1919, to conveniently recover and create a “usable past” which would place them on the “good” side of history, i.e. in the position of the victors.

Participation in war — with its armed confrontations, its human and territorial sufferings and losses, its abuses under occupation, and its need to mobilise society through propaganda — inevitably gave rise to official and civic anti-German discourse. A number of stereotypes were put into circulation, depicting Germans as “barbarians”, “Teutons”, “collectivists”, the expression of a technical civilisation, devoid of soul, and hostile to individuality and creativity. Self-interested discursive constructions and those representations adverse to Germany continued, for reasons of political legitimation, in Greater Romania after 1918, making the necessary internal recovery of defining elements of the German world in the post-war period difficult, including the negotiation with one’s own past.