

ELECTORAL PRACTICES IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN ROMANIA AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM. CASE STUDY: THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT AND THE DEMOCRATIC AGRARIAN PARTY OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: In the following notes we are going to examine the way in which two newly created parties from post-communist Romania have gathered, at a declarative level, in their political programmes ways of making the Romanian economy compatible with those of Western countries. We have chosen two parties on purpose – The National Salvation Front and The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania – regarded by specialists in the Romanian political phenomenon as obviously dating before 1989, in order to analyze the manner in which they understood, at the beginning of the '90, to take steps in providing Romania with a capitalist economic background like the one in the Western countries. Many of the ideologists of such economic ideas from these parties were the same persons as those supporting the idea of a centralized economy before 1989. It is not our intention to discuss here the fit or unfit relationship between the political programmes and the real events. In the first and a half decade of the post-communist era the results were obvious, as long as the two parties- first of all The National Salvation Front, but The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania too, have led the country.

Key words: Post-communist, National Salvation Front, Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania, Political programmes

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The year 1989 marked the implosion of communist regimes from Eastern Europe¹. These started to fall one after another so quickly that in only a few months they disappeared from the international political background. As a consequence, in all these areas, begins a process of retrieving the lost time and huge differences that separated the European East from the Western part of the continent. The phenomenon takes place in all ex-communist countries. Some of them moved faster and some-slower. Without doubt, Romania is one of the ex-

¹ Ion Alexandrescu, Stan Stoica, *România după 1989. Mică enciclopedie*. București: Editura Meronia, 2006, p. 133.

communist countries that moved on in a much more difficult way on its road to modernizing and becoming a European country². From an economic point of view, the process was even more complicated because of communist reminiscences found in Romanian economy for more than a decade after the events from December 1989.

However, all political parties newly created had as their principal goal a faster development of Romanian economy so that it might become compatible to all economies from European countries. In other words, they tried to make it European.

In the following notes we are going to examine the way in which two newly created parties from post-communist Romania have gathered, at a declarative level, in their political programmes ways of making the Romanian economy compatible with those of Western countries. We have chosen two parties on purpose –The National Salvation Front and The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania – regarded by specialists in the Romanian political phenomenon as obviously dating before 1989, in order to analyze the manner in which they understood, at the beginning of the '90, to take steps in providing Romania with a capitalist economic background like the one in the Western countries. Many of the ideologists of such economic ideas from these parties were the same persons as those supporting the idea of a centralized economy before 1989. It is not our intention to discuss here the fit or unfit relationship between the political programmes and the real events. In the first and a half decade of the post-communist era the results were obvious, as long as the two parties- first of all The National Salvation Front, but The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania too, have led the country.

A very important aspect to be mentioned is that the political programmes are full of good intentions, even if clumsily put down in words. Almost all of the paragraphs underline the necessity of passing from the socialist economy to the capitalist one and the developing of a higher living standard.

From the beginning, the political ideas of The National Salvation Front were based on the fact that the party was a democratic one and its purpose was to realize in Romania “*a modern and efficient economy*”³, while the same document of The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania mentioned as one of its main objectives “*the fight for economic reconstruction*”⁴ in the sense of “*modernizing and intensifying the agriculture, forestry, food industry, cooperation, the revival of the Romanian countryside, a higher living standard for those in the countryside areas*”⁵, this party assuming the role of spokesperson for the peasantry. Thus, at least at a declarative level, both parties were fighting for modernizing, in an European sense, the Romanian economy and organizing institutions in the process.

The political programmes of the two parties gave details further on in the chapter “*Economic Programme*” about the ways in which they wanted to transform the centralized Romanian economy into a modern European one. The political programme of The National Salvation Front underlined that “*the main purpose of the political organization called The National Salvation Front is to*

² Tom Gallagher, *Furtul unei națiuni. România de la comunism încoace*. București: Editura Humanitas, 2004, p. 17-33.

³ *Frontul Salvării Naționale. Platforma Program*: București, 1990, p. 1.

⁴ *Programul Partidului Democrat Agrar din România*: București, 1990, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibidem*

*ensure the commonwealth of all citizens and the quality of life in all its aspects*⁶ and these goals could not be achieved unless “*a gradually change of the Romanian economy into a market economy*”⁷ occurred, while a legal support was also provided.

The economic programme mentioned the necessity of price liberalization as an essential step in adopting the Western European economic pattern. This was to develop gradually, under the state supervision, to avoid negative effects on population and economy. The state was to control especially the prices for food, energy and fuels. The social aspect of the party’s economic policy was to be emphasized here as long as The National Salvation Front included itself in the democratic left political background⁸.

As far as the “private sector” of economy was concerned, the programme contained a series of references, even if they were quite vague. It says that “*The National Salvation Front is supporting the enlargement and diversification of the private sector in the national economy*”⁹, under the state supervision, mentioning that the vital areas of economy like the soil and subsoil wealth, the energetic system, the railways, sea and air transport, other branches of public interest should remain state properties.

It is of interest the manner in which The National Salvation Front treats the problem of the private sector. This issue is even more interesting because the party has been a leader for more than a decade and it is easier to appreciate the relationship between intentions and facts. The party declared: “*As far as the possibility of passing partially or fully a state factory into another form of possession, The Front considers that such measures must serve the interests of the Romanian state and of those working there*”¹⁰. In the same time, a wider vision in the sense of new foreign investors interested in new technology, diversification and making profitable different sectors of national industry was displayed. The ways in which foreign investors could act in the Romanian economy were mentioned: capital investment, supplying of machines and equipment, providing access to technologies and know-how, creating societies with mixed capital, offering of technical advice and staff training, assistance, management and marketing.

The programme established the main ways of transforming the Romanian economy for the years that were to come. Thus, the major economic branches that were to be regarded as national interests were agriculture, tourism, and some industrial sectors, industry being reshaped according to people’s real demands, the country’s resources and concerns about the protection of environment.

The development of agriculture was to become the major objective of The National Salvation Front. The goal was to create structures and institutions adapted to the Romanian realities in order to ensure the European modern standards for the Romanian agriculture. Due to specific conditions of Romania, The National Salvation Front considered it was necessary a combination of different types of property: private, state property and a mixed type.

⁶ *Frontul Salvării Naționale. Platforma Program: București, 1990, p. 4.*

⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸ Ion Alexandrescu, Stan Stoica, *op. cit.*, p. 285-286

⁹ *Frontul Salvării Naționale. Platforma Program: București, 1990, p. 4.*

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5

In a very surprising manner, taking into consideration that the programme was conceived at the beginning of 1990, the party wanted to maintain the agricultural production co-operatives (CAPs), but only as “*independent organizations of the producers with the right to decide upon all matters concerning production, selling of products and use of incomes*”¹¹; the same happened to the agricultural state units (IASs) that were maintained as being very efficient from an economic point of view. All these institutions were to be supported from the state budget.

As far as industry was concerned, the economic programme of The National Salvation Front stated, in its attempt to make the Romanian industry more European, that it must pass from centralized planning and birocratic leadership to a prospective planning of the economic activity. Everything was to be accomplished gradually, in small steps. Small and medium business should be encouraged, no matter the form of property; the priority was given to those with a more rapid capacity of adapting to the market request. The National Salvation Front also considered that it was necessary the development and diversification of the services sector, a completely ignored field before 1989. Like in other European developed economies, this type of activity could have become one of the most dynamic fields of the national economy. In order to create a more functional economy like the ones in the Western countries, The National Salvation Front “*declared itself against making any differences in the matter of accumulating possessions by different social strata*”¹². To accomplish this ideal, they introduced a complex system of economic devices that proved successful in Western European economies, including progressive duties and income taxes.

In the same time, the economic programme of The National Salvation Front was concerned about making efforts to integrate the Romanian economy into the European and worldwide economy. For this purpose, The National Salvation Front imagined new policies as far as the external economy was regarded, according to the requests of the free market economy, based on the following principles: the disappearing of the state monopoly upon the external commerce, the decentralization of the decision of external commerce and the providing of the functional and financial autonomy of traders, no matter the type of property, the replacement of the centralized planning of the external commerce activity with prospective programmes controlled by economic means, the establishment of new institutions according to the free market specific conditions.

A new aspect of European origins which was described in the economic programme was that of setting up productive, efficient, competitive and balanced structures in the economy, as well as providing monetary and institutional conditions for the developing of the Romanian economy in the following years.

Finally, in this economic programme, The National Salvation Front tried to synchronize the environment policies from Romania to those European. Thus, “*The National Salvation Front considers as very necessary the establishment and application of a national programme concerning the restoration and preservation of the ecological equilibrium, the protection of the environment. The sources of pollution dangerous for the environment and population must be eliminated*”¹³. The discussed problem was of great interest in the European countries where they

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 6

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 7

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 7-8

already had a policy of reducing the polluting emissions, the programme of The National Salvation Front trying to be an European one.

In its turn, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania had in its governing programme, as a main objective, the economic revival of the country. This ideal was to be achieved by a combination of private, group and state property. From the first paragraph, one could read: "*We try to catch up with the European economy, to develop and modernize industry, tourism, public services, technology, in order to ensure an efficient activity, profitable with the condition of protecting the environment*"¹⁴. The reason was, of course, related to the desire of synchronizing the Romanian economy to the modern, West-European one.

The ways of solving these problems revived what once was known as the liberal programme "through ourselves", but in a more state-centered manner. Thus, the programme of The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania claimed that "*the reconstruction of the economy must be based upon the natural resources and inner financial efforts, present and future*"¹⁵. Foreign capital was to be used only as a source of economic development, being limited by law. The foreign capital had the role of equipping Romania with new technology of European level.

In this modernizing process, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania suggested that the energy-consuming factories should be abandoned, as well as those which polluted or requested a lot of raw materials from import.

As far as the changes in the Romanian industry, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania wanted to maintain the sectors of national interest as state properties: national defense industry, mining and energy sector, railways, sea and air transport, metallurgy, machine construction, chemical and petrochemical industry, in order to reorganize them to be economically efficient, and to turn into private property the rest of the factories or to create new ones, small or medium in size, as requested by the free market¹⁶. Special attention was to be granted to the modernizing of food industry to an European standard. According to The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania, the state should be involved in the developing and modernizing of production and services in industry, constructions, transport, commerce and tourism.

"The employees and the producers" were to be greatly supported by state. This should be accomplished by doing the following:

- developing of the financial system so as it would be able to support all economic activities, granting credits in worthy conditions;
- a price policy that would be able in a free market to maintain a balance between the price of the agricultural products and industrial products;
- the conversion of the national currency in order to facilitate the free exchange of products and services in the inner and outer market;
- the guarantee of a minimum wages meant to ensure a civilized level of living for the people;
- application of a progressive taxing upon incomes.

Being mostly centered on the rural life, the party's programme would greatly address to the Romanian villagers. It would be especially interested in raising the living standards, closely to the European one, but also in the reconstruction of the rural economy according to the Western pattern.

¹⁴ *Programul Partidului Democrat Agrar din România*: București, 1990, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8

These objectives were mentioned in the first paragraph of the economic programme referring to the agricultural field. Thus, we find out that “*The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania has as its main goals the reorganization, revitalization and modernizing of agriculture, the regaining of the peasantry’s dignity, freedom and equal rights with other social categories, the improving of the role and position of the Romanian village in the economic, social and cultural background of the country*”¹⁷.

The strategy it suggested in order to make European the Romanian rural world was extremely original. Thus, the party’s programme contained a form of modernizing that began from the forms of property already existing by then:

- the group property in which the land belonged to the peasants from the Agricultural Production Co-operatives;
- state property;
- state and co-operative associations;
- private farms in the areas with no co-operative associations.

In other words, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania wanted to make the Romanian rural world European, but in a collective frame. In addition, this party claimed the land as a national treasure that cannot be commercialized only by Romanian citizens. Only houses and the nearby land could be sold with no restrictions, if situated in the village inhabited area.

Even if the programme has nuances about this problem, several Marxist accents are easily traced. Admitting that the collective structures in agriculture were forced ones, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania wanted to make right some of the injustices done to the peasantry during 1949-1962, without asking for the disappearing of the forms of agricultural exploitation from the communist era. That is why they wanted the land to be used in common, but in the form of free associations. A part of the land should, nevertheless, pass to the peasants, idea which could be found in the programme of The National Salvation Front, too, in order to work it individually and sell the products according to their will. The surface given to each peasant should depend on the capacity to work it alone or together with the family. In this way, The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania wanted to create a village with “*a modern agriculture, a highly productive technology, with peasants able to master their work and products*”¹⁸, like in the Western rural world. The European influence was obvious as long as, in order to increase their profits, the Agricultural Production Co-operatives and the Agricultural State Units were allowed to create “*their own places for selling the products they obtained, meaning stores, small centers or kiosks, in rural or urban areas. The stores could belong to one or many such associations in order to ensure a diversified merchandise and a continuity in selling*”¹⁹.

The process of becoming European was even more obvious in the fact that The Democratic Agrarian Party considered the Agricultural State Units “*an important sector of Romanian agriculture equipped with all the necessary utilities, applying advanced technologies, modern methods of growing plants and breeding animals*”²⁰. All such institutions were to remain state properties, they could not become private. The party admitted, though, one concession: the above mentioned institutions could organize themselves, if the employees wanted, in

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 10

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 11

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14

²⁰ *Ibidem*

private societies in which the state had to possess 51% of actions, the rest of 49% belonging to the employees or other citizens. As far as the I.A.S. were concerned, the party accepted the idea of creating their own stores to sell the products or even “*industrial unities and workshops to realize industrial products or provide services to other unities or population*”²¹.

Like in the case of the IASs, modernizing the agriculture implied the modernizing of the Stations of Mechanization of Agriculture (SMAs) by providing a mechanized way of harvesting, services for agricultural associations or private producers, making of tools, equipments, metal confections and specialized transport of agricultural products.

Like in the case of IASs, the SMAs should remain, in the vision of The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania, as state property, but with the autonomy of making contracts, collaborate with other unities from agriculture, food industry or forestry. Only in a next stage, these could become private societies with the state possessing 51% of the actions.

As one can easily notice, as far as industry is concerned, the party’s programme is opened to the innovation, to provide the Romanian industry with a European vision, but as far as agriculture is concerned, the programme is quite conservatory, with few new ideas.

By analyzing the economic programme of The National Salvation Front and that of The Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania it is easy to notice that, despite the efforts of breaking up with the past, they are still marked by the economic ideas promoted before 1989. The fact that they were conceived during January- February 1990 is very important. Anyway, they represent a first step in the attempt of transforming the Romanian economy into a European modern one. The years that were to follow brought many changes in the process of passing from a centralized to a free economy.

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²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16