

The national party from Wallachia and the Great Powers (1838-1842)

The research of a theme of political history, of the national party from Wallachia, in this case, offers all the necessary elements – of documentation, methodology, analysis, contextual – for a better understanding of the transition to modernity, in the Romanian case. The factual elements, internal and external, insufficiently known, or biographical, prosopographical justify a new reading of the edited sources and, of course, additional searches in the archives. In their turn, the discursive-ideological aspects or those regarding the modern public space, the new forms of political legitimacy turns the attention towards some methodological clarifications, regarding the political groups, especially.

In the analysis of the ideological identity of the national party we started from the two texts drafted in November 1838, following the facts in order to better understand the measure in which the political practices of the group were reflecting the principles enounced in the *Act of union and independence* and in *Different act for the appointment of the sovereign of the Romanians*. The analysis of the ideological insertions from the discourse of the national party and of the manifestation of its members in the public space revealed a political group different from the “boyar tarafs” (specific to the pre-modern period), but not modern enough to be considered political party.

With the application of the reforms of the Organic Regulation, the traditional structure of the public space, of symbolical averment of the princely power, started to erode allowing the emergence of a public political language that “freed” the political act from the narrow framework of the boyar “bargains”, “mediations” and “conspiracies”. In this context of the emergence of a public space of diffusion of ideas and political confrontation, Ion Câmpineanu’s group intended to delegitimize those who controlled power in the Principality (the Prince and Russia) through a discourse that expressed claims based on the complaints regarding the violation of the “country’s rights”, used the idea of “nation” in a political sense and used ideological arguments to legitimate its right to a free political and social life, thus illustrating a modern perspective on the state as an institutional-juridical abstract entity.

Being at the border between the boyar and modern politics, the practices of the national party had features specific to the both, combining new ideas with older practices and vice-versa. Compared to the previous political groups, which extracted their legitimacy of power by the patronage over the society and by managing the social relations (by the control they held over jobs), the national party led by Ion Câmpineanu differentiates itself by the use

of a *public discourse*, built by ration criteria (law, liberty), which offered the group a shared identity, appropriated in a political project.

Following the relation between *politics* and *public space*, we observed that the Wallachian deputies who fought for defending the “country’s rights” tried to legitimate themselves in the society by a certain type of discourse, using a political language that was still unclear but which projected in abstract a political reconfiguration of the society. The solidarities built around Ion Câmpineanu weren’t due to patronage relations but to a patrimony of ideas adopted by a political group, under the impulse of a common interest, which expressed by claims for positions in the political power, proposing the replacement of a regime with its “fundamental laws [...] adopted during a Russian military occupation” (*Act of union and independence*).

Despite some obvious ambiguities, the analysis of the ideas and means of action of the national party members revealed a political group with an ideological built internal solidarity, with a discourse strengthened by *rational* and *national arguments*, gathered in a project for the reorganization of the political regulamentary regime. The ideological and also rational base of the entire discursive construction was represented by the eminently modern principle that the power comes from the society. From this point of view, the activity of the national party, between 1838 and 1842, can be considered a moment of “rupture” from the “boyar politics”, representing an important stage in the edification of the Romanian modern political culture, through its attempt to rearticulate the political system according to a set of principles.

Studying the Austrian, British, French and Russian correspondence and diplomatic reports, we formed a coherent image, in a certain degree contrary to the opinions expressed in the historiography until now, regarding the attitude of the Great Powers towards the plans of the national party and Ion Câmpineanu’s diplomatic demarche from 1839. The information contained by the unpublished documentary sources showed that the policy of Great Britain, applied in Bucharest by the general consul Robert Colquhoun, encouraged and supported the plans of the national party for the removal of the Russian protectorate more than French one. They revealed the effective involvement of Colquhoun and offered the necessary clues for understanding the reasons why he was so close to the political group, namely because he was following the direction of a policy directed from London that aimed at counterbalancing the Russian influence in this area.

On the other hand, the attitude of the French consuls from Bucharest (first Hippolyte Châteaugiron and later Adolphe Etienne Billecocq) and from Iași (Bertrand Huber) towards the plans of the national party was different, even contradictory. The French officials from

Bucharest took a considerable distance from Ion Cămpineanu after 1838, following the official directive from Paris, which ascribed them the role of simple observers of the Romanian political life. However, in Iași, Bertrand Huber had an entirely different approach, supporting the demarches of the national party. He insisted on the commercial and economical importance of the Principality, neglected in France, and obtained the support of a high official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Paris (Emile Desages, head of the Department for political affairs) for Cămpineanu's visit to Paris in 1839, where he wanted to present the situation of the Principalities and the advantages of the creation of a buffer state between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The different directions followed by the French officials, oscillating from total disengagement in the local political matters to supporting demarches that aimed at the removal of the Russian protectorate show France's lack of a coherent policy in the Principalities.

If under the leadership of Ion Cămpineanu, the national party was a political group capable to issue ideas with ideological substance, articulated in a project for the reorganization of the governing system, which generated modern solidarities (eminently political), after his arrest (at the beginning of 1840), the dynamics of the activity of the other members changed. Discouraged by the categorical reaction of Russia and by the repositioning of Great Britain's policy that started to withdraw its support for the Romanian efforts for national emancipation, they restrained themselves from acting in accordance with all the principles of the old political project, diminishing its "national" component. Led in the Assembly by Emanoil Băleanu, the national party started to act more like an *opposition party*, fighting against the Prince Alexandru D. Ghica, whose destitution became its main goal. Although they continued to have a clear vision on their role as deputies, acknowledging their responsibility to ensure order and fairness in the administration and to preserve the "happiness of the Romanians", the members which ensure Băleanu a majority in the Assembly were focused only on attacking the image of the Prince.

Placed in the internal and international context in which it carried out its activity and taking into consideration the human element (the visions, aspirations and interests of its members and leaders), the national party from Wallachia appears more like an *episode* that keeps its "autonomy" and not necessarily as a *stage* in an objective and organic evolution, of a growing process of the Romanian society, generated by the need of national emancipation.