

# THE NATIONAL RENAISSANCE FRONT AND THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN ROMANIA (1938-1940)

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## Abstract

The Constitution of 27th February 1938 created the ideological and theoretical foundations for the birth of the single party, called by the new regime The National Renaissance Front (Frontul Renaşterii Naţionale, FRN) and proclaimed as the only political entity in the state. FRN was strongly militarized in all its management structures, starting with the Directorate to the Superior National Council. It had a corporate-like structured aligned with the new constitutional principles, whereby people were only allowed and granted positions in the party, state, or Parliament if they actually had a job. A critical analysis of some of the parliament speeches made by the regime's representatives will shed light on the ideological principles of the FRN.

**Keywords:** Romania, constitution, single party, dictatorship, authoritarianism, new regime.

## Introduction

This article's goal is to analyse the constitutional order established by the 1938 authoritarian regime in Romania and the ideological principles of the single party, The National Renaissance Front (Frontul Renaşterii Naţionale,

FRN). Our hypothesis is that the new regime inaugurated by the Constitution of 27th of February 1938 underpinned the ideological principles of the single party, which in turn helped confer political legitimacy to it. In other words, the question this article seeks to answer is: were the principles of the 1938 Constitution principles the source of the political structure based on the single party?

To answer this question, I will analyse the parliamentary speeches issued by the new regime and single party in order to ascertain whether the regime was totalitarian / authoritarian or not, and whether it was based on the constitutional order established by popular vote. The plebiscite for the validation of the new constitution took place on February 24 and the results coincided with what the party was expecting – that is 4,297,581 votes in favour and only 5843 against. This means that the plebiscite was accepted by 99% of the voters, with only 0.13% voting against the new Constitution, which would translate into an acceptance of the royal dictatorship (Muraru and Iancu, 2000, 119). The implication was that, by taking part in political life, one recognized and accepted the authoritarian monarchy and implicitly the authority of the single party.

The violation of constitutional regimes by authoritarian regimes was also analysed by Giovanni Sartori. According to him, “a dictatorship is an unconstitutional government, because those who govern either falsify the pre-existing constitution or rewrite a constitution that gives them the power, in practice, to do whatever they want” (Sartori, 1999, 194). The replacement of the Constitution of 1923 with that of February 1938 in Romania created the legislative framework for the discretionary and arbitrary growth of the powers granted to the king, who could amend the laws, including the Constitution, without parliamentary approval.

The new Constitution was promulgated by King Carol II on February 27th, 1938, with a ceremony in which all the members of the government participated. On this occasion, Patriarch Miron Cristea, President of the Council of Ministers, gave an ample speech addressing the issue of political parties. He thought that, according to the new Constitution, the old regime could not be part of the current state organization. The Patriarch claimed that

“today we also destroyed agitation, fights, electoral competition and killings, and in their place we will have quiet, work, peace, and the sense of unity, sealed by brotherly embraces by the people, as it was in ancient times” (Constituție: promulgată prin Înalt Decret Regal, [*Constitution: promulgated by Royal High Decree Law*], 1938, 2). The Patriarch’s anti-democratic message against parties and the democratic system could be found in almost all the political speeches of the new regime. Elements such as establishing order and the removal of any activities identified as politically-oriented became clichés in the two and a half years of this regime.

The new Constitution’s identification as “God Given” was meant to convey the notion that it had been given to the country by the King, according to God’s grace. On the day of the plebiscite, the vote had not been democratic, but undertaken by raising hands in a public meeting or by verbal declaration at the workplace. The ballot boxes were manufactured by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and their caretaking was entrusted to local judges (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (Central National Historical Archives, henceforth ANIC), Fond Casa Regală [Royal Family Fund], File 89/1938, *Preliminary draft electoral law of Legislative Bodies, House and Senate*, 27). The Royal Decree by which people were asked to decide on the new Constitution was also published in the *Universul* (The Universe) newspaper. Article V of this new decree specified that “the vote will be made by verbal declaration in front of the voting bureau. There will be different lists for those who voted ‘for’ and for those who voted ‘against’. [...] Those entrusted with the preparation and progress of this plebiscite were the internal affairs and justice ministers, as specified by the 10th article” (*Universul* [The Universe], 1938, 5).

Since parliamentary democracy was undermined, the fundamental law made the monarchy into an authoritarian, unconstitutional one. As such, the vote was not secret, but public. Voting was compulsory and absence was fined by 1000 lei. Electors would also bear the consequences of voting against the Constitution, as an official regime procedure was meant to monitor the people who had voted against it. As a consequence, those who challenged the regime’s claim to unanimity, harmony, and national salvation were asked by the organizers of the referendum to sign a paper in which they accounted for their choice.

## The making of the single party

Based on Article 98 of the Constitution, 'the new regime' decreed "the law for the foundation of the political organism 'The National Renaissance Front'" (*Monitorul Oficial*, (*Official Monitor*), 1938,1-2). Law 4321/1938, establishing FRN, was published in the Official Gazette on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1938 and presented Romanian democracy with a *fait accompli*, because the party was considered "the only organization in the country, and any political activity outside of FRN was outlawed" (*Official Monitor*, 1938, 1-2). The supreme leader of the FRN was the King and its leaders were nominated by royal decree. According to the foundation decree, the FRN became the only political organization in the state, which confirms the authoritarian nature of the regime. The Front was therefore nothing other than the consequence of the February Constitution, and the fundamental law of the Romanian authoritarian state representing the royal will, which had been subjected to a plebiscite, intended to legitimize the monarch and legalize the regime. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1940, the day of France's surrender to the German army, under a government led by Gheorghe Tătărescu, another law-decree, signed by the minister of Justice, Aurelian Benteoiu, proclaimed the transformation of the FRN to the Party of the Nation (*Partidul Națiunii*), (ANIC, FRN Fund, File 850/1940, 25). As such, the period under investigation in this article starts with the establishment of the new regime following the February 1938 Constitution and concludes with its transformation into the Party of the Nation.

Who were the political players that created the FRN? We will try to answer this question making use of newspapers and archive documents from the period in question. Therefore, on the occasion of the appointment of the senators named by the King, a list of the founding members of FRN was published in *Universul*, the regime's official daily newspaper, as follows: 1) General Gheorghe Manu, 2) Nicolae Samsonovici, 3) General Ioan Sichitiu, 4) Dimitrie Gusti, 5) Nicolae Karpen, 6) Nicolae Miculescu, 7) General Constantin Ștefănescu-Amza, 8) General Mihail Ionescu, 9) General C.C Brăiescu, 10) Ion Pelivan, 11) General Gheorghe Rusescu (*Universul*, 1939, 11). The FRN's political architecture reflects its military nature. Thus, General Ioan Sichitiu was a former Chief of the General

Staff, General Mihail Ionescu a former Minister and Chairman of the FR Board. Vasilescu-Karpen, who held the position of rapporteur, was the rector of the Polytechnic University of Bucharest. The significant presence of the military, of judges, and of members of the gendarmerie and police in the single party structure shows the desire for supervision and control, indicative of the manner in which the new regime was led. We thus find that, from the very beginning, the entire leadership was militarized, as the purpose of the party was the keeping of public order and safety. This confirms that the architecture of royalist policy consisted of the militarization of state institutions (Grecu, 2012, 96-130). Despite the attempt to militarize the party and the regime's institutions, "the FRN remained a hybrid political organism, a conglomerate of groups, currents, guidelines and trends, united under the same company" (Alexandrescu, 1998, 119). Moreover, according to Ioan Stanomir, "the Decree-Law of 16 December 1938 brought into public life an institutional reality specific to national revolutions" (Stanomir, 2003, 119).

Pluralism and the political parties' struggle for power was abolished, for the benefit of the king and for greater political stability. The purpose of the new political organization was to mobilize the national consciousness in the direction of coordinated political action.

Except for the founding members, the *Universul* newspaper, led by Stelian Popescu, also published the lists of the leaders of the single party. FRN had a corporatist-structure, organized according to profession, following the 1938 constitutional principles. The structure of the Directorate, meant to be the leading decision-making body of the party, highlights the eclectic nature of the persons named by royal decree. For agriculture and manual labour: 1) Armand Călinescu, 2) Flondor Gheorghe, 3) Gherman Iftimie, 4) Jebeleanu Ioan, 5) Ionescu Sisești, 6) Șerban Mihail, 7) Seșcioreanu Constantin. For commerce and industry: 1) Angelescu Constantin, 2) Bujoi Ion, 3) Const. Mitiță, 4) Gafencu Grigore, 5) Gigurtu Ion, 6) Savu Eugen, 7) Slăvescu Victor. For intellectual professions: 1) Petre Andrei, 2) Cancicov Mircea, 3) Cazalciu Grigore, 4) Ghelmegeanu Mihai, 5) Hațieganu Iuliu, 6) Iamandi Victor, 7) Ralea Mihail (*Universul*, 1939, 9). In this sense, the political elites who formed the Directorate were former members of the traditional political parties, which had been abolished by the decree of

March 1938. The FRN Supreme Council was made up of 150 members, 50 members for each of the three trades stipulated in the Constitution, listed above.

The Constitution promoted the establishment of the state on a nationalist community basis instead of individualism and enshrined the principle of Romanian ethnic primacy. G.G. Mironescu, in the “Innovations of the 1938 Constitution”, showed that the truly fundamental idea of the organization of the state according to the new Constitution was not represented by the principle of professionalism, corporatism, or by the elimination of individualism, but by the natural obligation to use the potential of the nation through effective work. Mironescu was of the opinion that “only those who actually work in the field of various professions have a role in governing the State, because the organization of the State, according to the new Constitution, is based on what we could call the Royalty of Labour. The principle of actual work lies in the fact that in order for one to be a voter or elected, among other considerations, he must actually exercise one of the following professions: manual labour and agriculture, industry and trade, and intellectual occupations.” (Mironescu, 1939, 31).

The royal advisors and founding members would regularly take part in the National Supreme Council meetings. The members of the Directorate and the National Supreme Council were appointed by royal decree on a two-year term following a proposal from the Council of Ministers (*Universul*, 1939, 9). The decisional architecture of the single party was *de facto* composed of a small number of members. The president of the Supreme-Council was Armand Călinescu, the prime minister, and the president of the single party, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, was elected on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1940. Vaida-Voevod’s choice as president of the single party coincided with the initiative of King Carol II to reorganize the Front. The President led the Executive Board and the Supreme Council of FRN. Through the re-organization of the National Renaissance Front that took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1940, it was agreed that the ruling bodies, from central to district level, were to be elected, thus replacing the procedure consisting of direct appointments through royal decree, which saw the Ministry of the Interior propose the appointees, who were then approved by the Council of Ministers.

Gheorghe Tătărescu, the Prime Minister, was named as Vice-President of the single party. The Vice-Presidents of the royal party were also Vice-Presidents of the

executive body of the Front. C.C. Giurescu was named General Secretary of the FRN, while Nicolae Cornăţeanu, former Speaker of the Assembly of Deputies, was appointed Prime Secretary for agriculture and manual labour, and served as Minister of Agriculture and President of the Council of Ministers headed by Armand Călinescu. Ion Bujoi was appointed as Prime Secretary for Trade and Industry, Victor Moldovan as Prime Secretary for the intellectual professions, and General Peter Georgescu was appointed National Commander of the FRN Guard (ANIC, FRN Fund, File 10/1939-1940, 104).

What did the National Supreme Council of the FRN do? It defined the Front's political directives, provided observations on the course of public administration, and approved the candidates proposed for parliamentary elections. The National Supreme Council was the kind of 'political office' that followed the directions of the party. Part of its powers included organizing corporate elections for the parliament, which were supervised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In addition to organizational issues, we can identify the political directions of the single party from the explanatory memorandum of Patriarch Miron Cristea, President of the Council of Ministers, on the Supreme Council and the Directorate. The Patriarch / Prime Minister suggested that the single party organs were "meant to educate the masses, [inculcate] the belief in the superiority of the front". The manner through which superiority was to be achieved was relevant to the education of youth. Education could be achieved by employing the youth in the structure of the new regime. On the other hand, "advisers, managers and leaders of the Front were meant to know their troubles, deprivation, hardship and the conditions of life". The aim was "to find and recommend those who were competent, the means to remove the evil" (Cristea, 1939, 30, see also ANIC, Prime Minister's Fund, File 41/1938, 456-461). The allusion to removing the evil refers to the legionnaires, who had been destabilizing elements for the new constitutional order. The stated goal of the legionary movement was to change the shape of the political regime. Like King Carol II, the Iron Guard movement was campaigning against the multiparty parliamentary system and parliamentarism. Knowing the strides and shortcomings, were, in fact, ways through which the single party regime wanted to establish order and discipline, through surveillance and control.

The decree that established the FRN was consistent with the principles of the authoritarian Constitution promulgated by the monarch on the 27th of February 1938, which stated that all Romanians who had reached the age of 21, except for active military and members of the judiciary, have the right to require registration in FRN, as long as they agreed to follow its conditions of operation and discipline. By the decree of March 3rd, 1938, the political parties were abolished, which created the background for the single party to organize the elections. In the spirit of the state of siege, a decree was issued to dissolve the political parties, and Article I stated that “all organized associations, existing groups or parties that spread political ideas or their implementations, are to remain dissolved” (*Monitorul Oficial*, 1938, 6).

After the coup d'état and the change of government, the next step, according to Armand Călinescu's political notes, was represented by the establishment of the state of siege. The first measures of the Miron Cristea government were thus aimed at restoring order and institutionalising the new regime. Thus, by Royal Decree No. 856 of February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1938, the state of siege was established throughout the country. The role of this decree was to establish absolute control over the entire society and political organizations, and it was especially directed against Codreanu's Iron Guard.

The purpose of the decree-law establishing the state of siege was to exercise effective control over the administration, through the Ministry of Interior, led by Armand Călinescu. The militarization of the regime is shown in Article 2 of this decree: “all the powers assigned by laws and regulations, in everything related to the maintenance of public order and state security, pass into the hands of the military authorities altogether. The attributions of police and general security of the State will be exercised under the orders of the Ministry of Interior” (*Monitorul Oficial*, 1938, 6).

The last paragraph represents the essence of the decree, establishing the state of siege, which included several paragraphs that defined the authoritarian nature of the new regime managed by Patriarch Miron Cristea. As such, Article 4 specified what the punitive measures were: “a) the military authorities have the right to search wherever and whenever necessary; b) order the deposition of weapons and ammunition and carry out the search for them; c) to censor the press and



any publication, to prevent the issue of any newspaper or publication or the issue of certain news or articles; d) to stop or dissolve any meetings, regardless of the number of participants and in any place they would meet” (Heinen, 1999, 352).

The state of siege was not a novelty, as it had been encountered on the territory of Romania before 1938. The emergence of the communist movement – following the Russian revolution – but also the danger posed by the extreme right contributed to the introduction of an article in the 1923 Constitution that made it possible to resort to the legislative, anti-democratic instrument known as the state of siege. The institution of the jury, “as outlined in Article 26 of the Constitution of 1923, is inexplicably linked to press offences, being an expression of a reality prior to the new constitutional act” (Stanomir, 2001, 372).

The decree came to meet the constitutional intentions of the regime. By abolishing the system of political parties, the Romanian democracy was faced with a *fait accompli*. The personal dictatorship of King Carol II was born. The abolition of the multiparty regime led to the birth of the single party called the National Renaissance Front, which filled the ‘power vacuum’ created after the abolition of the political parties. Therefore, the text of the law establishing the FRN provided that in the future, the single party was entitled to set and submit candidacies for the parliamentary, administrative, and professional elections. The parliamentary elections were designed to strengthen the parliamentary political regime created by the Constitution and to complete the work of reconstruction of the state, through policies that were meant to be uniform but undemocratic.

### **‘Constitutional’ criteria and ‘ideological fundamentals’ of the single political party**

The authoritarianism of the regime was defined by means of an antidemocratic legislative formula which demistified the political parties era, that is “any other political activity than that of FRN shall be viewed as illegal and its authors shall be punished with loss of civic rights for 2 to 5 years” (*Monitorul Oficial*, 1938,1-2). On the other hand, the monopolization of the state’s political life in favour of a single party created the legislative framework for the application of the king’s authoritarian policies. To this effect, we can recall the references

of the Minister of Justice, Victor Iamandi, made during parliamentary debates, where he expressed his opinion about the FRN's role. He believed that by the creation of a single party, "the country's political life had been monopolized in favour of a single mass political organization, as most of this country's citizens who joined this party are determined to work for the consolidation of the new regime"(Iamandi, 1939,13) The principle of work became the catalyst of the public addresses delivered by the regime's representatives, visible both in central and in local public addresses. The centrality of work was elevated to the status of a constitutional principle. To this effect, the Constitution of 27<sup>th</sup> February 1938 established the state on communitarian, nationalist bases in the place of individualism, and enshrined the principle of Romanian ethnic precedence.

During this time, the single political party was the subject of the authoritarian and unconstitutional royal dictatorship that aimed at becoming the society's catalyst by rallying around itself all political, economic, and social forces. Carol II's party aimed to educate the behaviour and the state of mind of the citizens. The citizens could find ways to express themselves within the framework of the royal single-party political system. *The common good* was thus considered to be "the result of the personal ethics of the King, and not of the political nation" (Ionescu, 2001, 196-197). The wellbeing of society was used as a propaganda tool at various government and party levels. Hence, the National Renaissance Front had to consolidate the state by channelling everyone's work and contribution, following the idea that only under a strong state could the citizens lead a peaceful life. The Front was the single political party representing the aspirations of the citizens and created a political framework everyone could join to express a certain opinion, thus building the peace that the regime and the state needed in order to be able to govern and apply their policies.

The catalyst binding the Front with society resided in the fabrication of an imaginary mission between the rulers and the people, and was intended to be permanent. Thus, by the establishment of the FRN, the state crafted itself a totalitarian tool through which it would spread its values, which were essential for its survival, to society.

Ernst Nolte, in his analysis of the NSDAP in the volume *European Civil War*, shows that "around 1930, more than any other German party, far more obvious

than the Bolsheviks before they took power, the NSDAP had the character of a state within the state, and the cult of the Führer was the most important integrative factor of the party” (Nolte, 2005, 273). The FRN also had the character of a state within the state, as in Italy or Germany, and the monarch was proclaimed by the Constitution of February 1938 as the head of state, assuming full political responsibility for appointing the government.

Raymond Aron, in his analysis of the single party, although he took the USSR as a case study, considered that it is a “party of action or rather a revolutionary party” (Aron, 2001, 60). Therefore, the National Renaissance Front cannot be considered a fascist party, but only one that borrowed the organization and functioning of such parties. FRN was conceived with the role of encompassing the entire state and supporting the regime of royal authority.

In Germany, according to Nolte’s example, “even before taking power, the NSDAP had a state-like organization and, since 1930, the Munich leadership was like a government” (Nolte, 2005, 275). The FRN does not meet these characteristics that would allow it to be defined as a fascist-type party, but it can be said that it was one of the corporatist type.

Hannah Arendt, in her analysis of totalitarianisms, sees in the NSDAP a kind of state-type political construction within the state. However, in this totalitarian regime, this was achieved by doubling the services and offices, thus solving the problem of the relationship between the party and the state. According to Hannah Arendt’s analysis, “for these positions of state power that the National Socialists could not occupy with their own people, they created appropriate ghost offices in their own party organization, thus establishing a second state alongside the state itself” (Arendt, 2006, 489). The method of doubling the services had a precise purpose, namely that of “creating functions to the party members” (Arendt, 2006, 493), which could not be employed in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. In essence, however, the role of the dual services was meant to curtail the party’s power by apparently creating competition from within the Nazi organization. These competing powers were the party, the SA, and the SS. This method of doubling the services “provided the apparent solution to the problem between the party and the state in all the dictatorships of a single party”. This doubling of services was also carried out under the authoritarian regime of Carol

II by creating the second service, the super service, which competed with the party, the Ministry of Organization FRN. The FRN Ministry was divided into Departments, and these into Services.

Competition, under the new regime, translated into the supervision of the party and its members, the role of the Ministry being to concentrate and dissolve the power of the party, through the technique of appointments and hierarchical control. Any decision was transmitted to the Ministry on a hierarchical ladder, and the circulars of the single party superstructure were also communicated hierarchically. In this way, state control was exercised both vertically and horizontally within the political organization.

The law on the organization of the Ministry of FRN defined the party as the governing force of the Romanian state, FRN being the only party from which the administrative and parliamentary cadres of the country could originate. The law governing the functioning of the FRN was inspired by Italian fascism more than German Nazism. For example, "in Germany, the Law for ensuring the unity of the party and the state of 1 December 1933 defined the party as the leading force of the National Socialist state" (Nolte, 2005, 274).

The situation in the FRN showed the opposite, as the single party was even sabotaged from the inside, and the FRN representatives were not new to Romanian politics, as the new ideology with authoritarian valences required. The representatives of former parties in the FRN did nothing else than carry on the endless fight for positions within the state apparatus, which demonstrated that nothing had been achieved in the direction of eliminating party competition; on the contrary, everything was amplified. The political conflicts continued under the umbrella of the authoritarian monarchy, "as everyone took as much advantage as possible of the new regime, which demonstrates that the members led a political life which was contrary to and outside the FRN" (Scurtu, 2004, 180).

The constitutional order of the new regime and single political party were based on the notion that "individualism has as effect the undermining of the idea of society, whilst the community doctrine provides spiritual and dynamic force, and, by the solidarist structure of the society, the participation of all society members is ensured". As a consequence, "in the view of the Communitarian

State, the isolated activities of the individuals are considered as being inferior to associated activities, as the individual must integrate his activity into social groups and the state itself, and this is the only way that the activities of all individuals shall be taken into consideration and harmonized” (Negulescu, 1939, 241). The nationalization of politics, the understimation and exclusion of the principles of individualism and liberalism represented the official nature of the authoritarian regime. The regime theoretised these collectivist concepts in order to politically and legally legitimate the FRN with both the population and political parties, until their abolition in March 1939. The single political party and the new type of doctrinal state which, as defined by Chantal Millon-Delsol, is based on ideology, were focused on the adhesion of the masses to the new regime.

Typically, the doctrinal state considers itself the sole trustee of a common project and political and social ethics (Negulescu, 1939, 116). The regime was primarily directed against the Iron Guard, and was seen as a way in which this organization could be eliminated or at least diminished in terms of influence, by determining young people to join the FRN instead. The ways in which Romania’s youth was to be drawn into the FRN structures consisted in organizing a political life that could be modelled on the spirit of the new constitution, which, as shown above, had been put to a referendum on the 24th of February 1938 (*Universul*, 1938, 2).

The rhetoric of the new regime, which was legitimized by demonizing the former regime and was based on representative party democracy, was used by Armand Călinescu as well, who considered that “the political expression of the new regime is represented by the creation of FRN. It is not a party such as those of the past. This is why no agent of this Front was seen making demagogic promises, nor shall any representative of this Front be seen on the halls of the ministries and in the offices of administrations asking for all sort of favours” (*Universul*, 1939, 11).

The possibility of the former regime to flirt with the practices of the former political parties and of the multiparty regime was unconceivable, since FRN never aimed to be a party of morality, spirituality or in accordance with the political fashion of that time, that is totalitarian-authoritarian.

Although it did not succeed to mobilize the youth in order to prevent it from being influenced by legionary ideology, FRN was infested with the former

members of political parties. Eventually, this became a camouflage, an umbrella for continuing their activities under the circumstances whereby all democratic parties had been made illegal, unofficially legalizing their activities and meetings.

### **Authoritarianism versus totalitarianism in ‘parliamentary debates’**

The representatives of the government had different opinions and theories about defining the new constitutional order. Parliament debates revealed the existence of unanimity regarding the rejection of the labels of ‘authoritarian’ or ‘totalitarian’ when referring to the nature of the regime. Consequently, the definition of the regime of Carol II raised numerous questions, even among the members of the corporatist parliament, which would start to function on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1939, after the Chamber and Senate ‘elections’ of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of June.

Asked in Parliament how he would define the post-1938 regime, Ion Gigurtu, engineer and manufacturer, reminded his contemporaries that “we live under a monarchic regime, not a dictatorship, as dictatorship involves power usurpation and a dictator. Dictatorship can be mixed with the reign of the whim, whilst monarchy is legal in its essence. The authoritarian regime involves a dictatorship, that is a small minority imposing its view on all citizens. The totalitarian regime results as a consequence of dictatorship, consolidating it and ensuring it in time. Monarchy needs not such a regime, it governs the country by the consensus of all participants, it has an older right for such obedience. Monarchy does not govern as a political party, for and in the immediate interest of a category of citizens or for electoral success, it governs not only for the present, but for future generations” (Gigurtu, 1939, 19).

Deputy Ion Gigurtu’s speech was adopted by one of the architects of the regime’s doctrine, Professor for Public Law I.V. Gruia. According to him, with the enactment of the constitution on 27 February 1938, “we are within the limits of the authoritarian Romanian state”, on the one hand. On the other hand, “the authoritarian state is not a totalitarian or dictatorial state, nor is it inconsistent with the law and the principles of freedom and lawfulness. In a dictatorial state there is no legal rule – regardless of its source – restricting the rights and obligations of state authorities towards its individuals or of its

individuals towards the state.” (Gruia, 1939, 10). Furthermore, Ion Gruia tried to put forward arguments supporting the theory according to which a dictatorial state is tantamount to absolutism. “The authoritarian state is based on law, equality, the control of legal acts as far as it is legally allowed, enshrining and underpinning individual rights and liberties, the actual individual freedom, conditioned by the fulfilment of all fundamental obligations towards the state. The authoritarian state’s organization leans on the limit of the state’s rights and obligations” (Gruia, 1939, 10).

Armand Călinescu, a legal expert by profession, did not agree with the definition of the regime as being dictatorial. He tried to respond to this provocation regarding the character of the regime, as nobody actually knew exactly what type of regime it was. Thus, “in the place of demagogic tolerance, which yesterday hid the satisfaction of state interests in favour of personal ones, we devoted authority to state interests. Consequently, the restauration of order, the consolidation of the idea of authority, the rehabilitation of the state was the first task the new regime needed to carry out” (Călinescu, 1939, 11).

Invoking the need for authority as a state attribute was also supported by Victor Vălcovici, royal resident and senator appointed by the King within the category of intellectuals. He considered that the times in which the politicians lived were an extension of the social phenomenon, as it represented a natural corolary of the 10 February coup d’état. “This coup d’état is not only a political revolution, but also a moral revolution. The coup d’état of last February is the King’s command to take a stand against the parties and, at the King’s command, we all stood to order, determined to shake off the immoral state the sins of the political parties had plunged us into. [...] The aim of the coup d’état was to regain the prestige the state needed. This does not mean a totalitarian state, an Italian statocracy, but a serious understanding of the Romanian state’s vocation, and for this noble purpose the state needs authority” (Vălcovici, 1939, 2).

Defining the provisions of the act adopted on 27 February 1938, which inaugurated the new regime, as less authoritarian, seemed in the opinion of the regime’s representatives to be completely integrated with the ideological trends prevailing in the European context, and in accordance with the political developments of the time.

The temptation to establish single parties was a fashion of the era not only in the Central and Eastern European space, but also in the democratic West, and it was also imported to Romania with the establishment of King Carol II's regime. "In Southern Europe, the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Franco in Spain, the dictatorship of Salazar in Portugal, that of General Pangalos, then of General Metaxas in Greece; in Central Europe, the 'Order and Tradition' movement in Switzerland; the governments of Monsignor Seipel, then of Dollfuss, then of Schuschnigg in Austria, the formations of Hlinka and Monsignor Tiso in Slovakia, the power of General Horthy and then of Gömbös in Hungary, the Legion of the Archangel Michael of C. Z. Codreanu in Romania and the authoritarian regimes of Kings Carol II in Romania, Boris III in Bulgaria, Alexander in Yugoslavia, Pilsudski's conservative regime in Poland; or even the Rexist Party, from the name of Christ-king, of Degrelle in Belgium, or the French People's Party of Doriot in France" (Millon-Delsol, 2002, 95).

FRN representatives omitted to mention that the democratic principles of political pluralism and fundamental rights of the citizens, rights which had been guaranteed by the previous constitutions of 1866 and 1923, had been destroyed. The constitutional legislators of 1938 recognized the need for a political organization that would replace the old parties and consolidate the authoritarian regime. The project was drawn up by Armand Călinescu, who envisaged the creation of a single party as an instrument meant to mobilize and channel the support of the masses for the newly created regime.

The speeches of the Minister of Interior and future President of the Council of Ministers laid out the theoretical and doctrinal foundations of the National Resurrection Front and became reference documents for the study of the authoritarian regime and the single political party. In his speeches in parliament and radio interventions, Armand Călinescu raised a few questions about the nature and the role of the new party.

Why was a single political organization needed? The answer was provided by Armand Călinescu himself during a radio conference about the purpose of the National Renaissance Front: "It was needed out of the necessity to defend the Nation and the State against outer and inner perils. For this reason, union rather than division should be aimed at, and it should consolidate, and not



share the authority, it should concentrate, and not disperse ideals” (Călinescu, 1939, 105).

The creation of the single political party was directed against the Iron Guard, which threatened the political order in Romania. The invocation of nation and homeland was also directed against the Iron Guard and, implicitly, against political parties, which were accused of splitting the political spectrum. Above all, the FRN was meant to challenge the very nature of Romanian politics. The alliance hinted at in the speech was the one between the *Totul pentru Țară* (“Everything for the Country”) party, led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, and the National Peasant Party of Iuliu Maniu in the elections of 1937. This electoral alliance led to the establishment of the new regime, which considered that the political parties were culpable for the destruction of the state authority due to the violence caused by the parties during electoral campaigns, which were believed to divide the society, the state, and, last but not least, the electorate.

A strong state was therefore considered to be one where authority reigned, where parties and citizens shared the state’s interests. The theorization of such a concept aimed to destroy interwar Romania’s democracy and to establish a regime which was based on the values of state authoritarianism and the single political party. The authoritarian regime had the National Renaissance Front at its forefront, and the FRN was supposed to bundle ideals together and reestablish social unity.

What was then the Front? The answer was given also by the Minister of Interior, under the government led by the Patriarch Miron Cristea. He believed that “it is first of all a Romanian formula. It is not identical to any foreign regime, although some details regarding a similar form, in political matters, can be found” (Călinescu, 1939, 95).

The Front was not meant to be a copy of the single political party in Germany or Italy. It was instead meant to be an original organization, established because the people and the nation required it. Through the constitutional referendum, the creation of the single party, and the organization of elections which were won by the FRN, it tried to prove that the organization was both popular with the masses and the exponent of the political interests of King Carol II. Although Armand Călinescu considered that the Front was a Romanian party, an examination of

its ideology allows us to see that it was instead very much an adaptation of the Western authoritarian and totalitarian models of the time.

What did the Front aim to accomplish? It aimed at the rehabilitation of the state, as the state was seen to be a victim of politicking. "The state surrendered to such an extent that its servants, its ministers negotiated with the criminals. The glorification of the state as a concept, its rehabilitation to its natural status mean not only the restauration of the authority and prestige, but also the recognition of ideals the state has the mission to formulate" (Călinescu, 1939, 95). The victimization of the state due to politicking aligned with a rhetoric aimed against the former system of political parties, accused of having destroyed the state's authority by various political cartels, especially, as mentioned above, the one between the legionaries and the members of the National Peasant Party. According to this interpretation, the only solution to restore prestige and unity was the creation of a single political party, which should bundle all ideals and interests together under the protection of a single man, King Carol II, who was considered to be the guarantor of unity and statehood, "the saviour of the nation".

During the King's dictatorship, politics no longer included disputes over what should be done. It consisted instead of governing, taking into account the public interest and preventing private interests from damaging it. This is why dictatorships strive to prevent conflicts. Delsol states that "the dictatorship does not engage in politics, just like the corporatist dictatorship aims to be the only type of politics that does not engage in politics" (Millon-Delsol, 2005, 117).

Carol II's regime and Armand Călinescu in particular embraced both European and local statism and authoritarian theories overestimating the state and minimizing the importance of individual rights and liberties in favour of the greater public good, which was considered to be superior to narrow group or party interests. Putting an end to the era of political romanticism, as well as reversing the individual-state relationship were the main goals of the Constitution of 27 February 1938. Consequently, in the views of the Front, according to the authoritarian constitutional order, the individual should be subordinated to the state. Thus, "the personal interest is to be overlooked, unless it coincides with the collective interest. The personal interest cannot be fulfilled, unless it is part of a professional activity, which is useful for everybody. Therefore, promoting

the general interest of the collectivity was the first mission of the National Renaissance Front” (Călinescu, 1939, 96). A natural consequence of this reversal of the individual-state relationship was the “remodelling [of] the individual profile as a citizen, and was the ultimate stake of the Constitution and New Regime” (Stanomir, 2003, 95).

The Front seems to have forgotten the mission it was created for and hoped to reach the goal of coalescing public opinion around the regime and the King. The mission of promoting collective interests was directed against the private interests of the political parties, whose main goal was seen to be the takeover of power. Under the new regime, power was to be the exclusive attribute of the single political party and the monarch. The single party coordinated government policies and the monarch ultimately directed the activity of the party. Consequently, the monarch was the leader of the party and nation, the uncontested leader, as was mentioned in the first article of FRN’s organization law.

The abstract citizen, which was the creation of the regime and its fundamental law, became, according to the King’s own interests, an instrument, and was subordinated to the monarch’s cult of personality, to the cult of work and family. The statute of citizen was seen as being combined with that of member of the single party, while the conditions for citizenship derived from an individual’s statute as productive and efficient work as provided in the Constitution of 27 February 1938. Between 1938 and 1940, citizenship in the Kingdom of Romania was conditioned by the regime’s approval and the participation in the uninominal elections for a corporate parliament. Moreover, citizenship was also conditioned by ethnicity, with xenophobic and anti-Semitic overtones. The exclusion of Jews from the public service, the minimization of their civil and political rights and freedoms, the application of the *numerus clausus* principle, and the application of anti-Semitic laws transformed the monarchy of Carol II into a state that was based on similar criteria to those undepinning totalitarian states that had made anti-Semitism into an authentic state policy, with catastrophic results. The application of anti-Semitic laws were founded by the authoritarian monarchic regime on the principle of Romanian ethnic precedence. Article 4 of the Constitution of 27 February 1938 resulted in the “enshrinement of racism, and especially of antisemitism” (Stanomir, 2001, 370) and excluded Jews from participation in the

political and social life of Romania during the period of the single political party and authoritarian regime under the rule of Carol II (Grecu, 2023, 112-125).

## Conclusions

The Constitution of 27 February 1938 eliminated the liberal democratic regime that had been enshrined in the 1866 and 1923 Constitutions of Romania. The infringement of the Constitution and the absolute powers granted to the head of state were the ways by which the principles of interwar democracy were disposed of and subsequently replaced by those of institutionalized authoritarianism, rendered constitutional by the country's fundamental law.

The principle of the separation of powers was replaced by the concept of concentration of powers. The Constitution granted the King the right to possess both executive and legislative power. Additionally, the Constitution granted the King conventional rights that had been enshrined in the previous fundamental laws, namely the right to initiate, promulgate, and sanction laws. The separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial branches did not divide, but rather concentrated the power. The precedence of the executive over the legislative, the appointment of the King as head of the state, and the fact that ministers had no responsibilities except towards the King turned the institutions of parliament and the ministries into monarchical instruments. The political system centred around the single party reveals Carol II's new regime as an authoritarian one. The elimination of the political parties, the instauration of curfew, the creation of the single political party, the proclamation of the King as absolute head of the FRN, administration, government, and parliament, transformed Romania into a ministerial monarchy between 1938 and 1940. Anti-democratism and antiparlamentarism were the constitutional principles on which the architecture of the Romanian monarchical authoritarian regime was founded.

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