

MEASURES TO REDUCE/ELIMINATE THE CONCUBINAGE IN THE OLT COUNTY (1938–1940)*

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Abstract: In this article are analysed the steps taken by the authorities of the monarchic dictatorship regime of King Carol II to reduce and, even, eliminate the concubinage in the Olt County (*ținut*), with the purpose of reaffirmation of the Christian family in the Romanian society, as defining element of national identity, but also to transpose in practice the concept of family as defined by the Constitution from 1938.

Keywords: family, concubinage, organized marriages, King Carol II, Olt County (*ținut*).

The monarchic authority regime, established during the night of February 10/11, 1938, brought, besides the substantial political changes, also a series of socio-cultural changes. The protagonists of the new regime were, at least at the theoretical and propagandistic level, the followers of the reinstating the Romanian traditional values, dropping them into desuetude being considered one of the main reason of the “morale crisis” of the Romanian society in the decade before the second World War¹.

In this context, between the ideological directives/leading ideas of the National Renaissance Front, political organisation established on December 16th, 1938, was also recorded “the respect of the family as social cell”, starting from premise that the: “Individual alone cannot support itself in reality. He constitutes a heresy. The individual can only be conceived as a social element part firstly in the family. Protecting the family is therefore a purpose”².

Sustaining the idea of Christian family, in the Constitution of “King Carol II”, promulgated on February 27, 1938, was written the compulsoriness of religious

* Some paragraphs and ideas of this text can be found in an older study, named *Orthodox Church and “revalorisation” of the family during King Carol II (1938–1940): Olt County*, in “Mehedinți – istorie, cultură și societate”, vol. 5, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Didahia Publishing House, 2012, pp. 920–927.

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¹ *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România întregită (1918–1940)*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2003, pp. 385–390; Cf. *Biserica și problemele sociale. Conferințe*, f. I., Tipografia Cărilor Bisericești, 1933, pp. 21–40.

² Armand Călinescu, *Noul regim: cuvântări 1938–1939*, 2nd Edition, Bucharest, DoMinor Publishing House, 2003, p. 99.

marriage. In this regard, article 20 from the new fundamental law stated the following: “The civil status papers falls under the civil law. Drawing these papers will have to always precede the religious blessing, mandatory for all cults”³. This compulsoriness was not stated in the Constitution from 1923⁴.

Protection of the family constituted an important objective for the laic authorities and also for ecclesiastic ones. In Olt County (*ținut*), that materialized under various forms, of which we mention: establishments of canteens destined to provide meals for children from families with reduced material possibilities; campaigns for education of population, especially in rural areas, with the purpose of raising the quality of life, through awareness of local communities regarding the need to pay a higher importance to personal health and, special the children; organisation of a celebration dedicated to mothers with many children; attempt to solve the problem of concubinage, etc.

For example, “Mother’s Day” was organized, in 1939, by Guardian of the Country, in cooperation with all local authorities, targeting the mothers with at least eight living children, raised in their parents’ home. The purpose of this holiday was to make propaganda to increase the birth rate and prevent the infant mortality⁵, considering that: “wise measures will have to be taken to achieve an incentive towards the care of the Kingd’s children, seeking thru every mean to highlight the good mothers and stimulate them to care for the food of the children and supervise their raising”⁶. The awards given, in the Olt County (*ținut*), on the occasion of “Mother’s Day”, consisted in clothing products for children⁷. Although it did not represented a long term solution to the problems that families with many children were facing, the organisation of this holiday had the role to make the families aware of the importance that had to be given to the health of children and pregnant women⁸.

³ *Constituțiunea Regele Carol [al]II [lea]. Promulgată prin Înalt Decret Regal Nr. 1045 din 27 Februarie 1938. Publicată în “Monitorul Oficial” Nr. 48 din 27 Februarie 1938, Published exclusively by the Liga pentru Unitatea Culturală a tuturor Românilor, f. l., 1938, p. 13.*

⁴ Article 23 from the Constitution from 1923 stated: “The documents regarding the marital status are the responsibility of civil law. Drawing these documents will have to always precede the religious blessing” (C. Hamangiu, *Constituțiunea cea nouă din 29 martie 1923*, Bucharest, “Universala” Alcala&Co Library Publishing House, s. a., pp. 3–4).

⁵ See, regarding the demographic problem in the period between wars, Keith Hitchens, *România 1866–1947*, Translation by George G. Potra and Delia Răzdolescu, București, Humanitas Publishing House, 1996, pp. 360–362; and, for the period 1938–1940, “Buletinul Statistic al României” years 1938, 1939, 1940, official publication of Central Institute for Statistics, director: PhD Sabin Manuilă, București.

⁶ S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative Service, Section State Administration, file No. 86/1939, f. 7.

⁷ *Ibidem*, file No. 72/1939, f. 4v.

⁸ Such initiative was welcome, if is considered the fact that, in the analysed period most women in rural areas had multiple duties: agriculture, house work and taking care of the family. Many of them were working the land even when they were pregnant, sometimes until they delivered the baby into the world (Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, “Mother’s Day” in the Year 1939 – *Opportunity for Celebration and Propaganda: Olt County*, in “Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor»”, no. 12/2011, Craiova, pp. 94–102).

To give the appropriate importance to the family in Romanian society, one of the most important measures, taken in that time, was the attempt to solve the problem of concubinage, highlighted initially, by the priests to civil authorities.

In that period, through concubinage was understood the cohabitation of two persons of opposite sex that were only married civil and did not had the religious marriage service in the Church, and also the cohabitation of two persons of opposite sex that were not married civil and religious.

For example, on April 15th, 1938, Olt County prefect send out a notice to the authorities reporting to him asking for the resolution of concubinage:

“Is been highlighted to us by the priests and we checked for ourselves that, in every commune in this county, are many men and women living in concubinage – some being married civil without religious service, and others are not even married civil and also without religious marriage”⁹.

Therefore, the mayors together with local police chiefs had to fill charts with the situation of people living in concubinage and explain to them the disadvantages of such cohabitation. All people in concubinage had to get married civil and religious within 30 days from the date that notice was issued¹⁰.

The problem of concubinage was not solved, the evidence being the fact that on June 2nd, 1938, the Olt County prefect issued a new notice to the mayors and registrars reporting to him, because of the high number of people living in concubinage (1.391 pairs not married civil and religious and 1.265 pairs married only civil), giving them new instructions:

“If every one of you hat thought about the bad coming from this unfortunate living, I am convinced you will put all your heart to end in a very short time this sad situation that bring no honour to the society we live in and produces two bad things. The first: children born from these concubines have no right to inheritance; the second: in the event of a war they have no right to pension; and for us as country is a disgrace to have such elements.

Upon receiving this order you will summon all the priests, teachers and chiefs of police, and on agreement you will fix the first holiday to call all concubines at city hall to be married legally, civil and religious, and those married civil will be immediately married religious. (...) the people being forced we will be successful”¹¹.

The authorities of Olt County give dispositions that men and women refusing to formalize the civil and religious marriage will receive records from the police authorities, with the hope that this way the problem of concubinage will be solved: “And being forced constantly in 4-5 months all will be married”¹².

⁹ S.J.A.N., Olt, Olt County Prefecture fund, file nr. 20/1938, f. 25.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, f. 59.

¹² *Ibidem*, f. 60v.

The situation was not singular; in all the counties in Olt County¹³ were cases of concubinage in various numbers, the hardest to convince to leave this illegitimate cohabitation being, in general, older persons¹⁴.

Besides, the matter of concubinage was valid in the entire country, the proof being the fact that The National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women submitted numerous letters to Ministry of Internal Affairs, offering to support, “together with other good people, who will want to help fulfilling this Christian and Romanian act”¹⁵, the marriage expenses.

Therefore, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was sending, at the begging of April 1940, a notice to all ten royal residents of the counties, notifying them of the objective of the called society and, in the same time, asking them to provide full support:

“The National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, ..., is informing us that in our country there are a high number of pairs that are cohabitating without being married civil or religious.

The social consequences of this arrangement (concubinage – our note) do not affect only hundreds of thousands of illegitimate children, but are also *digging, in the people conscience, believe in the holiness of the family (our emphasis)*.

Most of the cases were caused by the poor material situation that the pairs were, unable to handle the expenses needed to fulfil the civil and religious norm of marriage, The National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women aims to: 1. All the pairs not married belonging to orthodox rite, to be married civil and religious by the Society, thru our branches around the country; 2. The society will cover all the expenses for the wedding”¹⁶.

In this context, the Ministry of Internal Affairs asked the royal residents to give dispositions to the structures reporting to them that, together with the priests and teachers, to draw, for every locality, lists with the pairs cohabitating in concubinage and communicate the situation to the branches of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women in the region¹⁷.

On April 16, 1940, the Ministry of Internal Affairs completes the instructions given before. Therefore, the civil marriage had to be officiated at the end of May, and the religious one at the beginning of June. Was desired that:

¹³ Olt County was one of the ten territorial-administrative units created thru decree-law from August 14, 1938 and had the following counties: Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, Romanați and Vâlcea (Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, *Rezidența regală a ținutului Olt*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2012, pp. 77–78).

¹⁴ S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative Service, file no. 3/1940. f. 129.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, file no. 16/1940, f. 632.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 631.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

“A number [of] up to 500 marriages to be performed in bloc, at the beginning of June current year, out of the pairs in the county capital, the godfathers being the county Prefect together with the president of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women from the locality. If she is missing, with the commander of the Guard of the Country. The rest of the marriages will be done on the centre of places, during June [...]”¹⁸.

The expenses needed for rings and candles would be bared by the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, and the city halls had to exempt these marriages from communal taxes. Also, the Minister of Internals considered opportune that “the heads of administrative authorities, within the possibilities, had to seek to give a festive character to these solemnities, which will be developed into a frame of Romanian customs”¹⁹.

In May 1930, the royal resident of Olt County has send a letter to HH.E. mitropolitan Nifon Criveanu, in which he informed about the initiative of Aretia Tătărescu, the president of the Romanian National Orthodox Society, and also about the decision that on May 2nd, 1940 will be officiated, in all the cities and communes of the county, the marriages of those living in concubinage. As a result, he was asking the mitropolitan to give dispositions to the priests in Olt County (*ținut*) to officiate this service, at the end of the regular religious service. The godfathers, delegated by the royal resident, were the prefects and the mayors with their wives²⁰.

On May 20th, 1940, the centralization of the concubines of orthodox rite was complete. In Olt County, there were 13.852 pairs of concubines; on the first place was Dolj County with 5.474 pairs of concubines and Craiova City with 50 pairs of concubines. On the second place was recorded Mehedinți County with 2.396 pairs of concubines (57 pairs in the city of Turnu Severin; 47 pairs in the city of Strehaia; 13 pairs in the city of Baia de Aramă and 2.279 pairs in the rural communes of the County²¹), followed by the counties of: Romanați (2.260 pairs of concubines), Vâlcea (1.547 pairs of concubines), Gorj (1.079 pairs of concubines) and Olt (1.046 pairs of concubines)²².

The persons authorized to organize the event occasioned by the marriage of those living in concubinage respected the instructions received. For example, the mayor of Râmnicu Vâlcea city, to confer the event the required pomposity, and to “have a higher response within population’s rank”, appealed to the local commander of National Guard of National Renaissance Front. Thereby, on June 1, 1940, asked the Guard commander to delegate as many members of the Guard to

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, file no. 292/1940, f. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 2v.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 4.

²¹ *Ibidem*, f. 20.

²² *Ibidem*, f. 33.

participate at the religious marriage of the concubines from the city that would be officiated, the following day, in the churches: “Cuvioasa Paraschiva”, “Sf. Gheorghe”, “Sf. Ioan” and “Cetățuia”. In the same time, he asked him to delegate the important members of the local unit of the National Guard to be the godfathers of the pairs that would be married religious in the mentioned churches²³.

Also, the prefect of Mehedinți County sent, on May 20th, 1940, to the royal resident of Olt County, a letter informing him that he took all the necessary measures to celebrate the religious marriages scheduled for June 2nd. At these would participate the priests, teachers, guardians and administrative authorities from the respective localities and, within possibilities, the events would receive a festive character. The mayors and their wives were delegated to be the godfathers of those to be married and hat to, together with the owners from the county’s communes, ensure the festive meal of the grooms after the religious marriage²⁴.

The Olt County prefect, in the letter sent to the royal resident on May 19th, 1940, mentioned the fact that he took all the measures necessary to perform the marriages scheduled in the county but he was, still, sceptic that these would be realised totally:

“Also we report that measures were taken and necessary orders have been given, although we together with Ms President of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women and Ms Commander of the Guardians already taken the all measures and arranged that these marriages will receive special attention and be performed within a special ceremonial frame, in 9 centre.

To celebrate these marriages we will hit the irremediable inconvenient caused by the actual conscriptions, because there are communes were even the mayor and the notary are conscripted, so other people will be identified to perform these marriages without a heartbreak”²⁵.

The marriages, scheduled for June 2nd, 1940, took place, within Olt County (*ținut*), in different proportions, not being possible the complete solving of the concubinage matter from various reasons, of which we mention: the refusal of one party to officiate and bless religious the cohabitation; the absence from locality of some of the men, mainly, because the conscription; some of the concubines did not had the marital status clarified (although they lived in concubinage with a person, legally they were married to another person or the divorce process was not finished)²⁶ etc.

²³ S.J.A.N., Vâlcea, Govora Police Detachment fund, file no. 12/1940, f. 105.

²⁴ S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative Service, file no. 292/1940, f. 20–21.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 17.

²⁶ S.J.A.N., Gorj, Târgu Jiu City Police fund, file no. 1/1940, ff. 20–23; S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative service, file no. 292/1940, f. 38.

According to the reports of the Olt County (*ținut*) prefects, the matter of concubinage was solved partially²⁷. For example, in Dolj County, on June 2nd, 1940, have been officiated 2.156 marriages, legitimating 1.370 children²⁸. These marriages represented less than half from the total of marriages scheduled according to statistics developed by Dolj authorities. 5.472 marriages were scheduled to be realized in 3 centres of the county: 2.146 marriages in Craiova centre (communes: Ocolu, Brabova, Amaradia and Filiași); 2.667 marriages in Băilești centre (communes: Segarcea, Calafat and Plenița) and 659 marriages in Sadova centre (commune Sadova)²⁹.

In Romanați County, on June 2nd and 9th, 1940, were officiated 1.015 civil and religious marriages, legitimating 467 children³⁰.

In Gorj County, on June 2nd, were celebrated 68 marriages legitimating 37 children³¹. The authorities appreciated that the rest of the marriages will be officiated gradually, as the problems appeared at the initially scheduled date will be solved.

The attempts of the ecclesiastic authorities, in the Olt County (*ținut*), to solve the problem of concubinage represent evidence of the interest to reaffirm/revalue the Christian family in Romanian society, as defining element of national identity.

On the other side, the stipulation in the “King Carol II” Constitution of the compulsoriness of religious marriage, required the transposition in reality of constitutional provision, and achieving/materialisation of this action in a short time led to additional pressures, mainly, from the laic authorities, exercises over the population living in concubinage, as the concept was defined in that time.

Also, if we consider the fact that a large part of the marriages officiated between 1938–1949 did not represented the free will of the persons concerned, but were performed as a result of socio-politic conjuncture created by the pressure of laic authorities, can be stated that these represented, in fact, an artificial social scenario, meant to correspond to the official ideology and less to the real needs of the persons living in concubinage.

²⁷ We have to specify that for the counties in Olt not found in the examples, we do not possess official data.

²⁸ S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative Service, file no. 284/1940, f. 21.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, file no. 292/1940, f. 11.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, file no. 275/1940, f. 29.

³¹ *Ibidem*, file no. 292/1940, f. 38.

ANNEX NO. 1

The order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs No. 5422A/ April 16th, 1940, regarding the measures the local authorities had to take to reduce the concubinage, as a result of the initiative of Orthodox Society of Romanian Women.

MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Direction of State Administration

No. 5422A from April 16, 1940

Mister PREFECT,

Following our circular order No. 5254 from April 11th, 1940, (Annex in copy), through which we brought to your attention the initiative of Orthodox Society of Romanian Women to contribute to the marriage of all pairs living in concubinage.

To fulfill this laudable intention we ask you to please order the following measures:

- 1) To prepare immediately the lists of those living in concubinage;
- 2) The legal formalities of the marriages to be performed by the city halls in May this year, so that towards the end of June to be finished;
- 3) The civil marriage to be officiated in May this year and the religious one at the end of June;
- 4) It is desired that a number up to 500 marriages to be performed, in bulk, at the beginning of June this year, amongst the pairs from the county capital and the surrounding communes, godfather being the county Prefect with the president of the Orthodox Society of Romanian Women from the city.

If she is not available, the commander of the Guard of the Motherland.

The rest of the marriages will be performed in centers of *plasa*, during June this year using the lists prepared by the administrative authorities.

The expenses needed for rings and candles will be supported by the Orthodox Society of Romanian Women.

- 5) Orders will be given that city halls will exempt these marriages from the communal taxes;
- 6) The minister believes appropriate that the heads of administrative authorities, within possibilities, to provide a festive character to these solemnities, that will evolve into a frame of Romanian customs.

Bringing to your knowledge the above, we pledge that you order we will be kept informed of the measures you will be taking in this matter, and also of the results you obtain, communicating the statistic data so that the Minister will know the effects of the measures taken in the entire country.

Minister /ss/ indecipherable

Director/ss/ indecipherable

This order was communicate to:
 Royal Residents of the Regions;
 County Prefects in the Country.

Source: S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund, Administrative Service, file No. 292/1940, ff. 2–2V.

ANNEX NO. 2

Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, No. 5574A/April 19, 1940, addressed to Royal Residents and County Prefects, regarding the distribution of the *Appeal* launched by the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women regarding the concubinage.

ROMÂNIA
MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
Direction of State Administration
No. 5574A from April 19, 1940

YOUR EXCELLENCY

Following our circular orders No. 5254/940 and No. 5573/940 we have the honor to advance a number of 10 appeals, launched by the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, asking you to please order the distribution and posting in your County.

The heads of authorities will control the posting of these appeals.

Minister:

Director:

This order was communicated to:
Royal Residents of the regions, for information and control;
County Prefects, for execution.

Source: S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund,
Administrative Service, file 16/1940, f. 630.

ANNEX NO. 3

The Appeal of National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women through which the members of Society offered their material support for the pairs of concubines that wanted to get married religiously.

APPEAL

Any good Christian and Romanian becomes sad thinking that thousands of families live in the Romanian country one not civil married and not married in the Holy Orthodox Law.

Therefore the Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, determined to serve its kind and Church, calls all those that because of the shortages and needs could not get married

until today, to register on the City Hall list to be married and wed religiously by the ladies of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women.

The expenses of the marriage will be covered by the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women and by the good people that would want to help the fulfillment of this Christian and Romanian act.

General Interim President of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women
ARETIA G. TĂTĂRESCU

C.27.180 – M.O. Central Printing Shop

Source: S.J.A.N. Dolj, Royal Residency of Olt County fund,
Administrative Service, File 16/1940, f. 632.