

## THE FAMILY OF PUȚUREANU FROM CRAIOVA

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**Abstract:** After studying the documents from the archive of Puțoreanu family, this research is trying to reconstruct the biography of Mihail Puțoreanu, lawyer, secretary and librarian of the Bar Association from Dolj and the College of Barristers from Craiova.

The documents depict him as an active intellectual, constantly eager to improve his knowledge, involved in the social, cultural and political life of the city.

Without neglecting the family aspects, it was especially insisted on the activity of Mihail Puțoreanu in the Bar Association, and then in the College of Barristers, where he worked for over 4 decades.

Witness of the transformations from the Bar, after 1944, he survives to the purges and adapts to the new norms of behaviour, imposed by the communist regime.

**Keywords:** Puțoreanu, lawyer, Bar Association, purging, communism.

We continue presenting the history of Puțoreanu family from Craiova, this time approaching particularly the life of Mihail Puțoreanu, lawyer, librarian and secretary of Dolj Bar Association and the College of Barristers from Craiova<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Who was Mihail Puțoreanu?***

The name of Puțoreanu family<sup>2</sup> is well-known to the people of Craiova, due to Puțoreanu Inn – which is declared historic monument – built in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the trader Niță D. Puțoreanu, the father of Mihail (1841-1910).

The son of two peasant parents from the village of Puțuri – Dolj County, Niță, succeeds in raising beyond his common condition, joining the Bourgeoisie from Craiova. His businesses with liquors, well managed, which connect him to national and foreign companies, bring significant income that he uses to build the famous inn, which becomes a cosy shelter for the people who travel to Craiova,

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Mil Demetrescu, *Istoria Baroului Dolj dela 1864-1928*, Craiova, Tiparul “Prietenii Științei”, 1928, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> In order to know the family and the businesses of Niță D. Puțoreanu, see our articles about *Hanul Puțoreanu din Craiova (I) și (II)*, in “Arhivele Olteniei”, no. 27/2013, pp. 147-153, and in “Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor»”, XV/2014, pp. 131-137.

decade after decade. The gates of the inn were always open for the young lawyer and poet N. Burlănescu – Alin, who, with his poetry, touched the heart of Niță.

From the marriage of Niță Puțoreanu with Maria Dimianu, the daughter of a shoemaker from Sf. Gheorghe Vechi quarter, in 1875, six children are born, but only three survive: Zoe, Eliza and Mihail.

Mihail Puțoreanu, the youngest child of the family, was born in Craiova, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1889. In 1895, little Mihail suffers a terrible shock when his mother suddenly dies, at only 36 years old. Finding himself a widower, Niță Puțoreanu entrusts the supervision and the upbringing of his children to a generous woman, Alexandrina Zamfirescu, an old tenant of the inn.

After he attended the primary school at Arnold Institute and the secondary school at Carol I High-School – a highly rated school – where, without being a bright student<sup>3</sup>, he gets a serious education, Mihail, as many other young men from Craiova, chooses the profession of lawyer<sup>4</sup>. The death of his father, in 1910, does not divert him from his plans, and between 1911 and 1915, he attends the courses<sup>5</sup> of the Faculty of Law from Bucharest. After the graduation<sup>6</sup>, he comes back to Craiova and he joins, as probation advocate, Dolj Bar Association, led by Dean N. B. Rioșianu, and he becomes a titular lawyer in 1919.

Between 1916 and 1918, he participates in the campaign of the Romanian army, and, after the redrawing in Moldova, he holds the position of head of the military censorship in Botoșani. At the end of the war, Lieutenant Mihail Puțoreanu is decorated with “The Commemorative Cross 1916-1918”. Mobilised again, he takes part in the military action of Romania against the Bolshevik Hungary and, in 1919, he is appointed the military commander of Turnu-Severin train station. The military career<sup>7</sup> is, for a while, appealing to him, the request addressed to the War Office, in which he solicits his joining among the active cadres of the army, is a proof for this statement, but, shortly after, Mihail changes his mind, and returns to law.

The election, in 1921, of Dem. Stoenescu, as a dean, opens new perspectives in the history of Dolj Bar Association, marked by numerous transformations.

<sup>3</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1900, the director of Arnold Institute was appreciating the activity of the pupil Mihail, in 1899-1900, as following: “Well behaved. Sufficient general studies. Weak at compositions and solving problems. During the tuition classes he is not hard-working, he is rather distracted and turbulent” (post card having the heading of Arnold Institute, dated 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1900).

<sup>4</sup> From the 68 graduates of Carol I High-School, series 1898-1899, among which there was also the future Dean Dem. Stoenescu, over a third of them become lawyers (see *Aniversarea a 25 de ani dela Absolvirea Liceului Carol I, Craiova a promoției 1898-1899*, Craiova, Tipografia “Ramuri”, 1924).

<sup>5</sup> With periods of interruption: in 1911, when he is in the military service, and 1913, when, after the entering of the Romanian troops in Bulgaria, he is advanced to second lieutenant and received the medal “Avântul Țării” (approx. Progressing Country).

<sup>6</sup> According to his Bachelor Degree in Law, issued by the University from , on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1915, Mihail Puțoreanu passed his exam with a white ball and three red.

<sup>7</sup> Starting from 1914, he was writing to the minister: “Wishing to interrupt my attendance to the courses of the faculty and to dedicate my time to the military career, I ask you, Mr. Minister, to allow my temporary call to activity, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Hunters, as there are vacant positions...”.

Sustained by many young lawyers, among which he is recruiting his team of counsellors, Dem. Stoenescu<sup>8</sup> will try and succeed, to a great extent, to adapt the Bar to the socio-economic realities from the interwar period, to modernise its institutions, to increase its prestige through dignity, honour and professionalism. Thus, only few years later, after a remarkable activity, the Bar Association from Dolj is an example to be followed by the others from the country. Unfortunately, the price paid for it was equally divided. Exhausted due to the hard work (13 consecutive years as a dean), disappointed by some dissatisfactions and many of his so-called friends, almost losing his house, mortgaged for a loan to support cultural activities, Dem. Stoenescu becomes ill and, despite the treatments, he dies in December 1934. This man – who definitely deserves the writing of a biography – kind and naive as a child, and therefore a sure victim in front of so many profiteers, was always finding the resources to advise Mihail Puțoreanu, in one of his last letters: “In life, you should be on the look-out!”.

Mihail also joined the reforming nucleus around Dean Stoenescu. Without being a close friend to the family of Dem. Stoenescu – as G. Mil. Demetrescu – Mihail Puțoreanu, enjoyed the trust and the friendship of his superior. In 1924-1925, he obtained two important positions in the structure of the Bar, being appointed librarian (decision no.462/1<sup>st</sup> of November 1924) and the secretary of Disciplinary Judging Commissions. Owing to the professionalism that he proved when carrying out his duties, he held the both positions until 1957, the year of his retirement. To him it is due the elaboration of the Bar’s Library Regulations, the inventory, the ordering, the classification, and sometimes acquisition of books. In his quality of secretary of the Bar, keeper of all the secrets, Mihail always behaves as a good colleague, proving tact and discretion, having a conciliating attitude, on the occasion of different conflicts emerged among the lawyers.

Year 1924 brings personal satisfactions to Mihail as well. In summer, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, he gets married with Miss Sofia Mayer (1895-1977), daughter of trader Friedrich G. Mayer<sup>9</sup>, subjected to the Austro-Hungarians, established in Craiova since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soon enough, Puțoreanu family becomes extended, after the birth of a girl, Olguța, and, later, of a boy, Bebe Niță.

Thanks to the rents obtained from the inn, which he inherited from his father, and adding the salary of librarian (2,000 lei), Mihail, unlike other lawyers, does not worry<sup>10</sup> about tomorrow. His stable financial situation allows his to practice only

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<sup>8</sup> For the activity of Dem. Stoenescu, see G. Mil. Demetrescu, *cit. work*; and Mihail Puțoreanu, *Istoricul fostului Barou de Avocați al jud. Dolj 1864-1948* (publishing).

<sup>9</sup> Besides Sofia, Friedrich G. Mayer had two sons: Friedrich – doctor at Filantropia Hospital and the Military Hospital, teacher at the Nursing Officials School – who played an important role in the cultural movement from Craiova, until 1940, when he moved to, and married to Mărioara, the daughter of General D. Vișiorianu; and Ioan – engineer and architect – the constructor of many impressive buildings from the country (for example at Ploiești), musician, a flute virtuoso, painter and sculptor.

<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, more than once, the expensive life does not match his budget. In the Returns and Expenses Record for 1935, Mihail notes: “Returns 114,214 lei, Expenses 160, 245 lei = 46,031 extra expenditure”.

occasionally his profession of lawyer, pleading only for the trials of his friends or acquaintances. Nevertheless, at the request of the Judicial Assistance Office, he carries out an intense activity, defending, in dozen of trials, the interests of the needy people.

In the tranquillity of the Bar's library, Mihail does not waste the time: he reads a lot and from different domains (from the juridical literature to history, geography, literature, poetry etc.), he makes himself library cards and takes notes about the subjects he is interested in (for example, the history of the duel, the lives of the famous people). Passionate with music (he attends the courses of Cornetti Conservator and is a permanent presence at the concerts from the city), politics (prolific member of the local organisation in People's Party led by General Averescu), science and culture (member of the Royal Eugenics Society, member in the leading committee of "The Fellows of Science" Society from Craiova), Associate Professor (he has classes at the Free University from the locality), writer and translator (he publishes chronicles, translations, poems and literary and political articles in "Flamura" magazine and others), art lover (he purchases different paintings from exhibitions), Mihail actually represents the prototype of the intellectual from the interwar society in Craiova, in which the lawyers, belonging to Dolj Bar Association, are part of the elite. Those familiarised with the history of Craiova, already know their contribution to the development of the local and county administration. Thus, among the lawyers, there were chosen many mayors and deputy mayors, prefects and police quaestors, leaders of cultural, banking and commercial institutions etc. Their involvement was also present in the social and cultural life, founding or managing newspapers and magazines, associations and cultural societies, or charities. Undoubtedly, the lawyers of the Bar, ambitious people, with high principles and ideals, could not be separated by the politics: some of them were liberals, others belonged to the national-peasant or socialist parties. Few of them manage to accomplish their dreams, joining the Parliament or even the Government. The career of Gheorghe Chițu, the first dean of the Bar Association, who becomes the mayor of Craiova and then the Prime-Minister, is permanently an example for all of them.

As regarding the issue of having only Romanians in the Bar Associations, which was flaring up people starting with 1935, Mihail has a reserved attitude. He loathes any kind of excess. Although he attends, as assistant, to the General Assembly of Lawyers from Dolj, who, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1937, debate this problem, his feelings and thoughts are rather different. From his later notes and deeds, one can observe that Mihail did not consider appropriate the adopting of *numerus nullus* motion. On a document, from the same period, through which the lawyers were advised to enrol in *The Christian Romanian Lawyer Association from Craiova*, having as objective the transforming of the Bar into an association only with Romanians, Mihail writes indignant: "What a stupid thing!". Born and brought up in a Jewish neighbourhood (Sf. Dumitru Street – Elca Street – Horezu

Street – Madonna Dudu Street), Mihail Puțoreanu not only that he was never the partisan of a nationalist current, but, every time he had the opportunity, he helped his Jewish neighbours and friends. It is the same attitude that, for example, he had, according to his confessions, “during the iron-guard period, when I defended many of the Jewish citizens from my quarter, at any risk”; or in the summer of 1944, when, terrified by the American bombardment on Craiova, the Romanians and the Jews together, found a shelter in the basement of Puțoreanu Inn.

In the years during the World War II, Mihail was often mobilised, and advanced to the rank of reserve captain. In 1940, we find him detached at the General Staff, Section I, Department for the Study of Laws (Bucharest), in 1942 he was holding the position of deputy Military Attorney at the Martial Court of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps, and between 1943 and 1945, that of delegate of Dolj Territorial Department, being commissioned with the requisitions for the army.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, he was demobilised, and restarted his activity at the Bar, where the situation was starting to damage rapidly, under the pressure exercised by the constituents of the left policy, sustained by the minister of justice, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Dean I. B. Georgescu had been removed from his position, and he was soon arrested. It was formed *The Group of the Democrat Lawyers* (communists – a/n) that took the decision to “clean” the Bar Association and to “democratize” it, by removing the lawyers considered fascist or iron-guardist – which were actually the ones thought to have adverse feelings against the communist regime from Romania. The purging of Dolj Bar Association was an ample one. From the 217 titular lawyers and 31 probation lawyers, registered in *The Record of Lawyers* from 1944, there were, in October 1948, only 32 titular and 4 probation lawyers. The purged ones were – in most of the cases – imprisoned in the communist prisons, had their pensioned reduced, or they were refused the right to work, ending their existence in miserable conditions.

Mihail witnesses the dissolution of the Bar, without being able to interfere, and observes, full of concern, the tragic faith of his former colleagues. An equilibrated nature, he rejects the excesses and the extreme manifestations, hoping, as all the other Romanians do, that all will pass after the electoral elections<sup>11</sup> from 1946. When he clearly notices that the communist regime is there to last, he tries to adapt. From his vast personal library, he studies the books about Bolshevism, in order to find which step is the next. For example, in December 1946, he reads with

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<sup>11</sup> Among the notes of Mihail Puțoreanu, there is also a poem, signed and dated from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1946, four days before the elections falsified by the communists:

An upside-down world  
 Petru Groza is a fine  
 Teohari a Christian,  
 Pătrășcanu is a right  
 And Zăroni is a bright,  
 Maniu is a fascist  
 And the King a communist!

excitement and resumes the work of Karl Kautsky, "Terrorism and communism", in which he discovers the Bolshevik manner for seizing the power and the way to lead the society through dictatorship: "As in our case, in the days of 1946, November, under the Governing of Groza" – is the note made by Mihail.

Confronted to the repressive methods of the regime, which crush any resistance, Mihail Puțoreanu, fond of the Bar's institution, complies with the new communist dogmas. In his 60s, he makes visible efforts to learn Russian, he enrolls in A.R.L.U.S. (The Romanian Association for Closer Connection with the Soviet Union), he reads mandatory works of communist doctrine – such is *The history of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Soviet Union* – from which the lawyers have to prepare conferences or lectures, he patiently listens to the communist theories about *the new type of lawyer* and his role in "the popular democracy". In conclusion, he accepts to be re-educated, because the sayings of Molotov from 1947, noted by Mihail, seems to become true: "We are living in an age where all the roads are heading for communism". "I am part – writes Mihail in an autobiography from the 1950 – from the Syndicate of Trade and Finances and I hold the position of Secretary of the College Syndicalist Group. I am also a member of the mass organisations in the College, called Arlus, Peace Fight, Red Cross, «Progress» Sportive Society and I attend to all the cultural and political manifestations of the College and Justice. I learnt from the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrine, as the rest of the clerks and lawyers, due to the initiative and the perseverance of the College leadership. I work hard at my job". Moreover, in 1946, he enrolls in the National Popular Party, a creation of the communists, where he is a member, until its self-dissolution.

With all his wish for integration, the Communist Party will not forgive his bourgeoisie origin. After his enrolling, in June 1948, as pleading lawyer had been admitted by the College of Barristers Commission from Dolj, in 1949, the President of the Colleges of Barristers Union appealed, asking the annulment of the decision and the rejection of the enrolling application "because he does not have as the main source of income the profession of lawyer, but he has numerous others too...". Although bachelor of laws, he would remain until his retirement only an office worker of the College, yet keeping his two positions: of librarian and clerk of the court.

A year later, in 1950, Puțoreanu Inn was nationalised, and Mihail becomes a tenant in his own house.

In 1959, the communist Government, without explanations, removes his pension, depriving him of any means of subsistence. Through the Decision no. 759 from December 1959 of the Executive Committee of the Popular Council from Craiova, his "rights to receive a pension are removed, starting with the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1959". Desperate, having his wife ill, the 70 year old Mihail, after his contestation is rejected, he asks the help of his former colleagues, now into the good graces of the communist regime. Nicu Popilian, Alexandru Urziceanu,

Xenofon Vlăsceanu, Horia Tâlpeanu and others will provide positive references about the activity of Mihail, helping him to regain his right to pension.

About the last years of Mihail, we have little information. In 1977, his wife, Sofia, who had been by his side for 53 years, dies. “My beloved wife – as the deeply grieved Mihail is writing – which I lost forever”. Nonetheless, the year when Mihail Puțoreanu dies is unknown, being buried, seemingly at Sineasca Cemetery.

Devoted to his institution, in which he worked for over 4 decades, he did not waste any chance to celebrate its existence and accomplishments. He was easily writing epigrams and poems, more or less literary valuable, that he used to read on different occasions: at the election of the Colleges of Barristers Council from the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1954, at the voting for the budget of 1955, at New Year in 1955 etc.

In 1964, at the 100 year celebration since the founding of the bar associations, Mihail Puțoreanu writes a short history of the former Bar Association of Dolj County and the Colleges of Barristers from the Region of Oltenia.



**Fig. 1 – Mihail Puțoreanu**  
Lawyer, Secretary and Librarian of the Bar Association from Dolj  
and the College of Barristers from Craiova  
Puțoreanu family from Craiova.  
Source: Personal archive.

