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The Democratic Convention – an experiment of the civic and political alliance of post-communist Romania

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Abstract

Our research interest focuses on the political dimension of democratic transition. We believe that the emergence of political parties and how they interact will count in the further development of the country. The object of our research is limited in time and space - we consider the time between the violent removal of the totalitarian regimes, in December 1989, and the first peaceful alternation in power, in 1996, to be defining for the political and social future of the country. We analyze the dynamics of the party system in post-communist Romania, and in particular, the uniqueness of the political party called the Democratic Convention (CDR). We want to show that CDR functioned as a social and political myth, as defined by Georges Sorel (Sorel, 1961:50), in terms of the logic of political action.

After the dramatic events at the end of 1989, Romanian political life has seen an exceptional dynamics, characterized by what Dahrendorf (Dahrendorf 1993:31-32) calls "constitutional politics", different even if not clearly identified by another reality, that of "normal politics ". The British political scientist uses these two concepts to analyze political regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe, calling the revolutions of 1989 as the period of constitutional politics. This represents the new social order, the social contract and its institutional forms.

The normal policy refers to the behavior of political actors motivated by different interests and preferences, expressed within the constitutional framework. The constitutional policy issues can be discussed in two ways - open society and closed society - while the normal policy provides many options.

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For the group of Central and Eastern European countries that underwent regime changes at the end of the twentieth century, Romania is a different case. According to Linz and Stepan (Linz,Stepan, 1996:233), Romania has experienced a sultanistic regime type, which is why his removal was done by violent means, and the transition to democracy has seen a different trajectory compared to other post-communist countries.

The regime change is often initiated through the negotiation process between the reforming voices of the old regime and those representing the opposition. Both sides must prior express availability for negotiation. The representatives of the old regime and of the opposition should have autonomy, and political support to start and complete the process of negotiations. According to the two researchers, in the case of sultanistic political regimes, we cannot apply the model of negotiation because the actors involved have not the ability and / or willingness to support this process.

The proximity to the central figure of the sultan indicates the importance and power of political actors who would otherwise be deprived of any legitimacy. As regards the civil society, if there is one in Romania, it is completely fragmented, without an organized structure and no power to initiate a sustained action to challenge the political decision.

In discussing the democratic transition of a sultanistic regimes, we should not disregard the legacy of the old system and the difficulty to remove it. This includes in particular the personalization, taken to the extreme of political power and the fusion between the public and private spheres. The main targets of democratic transition are the rule of law and the emergence of a civil society as free entity, and capable to become a partner in dialogue and negotiation with the political power.

Any form of opposition, organized or not, is removed and suppressed by using the political police, and the forms of total control of public and private life of citizens have canceled the possibility of developing a civil society body. Party Propaganda and the high level of violence directed against individuals with contestable potential were tools that have abolished the role and power of civil society, negating any possibility to reform the regime by negotiation.

There is no political, social or cultural pluralism. Total control is exercised from the top down, from the leader in his political camarilla, at the officials of the state apparatus, at the private and public spheres of all citizens, who are considered the property of the sultan, not its source of legitimacy. The social and political context does not allow the emergence of a "parallel culture", as it happened in the case of Czechoslovakia, nor the emergence of a dissidence able to negotiate reform and take leadership in order to democratize – Trade union Solidarity in Poland.

Romania`s uniqueness during Ceausescu, compared to other signatory states of the Warsaw Pact, is the effect of the totalitarian regime she experienced. Linz and Stepan (Linz, Stepan, 1996:244-250) points out that Romania is the only country in Eastern Europe that had not any publication, previously to 1990, of opposition against regime abuses. In other states, individuals who opposed the system and condemned his deviations, knew a minimal organization and enjoyed visibility among citizens. Romanian society, atomized and without previous civil structures able to turn into a political party, was unprepared for the explosion of pluralism. This can be considered inevitable for states that have just removed the single party rule and tyranny.

Our research interest focuses on the political dimension of democratic transition. We believe that the emergence of political parties and how they interact will count in the further development of the country. The object of our research is limited in time and space. We analyze the dynamics of the party system in post-communist Romania, and in particular, the uniqueness of the political party called the Democratic Convention (CDR).

We consider the time between the violent removal of the totalitarian regimes, in December 1989, and the first peaceful alternation in power, in 1996, to be defining for the political and social future of the country. Using the concepts proposed by Dahrendorf, i.e. constitutional and normal policy, the temporal interval named above is dominated by the elements belonging to constitutional policy: legalization of a multiparty system, holding of the first democratic elections and the institutionalization of political opposition. We want to show that CDR functioned as a social and political myth, as defined by Georges Sorel (Sorel, 1961:50), in terms of the logic of political action.

Associated with the Marxist tradition and syndicalist movement at the early twentieth century, Georges Sorel can be considered a prominent figure in modern research of political mythology. Unlike utopia, social and political myth, as it appears the concept is developed in the work of Georges Sorel, is an expression of the decision to act, not a simple description of things. Social and political myths determines individuals to act, to change the situation which they consider undesirable. Political myth is not defined by truth, but by credibility and it becomes strong if it corresponds to a group`s beliefs.