

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON DECEMBER 1937 IN OLTENIA COUNTY*

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Abstract: In this paper we present two principal issues. In first part of the paper, we present the election campaign realized by local organizations of the main Romanian parties engaged in competition, the focus being on the actions of Legionary Movement. The sources used for documentation are, especially, confidential reports and bulletins elaborated in that period by the Regional Inspectorate of Gendarmes Craiova. In the second part of the paper, we present the results of the Parliament election, the accent being set on the options of the Oltenian electorate. Thru this paper, we want to integrate the political local events in the national history and to fill a blank space in the speciality literature.

Keywords: Parliamentary elections, Oltenia, Romanian electorate, political parties.

On 1937 Romanian democracy was in full process of degradation. That situation reflected, mainly, the result of King's Carol II actions and his collaborators, actions started on 1930 and pursued in the following period. Between 1930 and 1937, on Romania political scene, major movement took place. This way, in interior of major democratic political parties – National-Liberal Party and National-Peasant Party – tensions and repeated ruptures appeared, and their attempts to oppose King's authoritative plans had, especially after 1934, just a formal character, with no results. Prodictatorial political parties, especially Legionary Movement (represented from 1935 by political formation “Totul pentru Țară” – All for the Fatherland), knew a considerable ascension, phenomenon partially allowed by the King itself (the rupture between the King and the legionaries took place on January 1937), who wanted to create a favourable climate to install a personal regime. The executive power grew against the legislative power, especially because Gheorghe Tătărescu's liberal government (January 4, 1934 – November 17, 1937) was receptive to King's

* The study represents part of the doctoral research named „Royal Residency of Olt County (1938-1940)”, in progress in Craiova University, Faculty of Socio-Human Science, History Department, thru Project POSDRU/6/1.5/S/14 - „Improving the attractiveness, quality and efficiency of university studies by offering doctoral scholarship”.

Carol II plans to undermine Romanian democracy and becoming a quasi-personal cabinet of the King¹.

Therefore, in seven years King's politics obtain major successes, getting close more and more to fulfilling his objectives. Probably the most important movement was *de facto* increase of the monarchy in the state, because of exceeding by the King of prerogatives given by the Constitution. One proof in this sense is the way of solving the problem of government succession, by forming a new Tătărescu government (November 17 – December 29, 1937) who represented the will of the King². In theory, the main task of this government was to organize new parliament elections, but the program announced in the day of taking the oath was a perspective one, betraying the protagonist's intention of turning it into a long term one.

On November 20, 1937, by royal decree the Parliament was dissolved, and the electoral core was convened for election of the Deputy Assembly on December 20 and the Senate on December 23-28 1937³.

Starting with the 2nd half of November until the end of December, in Romanian political life the main issue was the competition between political parties to obtain the power. The 1937 elections "give the opportunity of a powerful trial of democracy and totalitarianism forces"⁴. On King's suggestion, who wanted to ensure the Government success in elections, the president of Ministerial Council, Gheorghe Tătărescu, concluded, in the name of National-Liberal Party, electoral deals with National-Democrat Party (Nicolae Iorga), Romanian Front (Alexandru Vaida Voievod) and The German Party, the last two known for their antidemocratic position. On the other side, Iuliu Maniu, president of National-Peasant Party, engaged into an open fight against King's Carol the 2nd manoeuvres and, in November 25, he made a nonaggression pact with National Liberal "Georgist" Party (Gheorghe I. Brătianu) and the Legionary

¹ Cristophe Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei 1930-1940*, Romanian version by Daniela Codruța Midan, București, Editura Militară, 2008, p. 18; Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*, IIIst vol., *Carol al II-lea*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2001, pp. 175-177, 182; *Istoria Românilor*, VIIIst vol., *România întregită (1918-1940)*, Ioan Scurtu (coordinator), secretary: Petre Otu, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2003, pp. 329-336, 338-362, 368.

² See Apostol Stan, *Ion Mihalache. Destinul unei vieți*, București, Editura Saeculum I.O., 1999, pp. 242-243; Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX (1918-1947)*, București, Editura Paideia, 1999, pp. 329-330; Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916-1939*, edition published by Al. Gh. Savu, București, Humanitas, 1990, pp. 357-358.

³ Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, IIst vol., 2nd part, *noiembrie 1933 – septembrie 1940*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988, p. 724.

⁴ Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947*, translation from English by George G. Potra and Delia Răzdolescu, București, Humanitas, 1996, p. 446.

Movement – Everything for the Country (Corneliu Zelea Codreanu). At this pact adhered also Constantin Argetoianu, president of Agrarian Party⁵.

The nonaggression pact represented, in initiator's opinion, "a deal with the purpose of defending and protect the liberty and fairness of the elections. (...) it means removing violent and denigration actions and language; it does not stops affirmation of own ideology and good faith discussion"⁶. It will be valid only until the end of the elections, the base of the pact being just "the idea for saving the national dignity, ensuring the free and legal affirmation of her voice and *discomfiture of eventual attempts to falsify the national will* (D.P. underlying.)"⁷.

Iuliu Maniu has motivated the electoral agreement from 1937 in the following manner:

Making this agreement was necessary because of the electoral practise used by so called liberal party. All elections organized by the liberal Party have been characterized by corruption, by terror, by the interfering of state's forces and by physical-moral violent acts. (...) The actual government is an arbitrary one, who has falsified the national will, a King's personal government and nothing characterized better this circumstance like the fact that parties with opposed ideologies united to fight against the common danger that threatens the country (...)⁸.

Therefore, is desired to ensure, trough this pact, the freedom of parliament elections and put a barrier to King's dictatorial ambitions. But this has incite to controversy and confusion in the ranks of members of the political parties the sign it, and, especially, in the ranks of electorate. In fact, the nonaggression pact and the political cartels mentioned above have been pretty unrealistic and did not broth the wanted results. The Legionnaire Movement was the most advantaged the deal with the "Georgist" liberals and the national-peasant has given them an extra credibility and respectability in the ranks of population with right to vote.

The parliament elections in the year 1937 have represented a culmination point in Romanian political life. They offered King Carol II the possibility to speculate the situation created by not obtaining the electorate majority by the ruling party⁹ (National Liberal Party - Dinu Brătianu) for giving the task of

⁵ Ioan Scurtu, *cited work*, pp. 211-212.

⁶ Iuliu Maniu, *Testament moral politic*, Edition by Victor Isac, București, "Gândirea românească" Publishing House, 1991, p. 185.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 183.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 186.

⁹ Results of parliament elections from December 20 have been: National Liberal Party (Dinu Bratianu) obtained 35,92% from expressed votes (152 mandates in Deputy Chamber); National Peasant Party, 20,4% (86 mandates); Everything for the Country, 15,58% (66 mandates), National Christian Party, 9,15% (39 mandates); Hungarian Party, 4,43% (19 mandates); National Liberal Party – Gheorghe Brătianu, 3,89% (16 mandates); Peasant Radical Party, 2,25% (9 mandates), Rest of the votes going to other

forming the government to a party with no authority and without the majority in Parliament, the National Christian Party, and as a extension consequence of the parliament elections, the King could pose, on February 11, 1938, in posture of “saviour” of the country. Under this shield he had accomplished the most important objective, pursued perseveringly for seven years, respectively: installing a personal regime, royal dictatorship, with multiple consequences in Romanian’s history.

Starting from these arguments, our opinion is that the analysis of the political and social situation in Oltenia County created by the 1937 parliament elections is more then welcome mainly because have not been, yet, studied by the specialists. For knowing and analysing the socio-political events that took place in Oltenia County on November – December 1937 very important are the documents kept in local archives, some of them being confidential reports made by the Regional Inspectorate of Gendarmerie from Craiova¹⁰, and also the documents coming from prefect’s office archive.

Setting up, on November 17, 1937, the Tătărescu government was capable of confusing the population, and the main political party’s representative in local organisations.

The public opinion was surprised and disoriented by the outcome of government crises. For most of the population, especially for the intellectuals from the villages and cities, the new government’s structure shows an obvious orientation towards right, cooperation with Vaida’s “revolutionary nationalism” being done not to save the electoral majority, but for completely different reasons: “this pact is just like an infusion of nationalism made to a old organism like liberal party or, more likely, is the first step that is made to consolidate this State from national ethnic point of view”¹¹. Putting together a right government would have never been allowed by the context of Romanian foreign policy and would have never been possible without total reconciliation of all nationalist groups¹².

The game with government’s resignation, the repeated audiences to the King of the Party’s leaders, imposing some conditions for joining the power, using compromises with modifications, all of these has created to the majority of

parties, political groups and independent lists (Mircea Muşat, Ion Ardeleanu, *cited work*, p. 736).

¹⁰ Regional Inspectorate of Gendarme Craiova was a institution that had under control the Gendarmes Legions from Dolj, Gorj, Olt, Mehedinţi, Romanaţi, Vâlcea and Argeş counties, last county not being the object of our research. We specify that, in the areas east of river Olt from counties Olt and Vâlcea are included in historical province Muntenia, we will take into consideration also the information coming from these townships to offer an image as unitary as possible.

¹¹ National Archives, Dolj, fund Regional Inspectorate of Gendarmery from Craiova; file no. 3/1937, f. 1534.

¹² *Ibid*, f. 1503.

the population the feeling that extending the time and kipping the National Liberal Party in government was premeditated. In many occasions, the opposition tried to confirm that truth, but the government did not denied or approved¹³. The population, the leaders of different political organizations, especially the national-peasant, believed that it was a mistake of the leader of National – Liberal Party, Ion Mihalache, that he did not accepted the formation of the government in the formula imposed by the King, living the party in the opposition. It was the hope that, with the change of the ruling par, the financial situation will became better “by decreasing the taxes witch they consider to be to big by compare with their income and the life that have become to unbearable will became cheaper”¹⁴.

The reports from the gendarme legions contain also unrealistic appreciations related to perception of the political events by the population. A suggestive example can be the appreciations that the authorities included in the report of the Gendarmerie Legion Dolj, issued for November 1937:

What is unanimous recognized is the undisputed merit, wisdom and patriotism of H.M.S. King, who could not give to this country, agitated enough, another government without producing a social lack of balance, who could transform in an undeserved intense struggle with serious foreign complications. (...) the program announced by the Prime Minister was received with live satisfaction by all and this way have been saluted with an obvious relief the 3 major problems proposed to be solved by the new government: strengthening and equipping the army, removing the politics from the administrative apparatus and acceleration the task of equipping and rebuild the national economy. Off course – the people are saying – if the actual government would not have behind it, the State of service done by the past 4 years government, we could not look with total confidence, solving the future problems mentioned above. In conclusion, the rural population puts all the hope in today’s government and most of them are decided to support it¹⁵.

The local authorities often inserted in official papers fraises of commendation for any activity and action of the King Carol II. But the compliments about solving the government crises did not reflect the truth about the perception Dolj county population had in the mater, the events in the following period proving that the population will not support the ruling party.

Amongst the local political organizations, the members of National Peasant Party have been without moral and agitated because their party have not been invited to be part of the government, like they expected. They had, still, the

¹³ *Ibid*, f. 1710.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, f. 1722.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, f. 1534-1535.

hope that after the general elections they will get the majority in Parliament and, based on population support, they can claim the power¹⁶.

The electoral campaigns have been officially open on November 19, 1937, when the parliament has been dissolved. In the initial phase, it was pretty calm. The lists of local political organisations have been issued to the electoral bureau, containing only the “heads of the list”, the exception being All for the Fatherland, who issued complete lists. Propaganda using manifests was reducing. In return, popularization of electoral sings was a method used often – “Nothing is respected anymore, the signs are painted using template over night”¹⁷, the most perseverates being the members of All for the Fatherland Party.

The relative calm from the beginning of the campaign was because the leaders of the local organisations have been waiting directives from the centre, especially those regarding the electoral pacts maid in Bucharest.

Also, in initial phase, the local authorities, based on local election results and information gathered from the population, writhe down in reports to be sent to central authorities a series of prognostications for parliament elections. For example, in Dolj county, for the ruling party it was foreseen to obtain 38-40% of the votes, taking into consideration that the percentage could became even higher in the context of nonaggression pact of the opposition, the introduction of the legionnaires that produces a bad impression in electorate ranks; for national-liberal, 28-30%, in conditions of them having many problems in the county, and for national-liberal georgisti, 4-5%, the partisans of this political group condemning their leaders for not making the pact cu old liberals, therefore not having the hope of a soon reconciliation. Regarding the pattern of national-liberal and national-peasant political man from the rural areas, the following quote is very suggestive:

Multiple passings have been made from Peasants to Liberals. The perspective of a new four year government has made many people to think twice. What does that mean? In the rural areas the politic is not made from convictions, is made from interests. All are opportunists. Nobody sais today: I am in this political group because X was solved, good problem for the country and nation. Today you will hear everybody: I will join the Peasants or Liberals because I have 2 children or I have to occupy for them that function or promotion etc. This is politic in the village world. Few are mature enough to understand it in its all meanings¹⁸.

Therefore, politicians in the rural area (the affirmation can be extended to those in urban area also) lack the civic education, their personal interests being

¹⁶ *Ibid*, f. 1567, 1610.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, f. 1535.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, f. 1536.

in front of the country's interests. Being a member of a political party was not the result of the conviction that ideology and actions of that party are the ones giving consistence to their option to be part of an organism thru witch a politician will serve his country, the community he represents, the people that gives him their vote etc. More important was the social position and influence offered by a political function, all these giving the possibility of obtaining easy some personal advantages.

Regarding the legionnaire, their initial start went suddenly to a halt (for the moment) because of the nonaggression pact made by the leaders in Bucharest with national-peasants and national-liberals georgiști. The central legionnaire leadership considered that by signing the pact (the purpose of that was to remove the aggressions during electoral campaign and to fight for abolition of censure and siege state) the other political groups that sign it has recognize the Legionary Movement as force and party, legionnaire in the territory have been disoriented:

It was a political moment understood fundamentally wrong by the Legionars. The effect was immediate. Stupefaction in Legionary world. Then the need for explanations, the Captain declares textual "Our deal can not upset anybody; it is a deal of peace" (...). The unanimous believe is that a mistake was done who sent the legionnaire movement way back and made it to lose popularity. This agreement did not bring any practical winnings because from moral and ideological point of view they will collect only damages (...). People are wandering how these people will rule the country, when they have no political sense and when in fact have no leaders¹⁹.

In this context, the authorities considered that the elections in Dolj County will bring to this party no more then 10-12% from the total of the votes, maybe even less. It was the believe that a good part of the votes reserved for them will go to the national-christian or to the government²⁰.

For the National-Christian Party, the prognostic given by the authorities was at least 12-14% from the total of the votes. On county elections on 1937, the party obtained 16.000 votes in Dolj County that meant a real success for national-christian movement. But, becoming dizzy by the victory they have obtained, until the end of October, the national-christian lost contact with the population, disoriented by the existing divergences between the leaders. In parliament elections perspective, they have organize, on October 31, a rally in "Minerva" garden in Craiova, where more then 800 listeners participated, including delegates from the county. The discussions had nothing new related to main ideas of party's ideology, concentrated on antijew propaganda

¹⁹ *Ibid*, f. 1539.

²⁰ *Ibid*, f. 1540.

(*jidovească*)²¹. Proposals to adhere to the agreement proposed by the national-peasants have been unanimously disapproved, because the following have been considered:

Any agreement with the Peasants will mean an abnegation of an entire past of struggle on the nationalism's barricades. A mixing between these two groups on any considerable will be seen here as a desertion from the straight line of struggle in the service of national idea and the end will only be the downfall²².

With the exception of Dolj County, where the prognostics given by the local authorities have been complete, in the other counties the authorities either not made these kind of provisions or they limited themselves to make appreciations, especially, about the possible success in elections of local organisations of All for the Fatherland Party. Therefore, in Olt County, in Gendarmerie Legion's report for November is written that while the number of local organisation's members is rising, the legionnaire propaganda is unsuccessful for the population because "all the people are cemented between the two parties National-Liberal and National-Peasant and less in the organization of National-Christian party"²³. In Romanați County, it was considered that Everything for the Country "will have chances to succeed because is an untested party and has a promising program of justice desired by the entire population and is the hope that will bring something new in political life, especially in the ranks of the youth will find increased support"²⁴.

On the other hand, the Jews, who were used to vote for the Peasants, were extremely indignant with the pact made by the Peasants with the legionnaire. Some Jews started to look towards the liberals, an option uncomfortable as the previous one because of the cartel made by the ruling party with Nicolae Iorga's Nationalist Democrat Party and Alexandru Vaida Voievod's Romanian Front. Others pushed the idea of separated lists, a more disadvantaged option like the first one because it was considered that "a separate list will increase the conviction that Jew element – even locals – are not willing to be assimilated in Romanian population's mass and they like in this situation to be considered in minority regime"²⁵.

Most of the prognostics made by the local authorities regarding the votes that local political organisations will receive have not been verified by the parliament election's results. This shows, mainly, that political realities in the territory were not known by the authorities as good as they would like.

²¹ *Ibid*, f. 1539.

²² *Ibid*, f. 1540.

²³ *Ibid*, f. 1579.

²⁴ *Ibid*, f. 1592v.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

On the other hand, authorities from Bucharest imposed a series of security measures for the elections. Therefore, on beginning of December 1937, Ministry of Internal Affairs was sending to county prefects a series of instructions regarding the liberty of propaganda of recognized political parties, and also to maintain public order and safety. These had to be issued to authority's prefects under their control. By December 31st, 1937, right to gather was free, according to article 28 from Romanian Constitution²⁶ and to valid instructions. The following were forbidden: night meetings and clandestine ones; marches in paramilitary formations and wear of uniforms in group or individual; participation under any circumstances of school children and students at meetings, manifestations or political propaganda (according to relative dispositions of school children's discipline and art. 15 from the law for completing some dispositions from law of university education from March 24, 1937); showing electoral signs and inscriptions on public buildings; on private ones is allowed only with the consent of the owners and the inhabitants²⁷. Can be considered that most of these instructions were targeting, mainly, limitation of legionnaire's activity in electoral campaign.

These instructions specified that persons from another city, coming with the purpose of making political propaganda had to have on them the member card of that party and had to identify itself to police, administrative and gendarmerie authorities. Also, the weapons can be carried only with a legal permit, but not in public assemblies, gathering of any kind, in electoral buildings or those of public authorities. Identified students of making electoral propaganda – showing or distribution of political manifests, painting electoral signs, holding speeches of electoral interest – had to be recorded on paper issued as soon as possible to Police General Direction. In the case of attacking the Monarchy, the King or members of royal family on a public meeting, the papers written for those persons had to be issued for solving to the *Parchet*. Instructions ended with specification that all those who respected the measures for public safety and order had complete freedom of action. In return, those who break them had to be stopped immediately in the strict limit of the law²⁸.

The prefects have issued ordinances in which they notified the population and persons involved in politics that starting with December 14, 1937 all the

²⁶ The content of art 28 in Constitution from 1923 was: "Romanians, indiscriminate of ethnical origin, language or religion, have the right to meet peaceful and without weapons, in compliance with the laws that regulates the execution of this right, to treat all kind of problems; for that there no need for previous authorisation. Meetings under the open sky are allowed, except markets and public roads. Meetings, processions and manifestations on public roads and public markets are subject to police laws".

²⁷ National Archives, Dolj, fund Dolj county Prefecture, Administrative Department, file no. 434/1937, f. 160.

²⁸ *Ibid*, f. 161.

street manifestations are forbidden. In case of noncompliance the fine 5000 lei if the infraction would happen on urban territory and 500 lei for rural territory²⁹.

In the report issued on December 1937 by Regional Inspectorate of Gendarmerie Craiova, signed by Colonel Emil Broșteanu and major Florian Stoienescu, was specified that political parties have not made a very intense electoral campaign, because of bad condition of the roads the travels into territory being very reduce. From the parties in electoral competition, tree have been more active: National-Liberal Party, the ruling party, has made political propaganda in all the counties in Oltenia, on their meetings numerous people have participated; Everything for the Country was considered the 2nd party who activated day and night on entire territory of Oltenia, his teams went to all the villages and made contact with the population, wining numerous adhesions; National-Peasant Party has situated, in authorities opinion, on 3rd place. Representatives of the rest of the Parties: National-Christian, National-Liberal Georgist, Radical Peasant, Agrarian and Peoples moved harder in territory, their electoral propaganda being seen the least. In big picture, the political propaganda happened in order and, except a few incidents, was considered to be the quietest electoral campaign from all that took place in the last time³⁰.

The action of left and extreme left currents seems to have been disappeared completely. The authorities considered that most of the members and the sympathizers of those movements have joined the right parties, because in their programs they have seen an accomplishment of their aspirations. Especially, the Legionary Movement attracted most of the manufacturers and workers from the cities, this fact being verified with the opportunity of parliament elections³¹.

During electoral campaign, all political organisations in competition made contact with the population, either in different meetings, either by personal contact “from man to man”, either by spreading manifests. Each party exposed his program and requested people’s vote. The population was dazed and disoriented by the critics and promises made by the politicians. On one side, the one in government bragged with their “achievements” in the last 4 years of ruling, and on the other side the parties in opposition placed the expensive life and all the lacks of society on the actual government. All promised a better life and asked the votes for the organisations they represented³².

²⁹ National Archives, Vâlcea, fund Valcea county Prefecture, file no. 38/1937, file 110.

³⁰ National Archives, Dolj, Fund Regional Inspectorate of Gendarme Craiova, file no. 3/1937, f. 1642-1643.

³¹ *Ibid*, f. 1648. Information about the left and extreme left currents are with gaps, incomplete because of the selections done by state authorities in 1947 having as effect destruction of documents with fascist and/or anti-soviet character, according to a note left by exactly those authorities (*Ibid*, f. 1647).

³² *Ibid*, f. 1746.

Considering the way electoral propaganda was handled, from the political parties in competition All for the Fatherland distinguished itself. The Romanian Legionars diploid an intense political propaganda, legionnaire teams moving around on entire Oltenia territory, “facing all weather and privations and going across the most remote places and visiting even the isolated houses”³³. Large meetings were not frequent. Such a meeting happened on December 1937, in Craiova, in the garden of “Rio” cinema. Around 1000 members and sympathizers of All for the Fatherland attended, leaders of Legionary Movement spoke to them, like Alexandru Cantacuzino, professor Radu Gyr and others about the Legionary program and about the sacrifices from Spain for the triumph of nationalist cause. Rest of the propaganda was done man to man, from house to house, and also by making contacts with small groups of members and sympathizers³⁴. The teams sent in this purpose showed a methodical organisation of the propaganda and complete discipline³⁵. In the beginning they have tried propaganda with marches, but confronted with the authorities did not allow them this kind of activities because of legal dispositions, they renounce at this system³⁶.

A particularity of Legionary propaganda was introducing a new system meaning propaganda using patephone. Patephone plates, most of them containing the speeches of Captain Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (head of Legionary Movement), were plaid to be listen by those who participated in Legionary meeting, their number being, in average, between 50 and 300³⁷.

Romanian Legionars acted in electoral campaign different by comparison with the representative of the other parties, still fixed in political stereotypes practiced over the years. Therefore, leaders in the counties have run last on electoral lists, because they wanted to remove the mentality according to witch a county was the property of a county leader where this one invested capital only to recover it later from daily allowance, interventions and business. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, believing in the force of personal example, run not at the top of the list, but de second. In all the counties, he has established the running’s without personal interest and without a favour³⁸.

The Legionary propaganda represented an obvious contrast next to electoral propaganda based on pluses or minuses of political parties who in various periods have been in control of the government. The electorate can not place on members of Legionary Movement the lack of achievements or lying attitude towards the people that are about to give them their trust because they

³³ *Ibid*, f. 1649.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ *Ibid*, f. 1650.

³⁶ *Ibid*, f. 1749.

³⁷ *Ibid*, f. 1538.

³⁸ National Archives, Vâlcea, fund Vâcea county Prefecture, file no. 37/1937, f. 27.

have never been previous in the ruling structures of the country. On top of that, they came with new strategies for promoting their party, with a new mentality. All of these can explain a part of the success the Everything for the Country Party had in parliament elections.

Although it was the believe that the pact made in Bucharest cu National Peasant Party will decrease the sympathy for this movement, the result of the elections proved the contrary. The vote obtained by the legionnaire got over the most optimist expectations, even those of the Legionary Movement's leaders. Thereby, the votes obtained by the legionnaire in elections for the Chamber placed All for the Fatherland Party on the third place after the liberals and national-peasants. By counties the number of votes has been split in the following way: in Dolj, the legionnaires got 22.109 votes; in Gorj, 8.318; in Mehedinți, 5.429; in Olt, 4.248; in Romanati, 6.437; in Valcea, 6.201. The election results in Dolj County exceeded all expectations, the explanation given by the authorities was that many votes have been given to legionnaire by the partisans of other political parties who showed this way their discontent towards their own parties³⁹. The same officialises considered that, although have reached the higher level of votes in their existence, the real number, for Dolj county, was a lot higher, it could have reached 30.000, if they take into consideration the minor sympathizers and those who did not vote⁴⁰.

Regarding the exact results obtained by the other political parties in competition, they are specified only partial in the documents we have studied for counties Gorj, Olt, Mehedinți and Romanati, these being limited to results obtained in elections by the legionnaire, government or to appreciations of the authorities regarding the parties in opposition in general. Complete data have been written in reports for counties Dolj and Valcea. Of course the numbers are important, but we consider far more important the information's regarding the causes of losing the elections by the Government.

The election results for the Chamber, on December 20, in Valcea county was: Government obtained 18.958 from expressed votes; National-Peasant Party, 16.298; All for the Fatherland, 6.201; National-Liberal Georgist Party, 2.358; National-Christian Party, 855; Radical-Peasant Party, 2.041; Agrarian Party, 931; Peoples Party, 275, and in those for the Senate on December 22: Government 10.392; National-Peasant Party, 7.288; Georgists, 897; All for the Fatherland, 2.138 votes⁴¹.

In Dolj County, the results for the Chamber have been: Government, 30.831; National-Christian Party, 7.925; Georgists, 7.817; National-Peasant Party, 17.038; Independent, 969; Agrarian Party, 3.755; Radical-Peasant Party,

³⁹ National Archives, Dolj, fund Regional Inspectorate of Gendarme Craiova, file no. 3/1937, f. 1650.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, f. 1682.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, f. 1747.

1.263; Peoples Party, 562; Independent, 53; Independent, 87, and in the Senate: National-Liberal Party, 17,038; National-Liberal Georgist Party, 3.494; National-Peasant Party, 8.699; National-Christian Party, 1.689; All for the Fatherland, 9.255 votes⁴².

According to election results for the Chamber from December 20, in Gorj county, All for the Fatherland was the second after ruling party National-Liberal Party, who got 20.101 votes (on July, 1937 in county elections obtained just 16.546, still his popularity was down from the 1933 elections). Rest of the opposition has lost a number of their voting people who voted for All for the Fatherland. The number of votes received in Gorj County by the opposition parties was reduced to half since the county elections from July the same year⁴³.

Options of oltenian electorate, expressed thru votes given to different political parties, have been determined by a series of general and local discontents. In Oltenia's locality's severe problems existed, ignored over the years, more or less, by every party in government. Decrease of popularity of the local organisations of the two parties considered, traditionally, democratic – National-Liberal Party and National-Peasant Party – can be better understand by description of some of the frequent realities in Oltenia.

One of the biggest problems was considered the deplorable situation of the roads, most of them being impracticable, and in rainy times the access to communes was impossible. In commune Moțaței (Dolj county), the villagers reproached the prefect this situation when he came to ask their votes: “Do you like Mister Prefect the roads: now you come to ask for our votes?”⁴⁴.

Other discontents were related to pore local administration, witch cause o series of problems. There were only a few mayors onsets, most of them being “recruited from the worst people of the villages. People without scruples who have been in all parties, some of them with penal convictions...”⁴⁵. Administration system, way of spending the public money was relay hated, and control was nothing but fiction, commune's budgets being made to satisfy the personal interest of mayors and their partisans. In the same time, the communes were in ruins, no initiative was taken, and everything was done just in form:

Unpaid staffs, bad roads in commune, broken bridges, fights between intellectuals, total lack of respect towards authority, chaos in everything.

There is no commune without politic and where we see the village split in political groups. The saloon gathers all, takes their minds and the murder is set⁴⁶.

⁴² *Ibid*, f. 1681.

⁴³ *Ibid*, f. 1689.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, f.1679.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

In the same time, the prestige and authority of order organisms, especially of Gendarmerie, were quite low, and that makes it harder to fulfil the duties:

If one gendarme intervenes and enforces the law, is transformed in oppressor. The sleazebags are prepared to go and whisper to Prefect that the gendarmes only persecute their people. Perhaps none of the administrative and police institution is more expose to interventions and vexations of all kind, like the gendarmes.

During the last elections we had so many interventions for relocation from one place to the other, that, if somebody stood against them, there will not be left any employees in their place⁴⁷.

In Dolj County, during elections, the gendarmes have been accused of being legionnaire, one report being made at the Prefecture against the Commandant of Gendarme Legion Dolj, Major Istrati George, and “his legionnaire”, the gendarmes under his command. Commandant considered: “a more ridiculous situation like this one has never been heard and that shows how ungifted they are (*informed* – our emphasis) those who are on top of the county’s when they appreciate the things so wrong and without discernment”⁴⁸.

Next to the abuses made by local administration, was the rises of prices for material for first necessity, in general the life was more expensive, without being find by the Government a possibility to solve the situation.

Other situations that provoked discontents to a good part of oltenian population came from the fact that people from administration, priests and teachers got involved in politics:

Priests, Praetors and Teachers have made political propaganda, held meetings, had speeches and made demagogic promises to *a population that proved not to be deceived any longer by such promises* (our emphasis).

The Priests have left their altars; teacher their desks and started the electoral fight, like any paid agent, forgetting their high mission to the State.

(...) They all wonder to get set, and because of that they have lost any ascendant in populations eyes⁴⁹.

In Valcea county, in an address of Prefecture sent, on December 11, 1937, to School Inspectorate, was specified that teacher Marin I. Popescu from commune Fumureni was absent almost everyday from the school and he made propaganda against National Liberal Party⁵⁰. On December 16, 1937, Cultural and Missionary Direction of Râmnicului Noului Severin Episcopy, was sending

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, f. 1679-1680.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, f. 1680.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, f. 1646.

⁵⁰ National Archives, Vâlcea, fund Valcea county Prefecture, file no. 37/1937, f. 16.

an address to Prefecture of Valcea county in which he notified them that disposition has been given that all priests will not be involved in any political agitations, which contravene dispositions given by the Government. Never the less, according to the report of *Pretura plășii* Horezu from December 14, two students from commune Pietrarii de Sus have been surprised by the authorities when transporting electoral manifests of National-Peasant Party addressed to the commune priest⁵¹. Examples could go on, because this kind of situation has been frequent and there are written in documents for other counties to.

Besides the realities described above, have been – in local authority's opinion – other causes that led to losing a significant number of votes by the Government. Thus, in elections from December 1937, there were no more electoral abuses and different pressure made usually on the people that want to vote, "unaware most of the times of his role in public life"⁵². Also, the government people rely on optimistic report and prognostics given by the heads of sectors and left "elections completely free, decreasing this way the government inheritance and allowing the opposition to share it"⁵³.

Loosing such a number of votes by the government happened also because of the way the legionnaire did their electoral propaganda, the most intense by compares with the other political parties in competition. Suggestive in this sense are the appreciations made by the local authorities:

Only the agents of Everything for the Country party have been loyal (*honest – n.n*) in propaganda, is true they did not had to brag with a past political activity, because they were for the first time in political arena, but by fact that, in most of these cases they did not asked the votes for themselves, provoking a big curiosity and perplexity in the people. That curiosity made them listening and *pay more attention to what they say* (our emphasis).

Promising an honest administration, using the public money in an honest manner, addressing to them and conversations only (with) people that can understand, only honest, hard working, not drunks, not political emigrants, provoked interest (...) and the support was given to them⁵⁴.

Contrary to the system until then, the followers of All for the Fatherland Party did not provoked anybody and they avoided any conflict, and when they were provoked, they report any incident to the authorities, despite the fact that

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, f. 17, 19.

⁵² National Archives, Dolj, fund Regional Inspectorate of Gendarme Craiova, file no. 3/1937, f. 1711.

⁵³ *Ibid*, f. 1712.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

they could have responded to provocations⁵⁵. Also, on the election day they came to the voting place in perfect order and discipline⁵⁶.

In contrast with the interest shown to legionnaire propaganda, population attending at different political meeting was listening; generally, with no interest what traditional politicians were promising, without making any comments and without showing any predilection towards any political organisation⁵⁷. The reluctant attitude manifested by the population came from conviction that regardless of the ruling party the taxation will not be diminished nor will be taken measures to improve life⁵⁸.

During parliament elections in December 1937 a change was seen in oltenian population's mentality, authorities considering that "it should be taken into consideration in the future". Suggestive in this sense are the notes kept in confidential reports of Regional Inspectorate of Gendarmerie Craiova:

Indeed, although apparently the rural population showed indifference next to all political manifestations in the last time, this fact means exactly a disapproval of the system used until now by the Romanian politician, who promise everything during electoral campaign and accomplish nothing of what he propose when he will be in charge of the country.

Everybody has seen that and is no need to be demonstrated⁵⁹.

Just that misbelieve, perpetuated over the years by lack of interest towards the promises made to the people in electoral campaign, led to those surprising results for National-Liberal Party and National-Peasant Party. Nobody would ever imagine that a party with tradition and authority would suffer such a failure without precedent in Romanian political history⁶⁰.

Another situation that shows a change of mentality was the fact that electoral campaign was done in calm and order, the population demonstrating an unusual reserve in this kind of circumstances, and small and few incidents appeared have not been noticed by compares with the violent acts done in past elections.

In election day the population presented - contrary to tradition – like a real "mute sea". Have not been the demonstrations from the past, with plenty of alcohol, with biting, crimes and abuses from authorities. *Each voted how he wanted and did not reviled his thought, when he was asked. It seems that this fact is the result of an ad(-)hoc education given by the legionnaire leadership to his*

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, f. 1713.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, f. 1652.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, f. 1688.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, f. 1722.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, f. 1636.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

*members, who became contagious to a good part of the population (our emphasis)*⁶¹.

The biggest surprise was the change of the government, because of not getting the majority in the Chamber by the National-Liberal Party and putting Octavian Goga, head of National Christian Party, in charge with forming the government, with collaboration of “centers” from National-Peasant Party. The authorities expressed the rural population reaction in the following manner: “It was a lightning strike, in the middle of insecurity that took over every body and a deep satisfaction broth to public sentiment, which vibrates with a powerful nationalism in this region”⁶². The 20th December was a surprise also in urban area in Oltenia County, where almost half of the votes went to All for the Fatherland Party, rest of the votes being divided between the rest of the parties. Intellectual population from the cities received whit happiness the news of ascending to power of National-Christian Party and the ruling program they have announced, especially solving the prices and black market problems find approval with urban population⁶³. Besides the national-peasant organisations, who remained loyal to Iuliu Maniu, rest of the political parties made no opposition to the new government⁶⁴. Regarding approval by the population of Goga’s government, this has to be looked with reservation, because was normal for the local authorities not to criticize the King’s decisions in written documents. But the fact that National Christian Party received few votes by compares with the other parties, shows reduced popularity in population’s ranks of the new ruling party.

Regarding g the position of Legionnaire Movement, although he reaches with the occasion of parliament elections maximum of intensity and obtain the highest number of votes from his existence, legionnaire central leadership, knowing his limits, did not thing in coming to power, for now. They had the believe that the events of after the end of national-christian mandate will definitely indicate the for ruling the country⁶⁵.

The parliament elections from December 1937 can by seen as a test witch political parties, weakened and severed because of internal tensions, lost it. Also, can be said that the options of oltenian electorate have been determinate, not by a state of disorientation, but by the high level of saturation next to the politics shown by the political parties who ruled the country in the past.

Their results demonstrated, therefore, a maturity of the electorate, his options showing clearly that demagogy, used on a large scale over time by the representative of liberals, peasants and other parties, can no longer be a

⁶¹ *Ibid*, f. 1637.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ *Ibid*, f. 1645.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, f. 1646.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, f. 1652.

conviction element for winning population's trust, who had enough of traditional political games.

Also, the parliament elections from December 1937 represented a test for Legionnaire Movement to, and All for the Fatherland Party successfully past it, although the party was "popularized" by the adversary as being extremist. A good part of Oltenia's population with voting right give trust to this organisation just because it came with new element of propaganda, conduit and action, representing a plus of credibility also the fact that have not been "compromised" by former rulings.

These elections demonstrated that just theoretical promotion of some democratic principles are not enough, but more important are the facts. Any democratic regime loses his substance if the welfare of the population is left last just by those elected to represent them in leadership institutions of the state. Of course, can appear voices to sustain that responsible for degradation of democratic system is king Carol the 2nd, but a good part of guilt belongs to those who, guided by personal interests and ambitions, forgot the main role they should play on Romanian political scene: defend the Romanian democracy with religious believe and, implicitly, the interest of Romanian's citizens.