

THE MAIN POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN OLTENIA (1920–1989)

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Abstract: Oltenia is a region in the South-West Romania, with an individuality which was in attention of great events from Romanian history, starting from 1920 to 1989. In the present article we want to present in which fields and periods of the Romanian History we can talk about the ideological importance of Oltenia. The milestones 1920 and 1989 are interpreted as main moments in the history of Romania and Oltenia.

Keywords: Oltenia, 1920, 1989, ideologies, politics.

Year 1920 is when Romania, according to the international treaties, managed to impose the international acknowledgement of the Great Union. 1989 represents the year when the communist regime led by Nicolae Ceaușescu fell. For almost 70 years, Oltenia experienced the manifestation of numerous political ideologies, both democratic and totalitarian.

In 1920, Oltenia was an important region of Romania that had paid a tribute in blood for the political accomplishment of the Great Union. In the modern age, Oltenia was ideologically dominated by the two main currents, the liberals and the conservatives. Nonetheless, 1920 is the year when the conservatives disappeared from the political stage, being accused of supporting the German occupationists from 1916-1918. Whether the industrialists, the bankers, the free-lancers, the traders were close to the liberal ideology, the landowners had a conservative orientation.

Yet, in the context of the war, PNL (National Liberal Party), the only great party remained on the political stage, faced a decrease in popularity. Ion I.C. Brătianu decided that PNL would have to be reorganised, and, as a consequence, he accepted to begin an active opposition. The Leadership of the Government was taken upon himself by Alexandru Averescu, a hero of the Reunion War, who had founded People's Ligue, a party that enjoyed an impressive adhesion, due to the fact that, during his governing, there was done the Land Reform from 1921.

General Alexandru Averescu (marshal from 1930) was very popular in Oltenia, because, before the breaking out of World War I, he had commanded the

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Army Corps I from Craiova. One of his main counsellors was Constantin Argetoianu, who later became his adversary.

The platform of the new party was, to a great extent, the result of Constantin Argetoianu's political beliefs, the People's League (also known as "People's Party") was militating for universal voting, expropriation of the estates, followed by the sharing of the land between the peasants that had fought on the battle field. The final bill of the Land Reform was voted in June 1921, and Constantin Argetoianu was noting down: "*I was sitting, at the poll time, on the steps leading to the desk, opposite the seats – I was about to mistakenly call them mangers – and, at the call of each name from our party I was staring into the eyes of the person, and, under my gazing, none of them could say the contrary*"¹.

The inter-war development of Oltenia did not overcome in intensity the one from the period 1875-1914². The appropriated peasants after the land reform from 1921 were still facing difficulties due to the lack of a coherent strategy for the economic development. Too few dwellers of Oltenia chose to leave for Ardeal or Moldova. Most of them were perceiving Bucharest as the chance for better earnings, but not for settling in those parts of the country, but for saving money to buy land back home. The houses of the better-off peasants were not radically different from the ones of the average ones, but they were obviously surpassed by the properties of the landowners, the industrialists, the traders, or of the bankers. There were, further on, entire sectors dwelt by the craftsmen, or the traders. Turnu-Severin and Calafat had been built after a German urbanistic plan.

*"Until our call for Governing, in March 1920, Averescu was a kind of Dalai Lama, he was reading obsolete political economy authors. He was losing his time entertaining himself with trifles and petticoats, receiving the visits of all the schemers and he would give ear to the wretched. The result was a note in which I was asked to take measures that would confuse everything even more, I have never met a more apolitical spirit that his, and, during the time of his first attempts in his new career, he would make all the mistakes, not missing one"*³.

Constantin Argetoianu became noticed as an active opposer of the communists. As Minister of the Internal Affairs, he had survived a bomb attack, while he was travelling on the railway, in the ministerial carriage, and had made everything possible to diminish the act from the 8th of May 1921, when PCR (Communist Party of Romania), this party being an annex of the 3rd communist International, ordered the arrests on the 12th of May 1921: "*I returned to the green table...until then I had not opened my mouth: Gentlemen – and I looked smilingly at Averescu – gentlemen, your debates are futile; it is all finished. All the*

¹ Constantin Argetoianu, *Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, Central Historical Archives. CRP Archive, collection 104, file 8589, ff. 79–82.

² Florin Nacu, *Ideologii și proiecte politice în Oltenia (1920–1989). Aspecte istoriografice regionale, naționale și europene*, in "Journal of Romanian Literary Studies", no. 20/2020, pp. 1428–1429.

³ Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, file 8594, ff. 1848–1849.

communist leaders and the terrorists are at Văcărești or Jilava... I can assure you joyously that the communism in Romania is over!"⁴.

The two ideologies, the communist and the legionary, had their position in the history of Oltenia. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was tried for shooting commissary Manciu from Iași, in Turnu Severin, in 1925, being acquitted. In his writings, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu remembers the enthusiasm he was met with on the journey by train from Turnu Severin to Iași, crossing through Craiova and Slatina. In their anti-Semitic ideology, the legionary men were accusing the Jews of controlling the national economy from Craiova, Turnu Severin, Corabia etc.

One of the ministers from the Antonescu-legionary governing, Constantin Petrovicescu, born at Târgu Jiu, filled the leading position from the Internal Affairs Ministry.

General Ion Antonescu (later marshal), the future State Leader, removed on the 23rd of August 1944 and executed in 1946 for war crimes and the undermining of the national economy, had graduated the Military College from Craiova.

During the German military occupation from Oltenia (1916-1918), deputy-lieutenant Victor Popescu led a resistance movement against the German occupationists. His nephew, Ionel Popescu, was by his side. In the period after the war, they enjoyed recognition and merits, but in the communist age faced dishonour, privations and jail. Victor Popescu obtain rehabilitation in 1956, but Ionel Popescu, in total opposition with the communists, adhered the resistance movement, being jailed intermittently until 1969, passing away at the end of the year, Victor Popescu also dying in 1970⁵.

The communists also enjoyed their historical share in Oltenia. Firstly, the layers Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Petre Pandrea had in common with Oltenia the studies (Maurer had attended the primary school and the military college at Craiova) and their origin (Pandrea had been born at Balș, in Romanai) and the political activity. Nicolae Ceaușescu also comes from Oltenia, the later leader of the communist Romania, who was executed on the 25th of December 1989, in Târgoviște.

In Craiova, in 1934 and 1936, there took place political trials against the communists, then, after 1941, at Târgu Jiu, it was founded a camp for the communist prisoners, where, among others, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu were imprisoned. Nicolae Ceaușescu brought, in 1934, subscription lists for helping the communist prisoners, being arrested in 1935, in Dâmbovița, for communist propaganda. Ion Gheorghe Maurer, along Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Petre Pandrea, defended the imprisoned communists. Petre Pandrea was then jailed

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Ionel Stoica, Liliana Năstase, *Partizanii din pădurile Olteniei (1916–1917)*, available at <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/1916-1917-partizanii-din-padurile-olteniei>, accessed on January 14th 2020/

by the communists because he later defended the national-peasant who came in conflict with the communist power after 1944. Petre Pandrea married the sister of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu⁶.

Ion Gheorghe Maurer facilitated the escape of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej in August 1944, the act from the 23rd of August 1944, finding him hidden in the house of priest Ioan Marina, from the County of Vâlcea, the future Patriarch Justinian Marina⁷.

In 1926, the National Romanian Party-Iuliu Maniu and the Peasants' Party-Ion Mihalache merged, founding Peasant National Party, which was intended to fill the gap left by the conservatives.

Although he was not from Oltenia, the liberal I.G.Duca, a politician who worked in the legal system from Vâlcea County, became involved in the political and economic life of the county. He was several times a minister, and, before being assassinated in December 1933, he became prime-minister after the elections from November 1933.

In the period 1934-1937, the politician from Gorj Gheorghe Tătărescu⁸ led the second liberal government that resisted throughout a four-year mandate. Later, he filled the same position again, between November 1939 – July 1940, and, after the war, he managed to become minister of the external affairs in the communist government that negotiated the armistice from the 12th of September 1944.

Until the legionary rebellion from the 21st-23rd of January 1941, the iron-guardists had filled excellent positions in Oltenia. The most renowned legionary leaders had been Ion Preoteasa from Mehedinți and Gheorghe Jimboiu from Dolj, Ion Druiu, Petre Zegheanu, Ilie Popa from Romanați (Olt)⁹. At that time, there were recorded numerous abuses against the Jews from Oltenia, and many acts of violence addressed to other political enemies. Many of them were later jailed during the communist period.

Constantin Argetoianu would play a significant role in the Romanian political life, trying to become closer to the National Liberal Party, after the death of Ion I.C. Brătianu, for later becoming closer to the historian Nicolae Iorga, after the ascending on the throne of King Carol II, and participating to what was called “Iorga-Argetoianu Govern”, installed on the 18th of April 1931.

On how the govern was formed, Constantin Argetoianu noted: “*Iorga would storm into the people’s houses, and, without saying hello, he would greet them with «you’re a minister», to which the interpellated was babbling something similar to*

⁶ Al. Săndulescu, *Întoarcere în timp: memorialiști români*, 2nd Edition, revised and completed, Bucharest, 2008, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române Publishing, pp. 315–323.

⁷ Lavinia Betea, *Evadarea lui Dej*, available at <https://jurnalul.antena3.ro/scinteia/istoria-comunismului/evadarea-lui-dej-36860.html>, accessed on January 19th 2020.

⁸ Al. Gh. Savu, *Sistemul partidelor politice din România (1918–1940)*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing, 1976, p. 48.

⁹ For more details, see <https://www.istoria.ro/sectiune/general/articol/secretele-cuiburilor-de-legionari-din-romania-cine-au-fost-liderii-miscarii-si-cum-au-sfarsit>, accessed on February 12th 2020.

«Ok, but...». «No but. You're a minister. At half past seven you are at my house dressed in tails with your decorations on. At 8 o'clock we will be sworn in.» The future ministers would stand still in shock, handled then by their wives, delighted as they were, forgetting to accompany the «mister prime-minster» to the door. Mister prime-minister, wings on his heels as Hermes redivivus himself, was flying towards his automobile, me keeping up with him – towards the next destination”.

In the years of the Economic Crisis (1929–1933), Constantin Argetoianu intended to render valuable the remains of Averescu's politics that he attempted to reconfigure, in June 1932, as “agrarian” policy. Losing the elections from 1933, won by the liberals, Constantin Argetoianu would militate for the increasing in power of King Carol II. The ideology of Constantin Argetoianu was founded on a series of clichés, according to which democracy was a failure in Romania, the political parties being nothing more than “coteries”, the Romanian Parliament transforming in a “wind-grinding machine”. Constantin Argetoianu was thought of democracy as to a variable notion, which was founded on the fruitless speeches of the Opposition, on the criticism against the Power and a series of great promises, for the politicians who would later seize Power to forget everything that had been previously promised to the people, to steal as much as possible and to recompensate their adepts for resisting in the Opposition subsequently. Constantin Argetoianu received from Carol II the reward for his speeches, being Minister of the Industry and Commerce in Miron Costin Government in 1938. He was a prime-minister in the period September–November 1939.

There ought to be remarked that a long time of the inter-war period was, with regards to the external policy of Romania, between 1920-1936, under the landmark activity of the great diplomat Nicolae Titulescu, a conservative politician until 1920, and later liberal. He tried to negotiate a mutual assistance pact with the USSR, an initiative that did not become a reality. His activity was placed in the service of the two inter-war alliances, the Entente and the Balkan Pact.

In the period 1920–1945, Craiova was the residence city of a great boyar family that owned properties in almost all the counties from Oltenia, and in the rest of Romania too. They were interested in investing in industry, agriculture, art, culture.

In 1936, Ioan C. Michail, the richest Romanian from Romania (born in 1875 at Craiova, the son of boyar Dini Michail) was dying, leaving his entire wealth to the Romanian state, to make future major investments, especially in health and other fields that Romania would consider a priority. Yet, the Romanian state did not make a good use of this estate, the huge sums of money disappearing gradually until 1948, when the communists banned the existence of the foundations in Romania. Michail family had tried to modernise farming in Oltenia, to give an impulse to culture, the orthodox belief, by building schools, churches, palaces. On a more reduced scale, important donations had also been made by Cornetti and Aman families¹⁰.

¹⁰ Florin Nacu, *op. cit.*, pp. 1430–1431.

In the tragical summer of 1940, Constantin Argetoianu was of the opinion that Romania was not ready to oppose against neither the Soviet ultimatum from June 1940, nor the request coming from Germany and Italy to satisfy the pretensions of Hungary and Bulgaria. Constantin Argetoianu was a minister of the External Affairs for a week, declaring that Romania was renouncing the Anglo-French guarantees.

Escaped from the legionary persecution, once with the intervention of Ion Antonescu (Ion Gigurtu is also arrested along him, a former prime-minister, born at Turnu-Severin, the son of general Petre Gigurtu and Olga Bălcescu, nephew of Nicolae Bălcescu, his mother was the daughter of Nicolae Bălcescu's brother), Constantin Argetoianu tried to survive politically to communism too. Although he had left for the free world, after 1944, in 1946, he returned to the country. Nevertheless, the communists would not forget him for his actions and he would be arrested on the 5th of May 1950, and later die in Sighet prison, in 1955.

Ion Gigurtu, the son of the general Petre Gigurtu and Olga Gigurtu, was an engineer and phyllo-German politician, born in Turnu-Severin. He attended the primary and secondary school at Turnu-Severin, and high-school at Craiova, the higher education being completed in Germany. As the prime-minister of Romania, he had to sign the documents through which there were ceased the North-West of Transylvania and the Southern Dobruja, in the fall of 1940.

The ideology of Constantin Argetoianu can be resumed by an article published by "Dreptatea" Newspaper, on the 10th of November 1946, called "Welcome, uncle Costică!" (pejorative nickname for Constantin): *"Mr. Argetoianu is returning today to the country to test his abilities... Although you have reached the age of the elderly, you still spur similarly to a champion of the political decathlon. The country is willingly at your disposal. Here are the strigs: pull them! Here is a backstage: direct from there! Here are the people: mislead them! You have always been honest to yourself. You loved conservatism when you used to be a conservative. You loved liberalism when you used to be a liberal... Now, that you are a patriot, be welcome and redeem us, you Saviour"*¹¹. His party, "The National Union for Work and Recovery", founded in May 1947, disappeared under the blows coming from the communists, against the democratic system.

Whether until 1945, the major investments in the infrastructure from Oltenia were limited to the railways, after the installing of the communist regime, the agriculture and the industry came to the attention of the authorities, who wanted to see increase in production and to extend it in the fields where Romania was lacking the resources. Obviously, it was all done with great sacrifice and many of the investments were unrealistic. The chemical and petrochemical industry, the food industry, the wine-making industry, civile engineering, industrial and hydrotechnical constructions, mechanical engineering, aircraft, locomotives, carriage, textile confections, trade, service delivery, agriculture, fruit growing, viticulture, vegetable growing, zootechny registered a major increase, owing to the external

¹¹ "Dreptatea", November 10th 1946.

loans that Romania got, which led to a rise in the birth rate. Nonetheless, the decision of the leadership to renounce re-technologization, for the payment of the external debt, which directed to the performance decrease of the Romanian industry, the disappearing of the markets, the growth of the production costs, thus, in 1989, many of the sectors were still working with the raw materials in stock and a lot undercapacity.

After 1945, the communists went on to the nationalisation of the economy, the collectivisation of the agriculture and the sending to prison of the political opponents. Later, Petre Pandrea and Lucrețiu Pătrășacu were removed and imprisoned, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu being executed in 1954. The both leaders were removed by Ana Pauker and Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, that is, the ones who they had defended in the inter-war trials.

In 1947, Gheorghe Tătărescu, the minister of the external affairs was announcing that Romania had refused the Marshal Plan, invoking ideological reasons, according to which, no economic project conceived without the involvement of the Soviet Union could not be viable. It was understandable that the plan had been created by USA, in order to stop the expansion of the communism in Europe, and no one was expecting that a state under the political influence of Moscow would accept it.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, released on the 4th of August 1944, would later take part to repercussions personally, against those who would oppose collectivisation, as in the case of Vadu Roșca repression, from the passion of general and deputy-Minister of the Armed Forces¹².

The truth on collectivisation and industrialisation is available today also due to efforts of the historian Cezar Avram, who has published numerous works on nationalisation and collectivisation, leading to projects and researches carried out at “C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, which he managed for many years¹³.

A less known aspect in the history of Oltenia is represented by the anti-communist resistance. General Iancu Carlaonț led a resistance group in the period 1946–1948, in which there were members: colonel Cărăușu, major Lucian Dimitriu, Constantin Grădinaru, Remus Radina, Tiberiu Țolescu, Ștefan Hălălău and historian Radu Ciuceanu. The latter one was involved in the coordination of ample research that would bring to light the anti-communist resistance, the abuses of the communist investigators and torturers, the works being known and promoted in Europe¹⁴.

Two important names of the international policy, from that time, Nikita S. Hrusciov and Charles de Gaulle visited Oltenia, a fact that the Romanian press

¹² For more details, see <https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/regional/focsani/ceausescu-a-murit-de-blestemul-razvratitilor-de-la-vadu-rosca-ni6soj>, accessed on January 17th 2020.

¹³ Cezar Avram, *Deceniul Stalinist. Colectivizarea agriculturii în fața istoriei*, Panciova Publishing, 2005, pp. 5–9.

¹⁴ Radu Ciuceanu, *Mișcarea Națională de rezistență din Oltenia 1953–1980*, vol. III, I.N.S.T., Bucharest, 2004, pp. 5–7.

mentioned as a result of the progress and acknowledgement that Romania was enjoying on the international plan¹⁵.

Once the leader of PCR, in 1965, and president of the socialist Romania, in 1974, Nicolae Ceaușescu appointed his close friends or relatives to high-responsibility positions. Very many party cadres and high officials were from Oltenia, especially from his native county, Olt (his brothers – Ilie, Nicolae-Andruță, brother-in-law Lică Bărbulescu, Lina Ciobanu, etc). In the external and economic policy, Ștefan Andrei and Petre Gigea were remarkable personalities, having an acknowledged performance, without being the relatives of Nicolae Ceaușescu. From the ideological point of view, Nicolae Ceaușescu confused the party policy with his own visions, and he made the cult of personality an absolute one.

Nicolae Ceaușescu was inspired in his policy of independence from Moscow from the activity of his south-western neighbour, Iosip Broz Tito, the leader of Yugoslavia. The project of closeness was begun by Dej, after almost a decade of distancing, due to the disagreements between Tito and Stalin was continued and developed by Ceaușescu, in this circumstance being exploited the Iron Gates I Hydropower and Navigation Complex and Iron Gates II Hydroelectric Plant. Thus, the Danube became navigable without any natural obstacles, and in 1984, the Danube-Black Sea Canal was commissioned. Yet, Nicolae Ceaușescu did not understand that it was not enough to produce a large quantity, but to produce it efficiently, a proposal forwarded by Ion Gheorghe Maurer, but ignored completely by Ceaușescu.

Period 1920–1989 is, for Oltenia, one in which the political regimes are succeeding, there are ideologies emerging and confrontations occurring. Through its strategical position and historic importance, Oltenia was permanently subjected both to the political, military efforts, and the historiographical analyses. For a long time, in the modern age, Oltenia had enjoyed its administrative individuality and its political priority in Wallachia. The Union of Michael the Brave, the Revolutions of 1821 and 1848 depended on the people of Oltenia. Even after the Union of 1859, Oltenia continued representing a high stake in the political games. Being a region of agrarian and zootechnical importance, in Oltenia, there were the great boyar families that had involved actively in the political life. The city of Craiova, after Bucharest and Iași, was, after 1878, a city that gave Romania numerous personalities, more or less controversial¹⁶.

Year 1920 was chosen as the beginning point for our analysis, because it was the year when the Paris Peace Conferences ended. In 1921, it was voted the land reform, a major act of social justice promised by King Ferdinand in 1917, which, at the end of the war, he honoured¹⁷.

¹⁵ Ioan Scurtu, *1962 – vizita lui NS Hrusciov în România*, available at <https://www.art-emis.ro/istorie/1962-vizita-lui-ns-hrusciov-in-romania>, accessed on January 24th 2020; Vladimir Roșulescu, *Charles De Gaulle la Craiova – 1968*, available at <http://vladimirrosulescu-istorie.blogspot.com/2011/10/charles-de-gaulle-la-craiova-1968.html>, accessed on January 24th 2020.

¹⁶ Florin Nacu, *op. cit.*, pp. 1432–1433.

¹⁷ Keith Hitchins, *România 1866–1947*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1994, pp. 363–364

Year 1989 is when the communist totalitarian regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu collapsed, the year in which Oltenia entered into a new era of its existence.

In conclusion, the period analysed in this article can be divided into several shorter periods: 1920–1938 – the inter-war period of reconstruction and homogenisation. It is the time when the traditional political parties from the entire Great Romania tried to have Oltenia on their side. It was when the sprouts of the extreme right and left ideologies emerge, concomitantly with the traditional parties ideologies. Oltenia began a different cultural life, great names from Romanian politics and culture, science, medicine and philanthropy, as Nicolae Iorga, Nicolae Titulescu, Alice Voinescu, Ionel Brătianu, Ioan C. Michail, Constantin Argetoianu, Constantin Angelescu, Victor Gomoiu becoming noticeable in that period.

Period 1938-1945 was one for the preparation for World War II, a time in which Oltenia was not exempt from considered efforts or sufferance.

Period 1945-1954 was the one when the communist regime installed in Romania. Oltenia was, along other regions of the country, integrated in the anti-communist resistance movement.

Period 1954-1968 was the period for the administrative changes, the political conflicts between the Romanian communists, after the death of Stalin (1953), the retreat of the Soviet troops from Romania (1958), the ending of agricultural collectivisation (1962), the independence declaration of the Romanian communists from Moscow (1964). The regionalisation and the division into districts, according to the Soviet model and then the returning to counties (1968) are two significant moments for the history of the Romanian administration¹⁸.

Period 1968-1989 was marked by the Entering of Oltenia under the sign of the intensive industrialisation, village, commune and city systematisation. The proclaiming of Nicolae Ceaușescu as President of Romania (1974), the earthquake from 1977, the strengthening of the personality cult, the profound economic and food crisis are elements that should be referred to by anyone who intends to occupy with the history of Oltenia. Year 1989 marked the Revolution from December, a moment when Oltenia started to transform, some fields almost disappearing, others continuing their existence¹⁹.

Thus, in the period 1920-1989, Oltenia offered Romania many prime-ministers (Constantin Argetoianu, I.G. Duca, Ion Gigurtu, Gheorghe Tătărescu), ministers (I.G. Duca, Gheorghe Tătărescu, Nicolae Titulescu, Ștefan Andrei, Petre Gigea), BNR (National Bank of Romania) governors (Mihai Oromolu, Tilică Burileanu).

¹⁸ For details, see https://www.iicr.ro/img/pro_memoria, accessed on January 14th 2020.

¹⁹ Cezar Avram, Roxana Radu, *Politica socială românească între tranziție, reformă și criză*, Aius Publishing, Craiova, 2011, pp. 10–11.

The 69 years analysed from the ideological perspective are full of events and accomplishments that ought to be considered in their entire complexity. During these years, Oltenia evolved from an eminently agrarian region, with major discrepancies between the social classes, to a region that made great efforts to become modern and to adapt to the new. Nevertheless, the communists did not manage to ensure what they were proclaiming in theory, that is, class equality, the communist leaders creating privileges for themselves and the close ones, while the population was facing, especially in the years of 1980, the effects of the crisis and food scarcity, electricity or hot-water cut-offs.