
III.

THE MAIN EXTREMIST ACTORS: THE ROMANIAN HEARTH, THE PARTY FOR THE NATIONAL UNITY OF ROMANIANS (PUNR), AND THE GREATER ROMANIA PARTY (PRM)

The most consistent, effective and threatening form of extremism in Romania was and remains *ultranationalism*. The organization that inaugurated this mode of extremist action is the Romanian Hearth (Vatra Românească), established in Târgu Mureș on February 1, 1990.⁷⁰ This initiative also involved the new officials in Bucharest, the leaders of which were in search of new means of legitimation: their old career in the Romanian Communist Party was back then a handicap rather than an argument for their newly acquired positions.⁷¹ The ideological foundation of the Romanian Hearth was the anti-Hungarian sentiment. The founders have been involved, at the end of January 1990, in anti-Hungarian provocations, some hidden⁷² but some manifest (in the local press and especially in *Cuvântul liber*, the organ of the future Hearth, as well as on TV). The anti-Hungarian feeling was supported by the media in the country's capital, and it reached a peak around the middle of March 1990. On

70 The first public announcement of the Romanian Hearth was made in Reghin on January 25, 1990.

71 On the evening of January 25, 1990, President Ion Iliescu talked about "Hungarian separatist tendencies", a phrase that later became an ultranationalist leitmotif. As a matter of fact, Iliescu featured on the list of Romanian Hearth founding members (see Előd Kincses, *Martie neagra la Târgu Mureș* [Black March in Târgu Mureș], Târgu Mureș, Juventus, 2001. Also see Gabriel Andreescu, *Ruleta. Românii și maghiarii. 1990–2000* [Roulette. Romanians and Hungarians. 1990–2000]).

72 On January 25, 1990, the Târgu Mureș Post Office sent an appeal cable with the following provocative (and false) statement: "Romanian brothers, colleagues in the Post and Telecommunication Offices ... in our unit, as well as others in Târgu Mureș, high positions are being systematically and abusively filled with Hungarians. Romanian pupils and teachers have been driven out of schools, brutalized, and spit on." (Előd Kincses, *Op.cit.*, p. 44)

March 19, a Romanian Hearth demonstration turned into an assault upon the local headquarters of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). A well-known Hungarian writer was savagely beaten.⁷³ The violence mounted and, on March 21, 1990, the city of Târgu Mureș was the site of bloody clashes between Romanians⁷⁴ and Hungarians. The clashes ended with five dead and hundreds of injured.⁷⁵ Building on the feelings instability and insecurity generated by the events, the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) was created toward the end of March 1990 on the structures of the old Securitate.⁷⁶ The legal procedures required by the establishment of such an institution were eschewed.⁷⁷

The anti-Hungarian Romanian Hearth, the group behind the clashes, garnered wide support both at local and at national level. It became an important political actor⁷⁸ and, just before the May 20, 1990 elections, it created the Party for the National Union of Romanians (PUNR).

In the coming years, PUNR became the most important ultranationalist party in Romania. In the local elections of 1992, its leader, Gheorghe Funar, was elected mayor of the most important Transylvanian city, Cluj.⁷⁹ In the parliament elections of the same year, PUNR obtained 7.72% (Chamber of Deputies) and 8.12% (Senate) of the popular vote, becoming the main partner of the Democratic Front of the National Salvation (FDSN) in the national coalition that led the country between 1992 and 1996. In that government, which the opposition used to call “the red square”, PUNR obtained two ministries and a relatively large number of other important positions.

How did the PUNR view the Hungarian threat? Here is a representative sample that needs no further comments: “As it is well-known, the nomad spirit and the barbarian style of the Hungarian people and its minority in Romania did not disappear in the last 1000 years. Maybe we, Romanians, will have to cure them of this embarrassment and turn them

73 The victim was András Sütő, an important Hungarian writer and a member in the leadership of the local branch of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania. See Tom Gallagher, *Democrație și naționalism în România: 1989-1998*, Bucharest, ALL, 1999.

74 Some were brought in from the villages surrounding the city, armed with bats and ready to fight.

75 Both Hungarians and Romanians were among the dead and injured.

76 The Securitate was Ceaușescu’s political police.

77 According to the law, the vote of the Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN) was required for the establishment of this institution. Yet the CPUN was not even informed in this respect.

78 A member of the Romanian Hearth was included in the Romanian delegation that participated in the June CSCE meeting (see Tom Gallagher, *Op.cit.*, p. 132).

79 It is worth noting that in the second run of the elections, Funar was supported by the Front of National Salvation, the winner of the general election in 1990 (Tom Gallagher, *Op.cit.*, p. 154).

into a peaceful, civilized European people that will no longer covet foreign lands. God forbid they should once again extend their paws toward Romanian territories.”⁸⁰

In the 1996 elections PUNR obtained only 4.36% (Chamber of Deputies) and 4.22% (Senate) of the parliament seats. It suffered what turned out to be a lethal loss of popularity. The fact that the UDMR, the Hungarians’ representative organization, became a party to the new government dealt another decisive blow to the former party. Moreover, PUNR leader Gheorghe Funar left the party in order to become secretary general of the Greater Romania Party (PRM). In the 2000 elections, PUNR failed to win any seats in the parliament. Its supporters defected massively to the PRM camp, the chauvinistic attitudes of which had defined a broader target (Hungarians, but also Roma and Jews). The Greater Romania Party was also responsible for a self-righteous, vindictive style in its simultaneous attacks against corruption and poverty. Today, the PUNR and the Romanian Hearth are both marginal groups with scant chances of ever finding their old glory again.

The Greater Romania Party

Most extremist organizations have developed alongside media organs which were made available to them and which entered, in this way, the extremist circuit. The Romanian Hearth found willing hosts in most dailies of the Transylvania region, which had recently changed from the local branch Communist-sponsored *Scântea* into so-called independent newspapers. Conversely, some media instruments created extremist movements. Such is the case of the *România Mare* (*Greater Romania*) magazine, which was first published in 1990 and later created the Greater Romania Party (PRM).⁸¹

The language of *România Mare* turned out to be extremely successful. Its discourse, a typical sample of hate speech, aimed predominantly at Hungarians, Roma and Jews, yet it was no less concerned with any political or cultural group that advocated democracy.⁸² Anti-Hungarian chau-

80 Gheorghe Funar, *Informația Zilei*, Satu-Mare, October 27, 1994. When this statement was made, the PUNR had already been a well-established actor for a number of years and belonged to the ruling coalition. Its aggressiveness and its main issues hardly changed over time.

81 Another case is that of the extremist magazine *Mișcarea* (*The Movement*), which pre-dated the Movement for Romania Party.

82 See the statement of the U.S. Department of State Report on Romania – 2001, which is the first to identify PRM as an extreme right party: “In May [2001] the Israeli Ambassador expressed concern about a book published by a member of the

vinism was prominent, in the first instance because it brought back a maximum of political capital: "I very much fear that, at this rate, if they keep rubbing it in forever, we shall once again run a healthy race to that wonderful town of the czardas and available women, and there we shall stay for a while, to ensure peace in the area, at least until the year 2000 – we do not wish things to get that far, nobody likes military campaigns, but faced with the alternatives of Hungarians in Bucharest versus Romanians in Budapest, you can imagine what we'll choose and which music we like to hear..."⁸³

The Greater Romania Party is identified almost completely with its leader (and chief contributor to *România Mare*), Corneliu Vadim Tudor. His discourse has long since exceeded even the most permissible boundaries of decency: "However, in talking about the descendants of those barbarians, I do not think that we offend the Magyar nation; quite on the contrary, we disseminate authentic, historical documents, attesting to the fact that they were originally primitives, something which Romanians have never been."⁸⁴

In the 1992 elections, PRM obtained 3.89%, (Chamber of Deputies) and 3.85% (Senate) a score that barely got it into the parliament. In 1996, the party won 4.46% and 4.54%, which turned it into the country's leading extremist group. Now strategically placed in the opposition, PRM turned out to be especially active. At the beginning of 1999, it even took part in an attempted *coup*. Several groups and individuals appealed to the justice system in order to outlaw the PRM, but these lawsuits were dropped in the end. Over time, the weakness of the authorities proved to harm political life severely.

During the November 2000 presidential campaign, Corneliu Vadim Tudor adapted his discourse to the new political realities. His chauvinism concentrated on the Roma, as the Hungarians appeared to be a less promising target. He spoke live on TV about "the typology of gypsy mafia... They attack as a group, control the markets, and the only reason why they do not rape their children and parents is that they are too busy raping ours..."⁸⁵ Previously, in 1998, Tudor had publicized a manifesto stating that "gypsies that will not go to work ... will be sent to work camps."⁸⁶ He answered the widespread protests of Roma groups and

extreme-right 'Greater Romania' Party (PRM) which contained two jokes on the extermination of Jews by the Nazis." (<http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/europe/15.html>)

83 Corneliu Vadim Tudor, "Atenție la Ungaria" [Beware of Hungary] (4), in *România Mare*, No. 17, September 28, 1990.

84 Corneliu Vadim Tudor, senator, president of the PRM. Speech delivered on February 7, 1995, at the working meeting of the PDSR, PUNR, PRM and PSM. See *România Mare*, No. 241, year VI, February 17, 1995.

85 *Doresc să fiu Președinte* (I Wish to Be President, TV Show), PRO TV, Bucharest, November 14, 2000.

86 The statement was published in full in *România Mare* (August 21, 1998), *Ziua* (August 17, 1998), and *Libertatea* (August 18, 1998).

NGOs by saying: “we are not interested in the gypsies. All [of them] should be sent to jail. There is no other solution.”⁸⁷

The self-righteous, vindicator spirit of his discourse, as much as his slogans against corruption caught on. C.V. Tudor obtained an incredible electoral success.⁸⁸ He obtained around 30% of the total votes in the final round of the 2000 presidential elections. His party won a no less incredible 21.01% of the Senate seats, and 19.48% of the Chamber of Deputies.

It is important to note, at the same time, that President Ion Iliescu, the victor in the elections, made little effort to denounce the racist behavior of his opponent. In April 2001, he even argued that Romania “developed an immune system able to withstand interethnic hatred, intolerance, xenophobia, extremism, anti-Semitism, and racism.”⁸⁹ Moreover, the president used the term “colored” (which, in Romania, is considered highly offensive) with respect to a Roma citizen,⁹⁰ and complained that the national interest toward Roma owes to an anti-Romanian campaign in the West.⁹¹

The 1999 Tentative Coup

The danger posed by the Greater Romania Party as an extremist group was never as clear as during its involvement in the 1999 tentative of *coup d'état*. In the third week of January 1999, the miners of the Jiu Valley started a protest movement.⁹² Corneliu Vadim Tudor addressed them with the following words: “My dear miners, the country is with you. ... I shall get you in the luxurious offices in Bucharest, and I shall put the scoundrels that ruined this country into the mines.”⁹³ At the call and under the guidance of the miner’s union leader, Greater Romania Party vice-president Miron Cosma, the miners announced their intention to march into Bucharest in order to force the government to accept their demands. Similar actions in the past, also under the leadership of

87 George Toader, “Romii nu-l iartă pe C.V. Tudor, dar nici el nu se lasă intimidat”, in *Cronica Română*, August 22, 1998.

88 The results were much higher than those projected by the opinion polls.

89 Ion Iliescu uttered these words at the opening of a forum on inter-regional relations in the Balkans, held in Bucharest on April 20, 2001. Cf. *România Liberă*, April 23, 2001. See RFE/RL Newswire, April 23, 2001.

90 “*Scurt pe doi*” [In brief] TV Show, Romanian Television, Bucharest, April 9, 2001.

91 RFE/RL Newswire, April 20, 2001.

92 Gabriel Andreescu, “*Tema stării de urgență din perspectiva tentativei de lovitură de stat*”, in *Sfera politicii*, No. 67, 1999

93 Corneliu Vadim Tudor, “Manifest pentru minerii din Valea Jiului” [Manifesto for the miners in Jiu Valley], *România Mare*, No. 444, January 15, 1999.

Cosma, had kept Bucharest under terror for several days in June 1990, and brought about the overthrowing of the Romanian government in September 1991. During the 1999 march, about 12,000 miners guided according to well-orchestrated military techniques destroyed two police and gendarmerie road-blocks. The prime minister was brought in to negotiate under the threat of the invasion of Bucharest.

The march on Bucharest was interrupted, but PRM vice-president Miron Cosma did his best to get it started again. He was eventually arrested, and the approximately 2,000 miners under his leadership were forced by law enforcement groups to turn back. To make this possible, however, the President had to call for a state of emergency.⁹⁴

According to the terms of the the Reports of the UN Human Rights Commission⁹⁵ the events qualified as rebellion, subversion, public disorder, a threat to the safety of individuals, a threat against the Constitution and the authorities, and a danger to the country's economic life.⁹⁶ The threat was both "exceptional and imminent".⁹⁷

The miners under the leadership of Greater Romania Party vice-president Miron Cosma were permanently in contact with the rest of the PRM leadership. The latter incited to and prepared, by means of statements made from the parliament floor and in the mass-media, a possible forcible change of the political regime freely chosen in the 1996 elections. PRM demanded the resignation of the cabinet and asked for anticipated elections, acting in resonance with the miners' actions.

Following the events, several public personalities requested that the PRM be outlawed on 5 counts: disrespect for the principles of constitutional democracy; incitement to public violence; disrespect for the rule of law; incitement to ethnic, racial and religious hatred; militancy against political pluralism.⁹⁸ The Ministry of Justice was notified but, in spite of clear evidence that PRM had violated the principles of constitutional democracy and the provisions of the law of political parties, the case was closed.

94 As provided in Art. 93.1 of the Romanian Constitution. An Emergency Ordinance had to be adopted in the night between January 21 and 22 (1999), because when the hostilities started, there was no law in Romania providing guidelines for a state of emergency/siege.

95 It legitimates measures such as those taken by the authorities in Bucharest (calling a state of emergency). See the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Study of the Rights of Everyone to be Free from Arbitrary Arrest, Detention and Exile*, E/CN.4/826, 1962, p. 257.

96 N. Questiaux, *Study of the Implications for Human Rights of Recent Developments concerning Situations Known as State of Siege or Emergency*, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1982/15.

97 See the Greek case in *Report on the EHCR*, YBECHR 12, 1969

98 Dan Pavel, a lecturer with the Political Science Faculty at the University of Bucharest, started the legal procedures for outlawing PRM.