



**NATIONAL AND RIGHT-WING RADICALISM
IN THE NEW DEMOCRACIES:
ROMANIA**

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1. Introduction

Twenty years after the overthrow of Ceausescu's regime, the right-wing and nationalist radicalism is undergoing a process of redefinition on the Romanian political scene. This process risks being accelerated by the effects of the current economic crisis, felt later, but harshly, in Romania, whose short-term economic prospects are gloomy.¹ After the official accession to the EU on January 1, 2007, the general degradation of the Romanian political life — as shown mainly by the proliferation of populist discourses and attitudes throughout the entire political spectrum — coupled with the reduction of the efficacy, already limited, of state institutions, have generated collective disillusion and frustrations which the economic crisis has only intensified. The violence of political rhetoric has increased, the anti-system discourse has been adopted by more and more political actors, the way has been paved for the multiplication of extremist political messages, and the recent electoral comeback of the **Greater Romania Party (PRM)** — populist nationalist — at the European elections in June 2009, surprised, in an unpleasant way, many observers of the Romanian political stage. The radical nationalism and right-wing extremism, which saw a first expansion on the political stage in the 1990s, only to enter a shadow cone during 2005-2008, is nowadays looking for a new dynamism that feeds on the social and political tensions and ruptures that have marked Romania over the past decade, while also taking advantage of its recently gained quality as a EU member. Both the place and significance of the radical, right-wing nationalist movements in today's Romania should be assessed from a double perspective: on the one hand, that of the history of these movements at different stages of the post-communist period, and, on the other, that of the longer history of Romanian nationalism and right-wing extremism, beginning with the interwar period until the fall of the communist regime.

¹ "Even with help from the IMF, 2009 and 2010 will be difficult years. Growth will be negative this year and near zero next year," Jeffrey Franks, the IMF's mission chief for Romania, declared in May 2009 — see the interview published in *IMF Survey Magazine*, 4 May, 2009 ("Romania Receives Support from IMF to Counter Crisis"). A recent report of IMF predicts the increase of the unemployment rate to 10% in 2010 (*IMF Country Report N° 09/301- October 2009*, table 3, p. 25 - <http://www.imf.org>).

2. Nationalist-extremism after 1990

Post-communist Romania has witnessed two main nationalist-extremist currents, crystallized in the 1990s, which can be defined in terms of a distinctive tradition of Romanian extremist nationalism carried on by each one of them. The most important among these radical currents has drawn on elements of the ideology and the discursive practices of the national-communism prevalent during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, adapting them to the new, post-communist social and political context. This political current, which has not claimed a right-wing identity, was represented, in the 1990s, by three „parties of ‘radical continuity’” (Michael Shafir): the **Greater Romania Party** (Partidul România Mare - **PRM**), the **Party of the National Unity of Romanians** (Partidul Unității Naționale Române - **PUNR**) and the **Socialist Labor Party** (Partidul Socialist al Muncii – **PSM**)² as well as by a part of the main political party that claimed a left-wing identity – the **Social Democracy Party of Romania (PDSR)**, led by Ion Iliescu. It defined itself mainly through its aggressive nationalism, doubled, from the very beginning, by a strident populist rhetoric.

A second nationalist-extremist political current, also from the 1990s, has rediscovered the interwar tradition of the fascist or fascist-oriented nationalism and tried to redefine, starting from it, a ”New Right” or what we could call a right-wing radicalism represented, in Michael Shafir's terms, by several „parties of ‘radical return’ ”³, independent from the legacy of the nationalism reinvented by the Ceaușescu regime.

Distinguishing between the two radical nationalist traditions—the interwar fascist one and the national-communist one – is a preliminary step towards avoiding the mislabeling of the outgrowths of these traditions in the Romanian political spectrum after 1990. For instance, in a relatively recent book dealing with the fascist movements from the interwar period, the American sociologist Michael Mann states bluntly that ”the Greater Romania Party, nationalist and rather statist, tracing back its lineage to the Iron Guard, is neofascist and obtained nearly 30 percent of the vote in 2000”⁴; however, the author ignores not only the fundamental difference between the **Greater Romania Party** and the **Iron Guard** (e.g. the

² Michael SHAFIR – ”The Mind of Romania's Radical Right” in Sabrina P. RAMET (ed.), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, The Pennsylvania State University, 1999, p. 213-214.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Michael MANN – *Fascists*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 370-371. For a critique of Mann's argument, see Daniel BARBU – *Politica pentru barbari*, Nemira, Bucharest, 2005, p. 122-128.

omnipresent and opportunistic populism, as opposed to the elitism and the *esprit de corps* of the late fascist movement), but also the very origins of the **PRM**, which should be traced back to the period of Ceaușescu's regime and to that of the first post-communist year, but not to the interwar period.

Between the two World Wars, Romanian fascism was represented by the movement that called itself the “**Archangel Michael**“ **Legion**, also known as the **Iron Guard**. Besides anti-communism, the radical nationalism of the **Iron Guard** was characterized by an obsessive, extremely violent anti-semitism, combined with a discourse, a symbolic repertoire and a ritualism that integrates numerous elements of Orthodox Christianity. The strong infusion of terminology, vocabulary, and Orthodox rituals into the public image of the Iron Guard was one of the extreme aspects taken on by the religious revival in Romania, after the Great War. As early as the 1930s, these traits led some intellectuals to consider the **Iron Guard** as being “a spiritual movement”, rather than a political one⁵, despite its participation in the political competition and the violence inflicted by this Romanian version of fascism upon its adversaries. The interpretation of the **Iron Guard** as a movement, even of a spiritual kind, resurfaced in post-communist Romania, against the backdrop of a newly emerged collective religious sensibility, as well as of a non-discriminate idealization of the interwar period. The new seduction exerted in some intellectual and religious circles after 1990 by the rediscovery of the **Iron Guard** as a “spiritual movement” was accompanied by the refusal to accept its characterization as a Romanian form of fascism.

The Ceaușescu regime generated, starting with the second half of the 1960s, its own version of Romanian nationalism, meant to confer upon the Communist Party and its leadership a popular legitimacy they had lacked during the first two decades after the war. This nationalist ideological synthesis – which gradually transformed itself into an instrument of the cult of Ceaușescu – adopted numerous themes, myths, and figures typical of pre-communist Romanian nationalism, and the regime encouraged the development of a new *intelligentsia* that would promote this “national-communism” in the realm of culture and propaganda.⁶ Although it used the Orthodox Church, the Ceausescu regime avoided, for obvious reasons,

⁵ The same holds true of the historian of religions Mircea Eliade – Florin ȚURCANU, *Mircea Eliade. Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, Editions La Découverte, Paris, 2003, p. 268-269.

⁶ Katherine VERDERY – *National ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, University of California Press, 1991; Vladimir TISMANEANU – *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, University of California Press, 2003.

integrating the Orthodox factor within its nationalist synthesis. Rather, it encouraged, especially during the 1980s, an anti-Hungarian rhetoric without precedent after the Second World War and allowed, within carefully supervised limits, anti-semitic manifestations in the Romanian mass-media. This was also the period marked by the first, veiled attempts at rehabilitating the historical figure of Marshall Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator between 1940-1944⁷, whose image as authoritarian leader and fighter against the Soviet Union could be associated, behind the scenes, with that of Ceausescu himself – proud until the end of the distance he had created between Bucharest and Moscow.

After Ceausescu's death, the legacy of national-communism proved to be a powerful instrument towards achieving political legitimacy by those forces linked through their political culture, leadership and interests to the communist era. In the 1990s, this legacy was an ideological link among parties such as the **Greater Romania** [Partidul România Mare (PRM)], the **Party of the National Unity of Romanians** (PUNR) and the main left-wing party known variously as the **National Salvation Front** [Frontul Salvării Nationale (FSN,1990-1992)], the **Democratic Front of National Salvation** [Frontul Democrat al Salvării Nationale (FDSN,1992-1993)], or the **Party of Social Democracy in Romania** (PDSR, 1993-2001). During the same period, elements characteristic of the political culture of national-communism continued to deeply shape the mentalities, values, and practices of numerous state institutions, including the Army, the Police, the Secret Services, and the Ministry of Justice, facilitating various types of interactions among these institutions and the above-mentioned parties.⁸

3. The Greater Romania Party

The retooling of the ideological elements and propagandistic themes from the Ceausescu era was mainly carried out by the **Greater Romania Party** [Partidul România Mare (PRM)], the most important and best known Romanian nationalist party from the post-communist period. This was founded in 1991, around the weekly nationalist newspaper *România Mare* (first issued a year earlier), by several leading representatives of the national-communist

⁷ A. SIMION – *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurecției române din august 1944*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1979; *International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. Final Report*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 341, 344, 348.

⁸ Concerning the relationship of some Romanian institutions and nationalist extremism during 1990-2002, see Gabriel ANDREESCU – *Right-Wing Extremism in Romania*, Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, Cluj, 2003, p. 13-34.

intelligentsia from the Ceausescu era: writers such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Eugen Barbu and Radu Theodoru (the last one a retired general) who were joined by one of the former censors of Romanian historiography, Mircea Mușat. Corneliu Vadim Tudor was to stand out, from the very beginning, as the absolute leader of the new party, leaving the imprint of his histrionic and opportunistic personality upon it. In 1995 the **PRM** already numbered 32.000 members to which should be added 5000 members of the party's youth organization⁹

Through its political discourse, **PRM** continued, in an exacerbated manner, some of the offensive tendencies of the Ceausescu regime: the anti-Hungarian, anti-Western sentiment, the extreme hostility against former dissidents, pro-Western Romanian intellectuals, a great number of Romanian political emigrants, and last but not least against the Free Europe radio station. Even Vadim Tudor's anti-semitism, unleashed after 1989, is a continuation—much amplified—of the same attitude that the writer-propagandist displayed in his literary and journalistic writings published during Ceausescu's regime, eliciting, in 1984, the protest from Romania's chief-rabbi, Moses Rosen.¹⁰ “In the early 1980th, with the approval of the communist regime, Corneliu Vadim Tudor depicted a negative portrait of the Jew, whether in the editorials he signed in the ultra-nationalistic weekly *Săptămâna* (The Week), or in the volume of verse *Saturnalii* (Saturnalia) (1983). This portrait is composed of a whole range of negative classical attributes, from mercantilism and cupidity to betrayal and deicide.”¹¹ Anti-semitism has become, from the very beginning, a distinct feature of the **PRM** discourse, and the denial of Romania's participation in the Holocaust, already present in the national-communist historiography during the time of Ceausescu,¹² could be freely expressed, after 1990, through the pen of significant party leaders.¹³ It can be said that, in this respect, **PRM** cast itself, by means of its weekly publication, as one of the agents of “the democratization of negationism” in Romania, after 1989¹⁴. Finally, added to the repertoire of xenophobia were

⁹ Michael SHAFIR, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁰ “File dintr-un dosar controversat : C.V. Tudor” in 22. *Revista Grupului pentru Dialog Social*, 25 noiembrie 2004.

¹¹ Andrei OIȚEANU – *Inventing the Jew. Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romania and other Central European Countries*, University of Nebraska Press, 2009, p. 151.

¹² *International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. Final Report*, p. 345 și 347.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 351-352

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

the repeated attacks against the *roma* minority – threatened to be sent to labor camps¹⁵ - and against the so-called ”gipsy mafia,” which allegedly controls Romania.

On the other hand, the steps taken towards the rehabilitation of Marshal Ion Antonescu before 1989 become “a great leap forward,” starting with 1990 in the pages of the weekly paper *România Mare*, so that, according to a study from 2003 about the extreme right-wing in Romania, “The *Greater Romania Party* deserves the credit for being the most sistematically pro-Antonescu organization of all.”¹⁶

Finally, some of the most shocking ingredients of the populist discourse have been present in the rhetoric of **PRM** from the start, taking the form of a sordid and virulent anti-intellectualism, of an offensive use of language, rich in slang and grotesque images, directed at enemies.¹⁷ After 1996, when the center-right parties entered the government for the first time, the populist dimension of the **PRM** discourse developed by taking advantage of the economic crisis that has been deepening ever since. Populism would serve to reinforce the ultra-nationalist discourse with which the party had launched itself onto the political scene and would increase its legitimacy.

Despite the fact that a new law concerning Romania’s national security, published in July 1991, defined as specific threats ”the initiation, organization, carrying out or supporting in any way of totalitarian or extremists acts, of fascist, legionnaire or any other type, as well as racist or anti-Semite acts”¹⁸, the **PRM**’s activities were not investigated by the authorities. Initially close to Ion Iliescu’s party, **FDSN-PDSR**¹⁹, as well as to the interests of former propagandists of national-communism and certain military and former **Securitate** circles,²⁰ the party run by Vadim Tudor gradually defined itself, through its electorate, as the party of those frustrated with the transition to democracy, who lived in small towns or medium-sized cities, and whose social backgrounds were most directly affected by the dramatic reduction of

¹⁵ *România Mare*, 21 August 1998.

¹⁶ Gabriel ANDREESCU, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Ruxandra CESEREANU – *Imaginarul violent al românilor*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2003, p. 104-118.

¹⁸ *Legea 51/1991 privind siguranța națională a României – Monitorul Oficial n° 163/July 8, 1991*; Gabriel ANDREESCU, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁹ The PRM even joined the PDSR government between January and October 1995.

²⁰ These were the backgrounds from which most of the PRM followers and militants were recruited in the 1990s and in the first years of the current decade – see Michael SHAFIR – ”Profile: Corneliu Vadim Tudor”, *Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty*, December 13th 2004 (<http://www.rferl.org/>); Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI – *Politica după communism*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2002, p. 54 și 57.

the industrial sector created in the communist era.²¹ It was only after 2000 that the popularity of the **PRM** increased in rural areas, remaining, however, limited.²² Instead, Corneliu Vadim Tudor's party attracted, at the end of the 1990s, the majority of the other nationalist party's voters, **PUNR**, founded in 1990 in the context of the ethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians and anchored electorally in Transylvania.²³ Gheorghe Funar, the party's leader and mayor of the city of Cluj, who had obtained, in the first tour of the 1992 presidential elections, a total of 1,294,388 votes, joined Vadim Tudor as vice-president of the **PRM** in 1998.

This migration of the **PUNR** electorate towards **PRM** – facilitated by the anti-Hungarian message shared by both parties – is not the only cause that determined the most important success achieved by **PRM** and its leader Vadim Tudor in the 2000 Romanian presidential elections. Until then, their electoral ascendancy had been rather modest. In the 1992 elections, the party got 3,89% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 3,85% of those for the Senate sending his first representatives in the Parliament. In 1996 the percentages were 4,46% and 4,54%, respectively, while Vadim Tudor received, in the presidential elections from the same year, 4,72% of the votes. Even more spectacular were the results obtained by **PRM** at the 2000 elections: 19,48% of the votes for the House of Representatives, and 21,01% for the Senate, while the party leader came second in the presidential elections with 33,17% of the votes.

These results, which marked the pinnacle of **PRM** on the Romanian political scene, were, to a great extent, the expression of a vote of protest, revealing the deep-seated frustrations in the Romanian society after 10 years of alternative governing by the left and the right. They created, for a part of the electorate, the image of an “anti-system party” which has persisted until today and which **PRM** tries to keep fresh in the future.

On the other hand, Vadim Tudor tried early to build for himself an image of a leader with visibility and connections outside of Romania. In 1997 he participated, along with the

²¹ Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI – *Politica după comunism*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2002, p. 126 and 205-206; Silviu MATEI – “Between *Left* and *Right* : Greater Romania Party's Location into the Political Landscape. Explorations of the Romanian Political Space of 2000” in Alexandra IONESCU, Odette TOMESCU-HATTO (ed.), *Politique et société dans la Roumanie contemporaine*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004, p. 111.

²² *Ibid.*; V.G. BĂLEANU – “The Dark Side of Politics in Post-Communist Romania” (paper published in March 2001 by *The Conflict Studies Research Center* of the *Royal Military Academy Sandhurst*, Camberley, England), p. 33; Cătălin DUMITRU – « ‘Le Pen din Carpați’ amenință din nou România », *Curentul*, 31 iulie 2002.

²³ Silviu MATEI, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

revisionist writer Roger Garaudy, in the festivities organized in Lybia by the Khadafi regime, attending, that same year, the Congress of the **National Front** of Jean-Marie le Pen and inviting the latter, in his turn, to the second congress of **PRM**.²⁴

Identified by its sympathizers and adversaries alike as a left-wing party, in its first years,²⁵ **PRM** has been considered by numerous observers as a movement difficult to classify politically, due to its origins, as well as to the heterogeneous character of its ideology and electorate.²⁶ The heterogeneous character of its ideology comes, however, from the very ambiguities and paradoxes of Ceaușescu's brand of national-communism, and the racist and fascist-oriented traits of the party's nationalism have resulted from the exacerbation of those attitudes and discursive practices that were already manifesting themselves, within control limits, before 1989, in the service of official propaganda. Unlike the small political groups that tried to define, starting with the 1990s, a "new right," to which we will turn next, **PRM** has never explicitly reclaimed the tradition of interwar fascism, while vehemently opposing, in the parliamentary session of December 2006, the official condemnation of the crimes committed by the communist regime, and openly insulting in its publications the victims of the Romanian Gulag. Neither the extreme right-wing classification nor the claim of a descent from the Romanian interwar fascism seems to apply to this party,²⁷ which is rather "one of the numerous European expressions of a nationalist populism,"²⁸ or the manifestation, in a post-communist context, of a "pathology of the Romanian left-wing", rooted in the communist period.²⁹ It has also been pointed out that neither the visits paid by Vadim Tudor to Jean-Marie Le Pen nor the fact that the **PRM** leader publicly defended, in 2000, the votes cast in favor of Jörg Heider are sufficient arguments for placing this party squarely within the extreme right category,³⁰ these attitudes serving rather to increase the legitimacy of the movement on the inside and its visibility abroad. We believe that **PRM** can be classified as a **nationalist-populist** party and that, through the type of populism it practices, the tribune-like

²⁴ Sorina SOARE – „Le national-populisme roumain aux portes de Bruxelles”, @mnis. *Revue de Civilisation Contemporaine de l'Université de Bretagne Occidentale. Europes /Amériques*, 2005, p. 8-9 (<http://www.univ-brest.fr/amnis/>).

²⁵ Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, *op.cit.* p. 110, fig. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 57; Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *op.cit.*, p. 235; Daniel BARBU, *op.cit.*, p. 121-128; Silviu MATEI, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

²⁷ Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *op.cit.*, p. 235.

²⁸ Daniel BARBU, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

²⁹ *Schelete în dulap. Vladimir Tismăneanu în dialog cu Mircea Mihăeș*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 21 ; Sorina SOARE, *op.cit.*, p. 1-2.

³⁰ Sorina SOARE, *op.cit.*, p. 9-10.

attitude of its leader, and the history of its participation in the political life, this party has fashioned for itself, since the second half of the 1990s, the identity of an *anti-political-establishment party*, positioned in the middle between an opposition party, which accepts the rules of the democratic system, and the role of an “anti-system” party, tempted to overthrow the political system.³¹

PRM came closest to conceiving the possibility of a coup in January 1999, when, its popularity with the electorate having been increasing,³² it publicly and vociferously supported, through Vadim Tudor’s voice, the march of 10,000 miners from the Jiu Valley towards Bucharest. This event triggered a serious political crisis and, given the weak reactions from both the police and the secret services, posed the threat of a coup.³³ The attitude adopted by Vadim Tudor on this occasion made that later “several public personalities requested that the **PRM** be outlawed on 5 counts: disrespect for the principles of constitutional democracy; incitement to public violence; disrespect for the rule of law; incitement to ethnic, racial and religious hatred; militancy against political pluralism.”³⁴ Since, despite the clear evidence which could have outlawed **PRM**, this did not happen, it emphasized the weakness of the rule of law in Romania, worsened by the political crisis of 1999-2000. At the end of this crisis, the 2000 elections were to propel **PRM** into second place on the Romanian political scene, in terms of the number of votes received.

After the sensational results in the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, over the next eight years, the **PRM**’s popularity with the electorate started to drop, at first slowly, but then increasingly faster. In July 2003, a recently adopted law made mandatory a new official registration of the political parties, and thus **PRM** figured, based also on the number of its declared members, as the second most important party in Romania, with 201,827 followers, after the **Social Democratic Party**, registered with roughly 300,000 members³⁵. The same year, in October, a Gallup opinion poll still showed a 20% vote preference for the **PRM**³⁶. In

³¹ Andreas SHEDLER – „Anti-Political-Establishment Parties”, *Party Politics*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1996, p. 291-312; Sorina SOARE, *op.cit.* p. 6.

³² Tom GALLAGHER – *Theft of a Nation: Romania since communism*, C. Hurst and Co., London, 2005, p. 172.

³³ Gabriel ANDREESCU, *op.cit.*, p. 33-34; Tom GALLAGHER, *op.cit.* p. 202-205

³⁴ Gabriel ANDREESCU, *op.cit.*, p.34.

³⁵ Cristian PREDA – « Les partis politiques dans le postcommunisme roumain » in Jean-Michel DE WAELE (ed.), *Les clivages politiques en Europe Centrale et Orientale*, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2004, p. 169-170.

³⁶ Cristian PREDA – “Sondaj IPP/Gallup”, 22. *Revista Grupului pentru Dialog Social*, October 28, 2003.

the 2004 elections, however, the party obtained 12,99% of the vote for the Chamber of Deputies, 13,64% of the vote for the Senate, and Vadim Tudor was wanted as president only by 12,57% of voters. Two years later Vadim Tudor's position within electorate's voting intentions was approximately the same – 13%³⁷ - but in 2008, **PRM** was collapsing electorally, failing to send any deputy or senator to Parliament, which had not happened before in the history of the party.

4. The collapse of the PRM

How can we account for this evolution which pushed **PRM** out of the second place it had occupied on the political scene in 2000 and out of Parliament altogether in 2008? The causes are multiple, and they have to do with the economic and social transformations undergone by the country during this time, as well as with the developments of its internal affairs and the changes in Romania's international situation.

The 2000 election, which put an end to the first right-wing government in Romania marked not only the pinnacle of **PRM**, but also the exit of the Romanian radical nationalism from the political cycle inaugurated, in its recent history, by the fall of communism. The country's economic growth picked up in 2000 and intensified over the following years,³⁸ unemployment dropped significantly, and this evolution added to the opportunity that had opened for a segment of the labor force affected by the disindustrialization in the 1990s to seek work abroad, on the EU territory³⁹. All of these developments, together with the consolidation of the middle-class over the last decade, have considerably reduced the number of frustrated electors, who had resonated with the message sent out by Vadim Tudor during 1996-2000.

On a political level, the signing of the treaty between Romania and Hungary in September 1996 had a much lesser impact than the inclusion of the party of the Hungarian minority, the **Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania** [*Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România* (UDMR/RMSDZ)] into all of the governments during 1996-2000. This fact enabled

³⁷Public Opinion Barometer of the *Soros Foundation Romania* released in October 2006 (http://www.soros.ro/press_releases/).

³⁸Romania's GDP growth was 2,9% in 2000 and 7,1% in 2008, the highest level being 8,4% in 2004 and an average of 6,5% per year (<http://www.economywatch.com/economic-statistics/>).

³⁹According to a Public Opinion Barometer of the *Soros Foundation Romania* released in December 2006, "12% of 18 to 59 year old Romanians have worked abroad after 1989. The phenomenon took significant proportions after 2002, as soon as Romanians gained the right to free circulation within Schengen space. Presently, temporarily working abroad is threefold the phenomenon in 2002" – „Two and a half Million Romanians in the European Work Market” – Press Release, 14-12-2006 (<http://www.soros.ro>).

the crossing of a psychological threshold in the inter-ethnic relations in Romania and the gradual but significant weakening of the mobilizing potential of the “Hungarian danger” theme, used by **PRM**. The government participation of the **UDMR**, albeit irregular during 1996-2008, has become a fixture in Romanian political life.

Romania’s changing situation at the international level also contributed to the weakening of the credibility of Vadim Tudor’s xenophobe nationalist message. The anti-American and anti-Western appeals informing the rhetoric of the PRM, appeals which had reached its peak around the time of NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, in 1999, became less and less attractive after September 11, 2001. The strengthening of Romania’s ties with the USA and the country’s acceptance into NATO in 2004 and in the EU on January 1, 2007 benefited from the powerful support of the public opinion and diminished the electoral impact of **PRM**’s nationalist message. Vadim Tudor could not possibly become a champion of the fight against Romania’s adherence to NATO and the EU because these changes in the country’s international status proved to be too popular to be openly resisted.⁴⁰

It was not only the electoral impact of the nationalist message that was weakening, especially after 2001, but that of **PRM**’S populist message as well. The popular mayor of Bucharest, Traian Băsescu, who entered the 2004 presidential race backed by a political coalition that significantly called itself “**Justice and Truth**,” managed to attract, both during its electoral campaign and after its victory in the elections, a part of the Romanian electorate that was receptive to the ‘reparatory’, populist message which Vadim Tudor himself had been preaching for several years, but more violently. Băsescu succeeded in winning a part of the electorate over to his side through a “softer” populist discourse than that of Vadim Tudor’s, but conferred upon it the credibility he had been enjoying as a public person, following his election as mayor of Romania’s capital, in 2000.

Another challenger of Vadim Tudor on the field of populism appeared in 2004 in the person of George (Gigi) Becali, the rich owner of the football club “Steaua Bucuresti” who took over

⁴⁰ Charles KING – “The Europe Question in Romania and Moldova” in Anatol LIEVEN and Dmitri TRENIN (ed.) – *Ambivalent Neighbors: The EU, NATO and the Price of Membership*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2003, p. 257 (“Even The Greater Romania Party has been strongly committed to joining NATO, if for no other reason than, in the words of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, to keep an eye on Hungary”). On the other hand, Vadim Tudor’s ambivalence towards his country’s adherence to NATO was expressed in the idea that Romania should trade that adherence for Russia’s benevolent attitude towards the union of the Republic of Moldova (former province of Bessarabia) and Romania.

the leadership of a pre-existing party, entirely marginal and lacking in ideological consistency, the **New Generation Party** [Partidul “Noua Generatie” (**PNG**)] Transformed by Becali into a self-avowed nationalist and “Christian” party, **PNG** became, just as **PRM**, a party attached to its leader’s aggressive and exhibitionist personality. Becali’s populism, fueled by his ostentatious displays of religiosity and by the unsystematic, but publicized food and money distributions to those in need, won him sympathy with a part of the poorest electorate in Romania, but the actual electoral results of **PNG** stayed modest since the party failed to send, in 2008, any deputy or senator to Parliament. The public exchanges of insults and accusations between George Becali and Vadim Tudor, totally relished by the Romanian mass-media, showed, in a colorful manner, the rivalry between the two leaders on the field of the populist vote, a field that was becoming increasingly disputed by various political figures.⁴¹

Started at the end of 2003, the attempts made by Vadim Tudor to prevent the erosion of its party’s popularity and change its image abroad were multiple, contradictory and especially unconvincing, demonstrating the volatility and political opportunism of **PRM**’s leader. The latter declared that he would abandon the anti-semitism and made a series of sensational public gestures meant to illustrate his new orientation. One of them was the inauguration, on January 15, 2004, in Braşov, of a bust representing Israel’s murdered prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin,⁴² whose family condemned this initiative, together with the Jewish community in Romania and various Jewish organizations from abroad.⁴³ Along the same lines, later on, a **PRM** delegation led by Vadim Tudor visited the extermination camp at Auschwitz. The attempts at gaining the recognition of a new political identity continued, in 2005, with the adoption, albeit temporary, by **PRM** of the name **The Greater Romania Popular Party** [Partidul Popular România Mare (**PPRM**)] and with the request addressed to

⁴¹ The latest “player” on this field is the current mayor of Bucharest, Sorin Oprescu, who was elected as an independent in 2008 and who is running for presidency, again as an independent, in the 2009 November elections.

⁴² Răzvan AMARIEI – “Romania : Leopard’s Changing Spots”, *CEEOL Transitions Online*, 20.1.2004 (<http://www.cceol.com>)

⁴³ One such organization was *The Anti-Defamation League* – “Dedication of Romanian Statue of Rabin a Ploy” (January 16, 2004, <http://www.adl.org/PresRele/>)

the European People's Party of accepting the new party into the fold. The request was turned down, and **PPRM** returned to its old name.⁴⁴

Since January 2007, after Romania's accession to the EU, **PRM** had had, *ex officio*, five representatives in the European Parliament until the first elections that the Bucharest administration was to organize, in November, for occupying the seats to which it was entitled in the Strasbourg forum. On this occasion, **PRM** found itself again, through a new move of political oscillation, on the road leading to the right-wing extremists from Western European countries – European representatives of the French **National Front**, of **Vlaams Belang** and others – together with whom it created, within the European Parliament, the group called "**Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty**" (**ITS**).⁴⁵ However, ten months later, Vadim Tudor's representatives left, ostentatiously and boisterously, this political group, as a protest against the "xenophobe" and "racist" attitude towards Romanians displayed by their colleague, the extreme right-wing representative Alessandra Mussolini.⁴⁶ This new political inconsistency would not be helpful to **PRM**, which, having received only 4,15% of the votes, failed to send any representative to the European Parliament after the first elections organized for this purpose in Romania, on 25 November, 2007.

Both **PRM**'s attempt to dispense with the radical nationalist party label, less and less useful on the internal level, and to escape the ostracism on the European political scene failed, which serves to emphasize the fact that the main political resource left to **PRM** today is populism. This can also explain why, leaving aside the mutual hostility between Vadim Tudor and George Becali – a hostility which had been publicly expressed on several occasions, the two politicians joined forces for the Euro Parliamentary elections in June 2009, at a time when the latter was in a difficult position that involved his penal responsibility.⁴⁷ Becali's temporary entrance into the ranks of the **PRM** with the purpose of running, alongside Vadim Tudor, for a seat in the European Parliament, was, for the leader of the **PNG**, an opportunistic, haphazard gesture. Yet for **PRM** – whose posters showed both politicians together – it meant the very fresh infusion of populism that the party needed and that gave it access to a considerably

⁴⁴ Daniela GRATIANU – "Partidul România Mare – retrospectiva anului 2005", 30 decembrie 2005, [informatia.ro / arhiva](http://informatia.ro/arhiva) 2005.

⁴⁵ Jean QUATREMER – "L'Europe brune serre les rangs au Parlement", *Libération*, 11 ianuarie 2007.

⁴⁶ "Dissolution du groupe d'extrême-droite", *La Libre Belgique*, 14 noiembrie 2007.

⁴⁷ George Becali was arrested on April 3, 2009 under the charge of sequestration, and currently facing a trial.

different electorate, which overlapped only to a small extent with that of Vadim Tudor's.⁴⁸ Thus, **PRM** received 8,65% of the votes on June 7, 2009, managing to send three representatives to the Parliament in Strasbourg, among them the newly recruited George Becali, who subsequently hastened to regain his political independence from his partner.

The temporary alliance between Vadim Tudor and Becali under the slogan "Two Christians and patriots/Will free the country from thieves" availed itself, on the occasion of these elections, of the first effects of the economic crisis upon the Romanian society, particularly the growth of unemployment by 56,3% between June 2008 and June 2009 (around 190,000 people) and the fear inspired by it.⁴⁹ In the opinion of sociologist Sebastian Lăzăroiu, "the comeback of the **PRM** should be attributed mainly to the social effects of the economic crisis. **PRM** has remained a party that focalizes social frustrations in times of crisis. Becali's presence alongside Vadim Tudor has helped the party. But I think that, given the weak structures of this party (**PRM**) outside of Bucharest, an election for which mobilization was essential must have required a stronger emotional incentive than mere sympathy towards Becali so as to determine almost 9% of the Romanians to cast their votes for **PRM**. And this incentive cannot be other than the general frustration generated by the effects of the crisis."⁵⁰

Against the backdrop of a relative revival of the extreme right-wing nationalist forces in Europe, occasioned by the latest European elections, some Romanian commentators expressed a concern that the result obtained by **PRM** could favor an electoral relaunching for Vadim Tudor, which could propel him into third place at the upcoming presidential elections in November 2009, or even into the second round of these elections, as it had happened, in a similar context marked by crisis, in 2000.⁵¹ Other voices, however, such as that of political analyst Sorin Ionișă, minimized the importance of the 3 Euro Parliamentary seats won by **PRM**, comparing the "the two buffoons, Becali and Vadim Tudor" with the "true neo-

⁴⁸ A Public Opinion Barometer released in October 2006 by *Soros Foundation Romania* showed that Vadim Tudor and George Becali share a greater popularity among men than women, and that Becali's electorate is, on average, much younger than that of Vadim Tudor and better represented in larger cities. (http://www.soros.ro/press_releases/).

⁴⁹ "Romania has the highest number of unemployed people in the last three years" [„România are cei mai mulți șomeri din ultimii trei ani” (<http://www.ziare.com/>, 5 iunie 2009)]; ANOFM – "The unemployment rate in May 2009" [Rata șomajului în luna mai 2009” (<http://anofm.ro>, 05-06-2009)].

⁵⁰ Sebastian LĂZĂROIU – "Antonescu and Geoana have a new counter-candidate in the second round" [„Antonescu și Geoană au un nou competitor pentru intrarea în turul doi – candidatul PRM”], *Cotidianul*, 10 iunie 2009.

⁵¹ Sebastian LĂZĂROIU, *op.cit.*; Cristian PĂTRĂȘCONIU – "Vadim-Bruxelles. Tur-retur”, *Cotidianul*, 13 iulie 2009.

fascists, organized and with an agenda” of the **Jobbik** party in Hungary, which had also won three seats in the Parliament at Strasbourg in June 2009.⁵² Political scientist Cristian Pârvulescu referred to Vadim Tudor as an ”obsolete leader,” whose only improbable chance in the future would be to attract a new electorate besides the traditional and shrunk one, consisting of ”the nationalist losers of the transition.”⁵³ The polls, whose number has increased since September 2009, anticipating the presidential elections on November 22, show that only 7% of the votes will be cast for Vadim Tudor,⁵⁴ who might not even reach the 10% threshold if he does not attract, as he did in June, at least a part of George Becali’s electorate. The latter has himself officially announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections.

An alarming proposal, which the media has not, generally, picked up on, was jointly made immediately after the Euro Parliamentary elections in June 2009, by Gheorghe Funar, secretary general of **PRM** and the president of the Cluj organization of the **New Generation Party** – namely that the two nationalist-populist parties led by Vadim Tudor and George Becali to make up a ”nationalist pole,” merging with two small groups openly situated in the Iron Guard’s line of descent: **Partidul pentru Patrie și Noua Dreaptă**⁵⁵. That proposal, to which I will return below, has not yet been put into practice, but it suggests one of the possible, and at the same time dangerous, evolutions on the field of Romanian radical nationalism.

5. The „new right,,

After 1989, the second current of Romanian radical nationalism defined itself through its rediscovery of the interwar autochthonous fascism and through its declared political-ideological objective, namely, the creation of a “Christian nationalism,” or of “a new right.” Several small political groups, inspired by the image and ideology of the “Iron Guard,” appeared between 1991-2000: **Mișcarea pentru România (MPR – The Movement for**

⁵² Sorin IONIȚĂ – ”Pipițe, oieri și factorul bling în alegerile europene”, *Evenimentul Zilei*, 9 iunie 2009.

⁵³ Dan DUCA – ”Becali și Vadim, împinși să îi alerge pe Geonă și pe Crin”, *Cotidianul*, 10 iunie 2009.

⁵⁴ CCSB - *Sondaj de opinie național septembrie 2009* (www.ccsb.ro); CURS – *Sondaj de opinie la nivel național septembrie-octombrie 2009* (www.curs.ro);

⁵⁵ Marius SĂLĂJEAN - ”Funar și Manea vor o Dreaptă românească” and Ionuț ȚENE - ”Cu pași mici, spre un mare partid de dreapta” (NapocaNews, 10 iunie 2009 – www.napocanews.ro).

Romania), **Partidul pentru Patrie (PPP – For the Fatherland Party)**, **Partidul Dreptei Românești (PDR – The Romanian Right Party)**, **Partidul Dreptei Naționale (PDN – The Party of National Right)**, to which were added two even smaller political groups truly imitative of interwar fascism: **Mișcarea Legionară (ML – The Legionary Movement)** and **Noua Dreaptă (ND – The New Right)**. Some of these, such as **MPR**, **PDN**, **PDR**, ceased their activity as early as the 1990s.

The emergence of this current was distinct from that of the parties that had inherited the national-communist ideology and occurred at the crossroad of several processes that unfolded during the early years of the post-communist period: the massive political youth mobilization, the establishment, in the public space, of a “diffuse” and heterogeneous political culture of the “post-communist anti-communism,”⁵⁶ the commemoration of the interwar period, idealized as a golden age preceding the instauration of communism,⁵⁷ the emergence from the shadow of former militants of the **Archangel Michael Legion / Iron Guard**, the importance of religious revival in Romanian society, etc. It can be said that the extremist nationalism of the political groups which Michael Shafir calls “the parties of radical return”⁵⁸ represents, in the 1990s, the ultimate expression of the “post-communist anti-communism.” This current can be characterized in terms of the comment made by Shafir with regard to the **Movement for Romania [Mișcarea pentru România (MPR)]** – one of the representative groups for the nationalism inspired, in the 1990s, by the interwar fascism: “There is... an important difference between the **PRM** and other parties of radical continuity, on the one hand, and the **MPR** and the parties of radical return, on the other. The **MPR** denies any merits to ‘national-communism’. Munteanu (Marian Munteanu, the leader of the **MPR**, n.n.), is unwilling to pay any tribute to Ceaușescu’s nationalist policies for two main reasons. First, in his eyes, genuine nationalism can in no way be associated with communism, since the latter is by definition an internationalist doctrine which disregards national specificity. Ceaușescu’s nationalism is,

⁵⁶The phrase belongs to political scientist Daniel BARBU – *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă* (ediția a 2-a), Nemira, Bucharest, 2004, p. 107-121.

⁵⁷ Florin ȚURCANU – „A la recherche de l’Âge d’Or : la mémoire de l’entre-deux-guerres en Roumanie au début des années 1990” in Bogumil JEWSIEWICKI, Erika NIMIS, *Expériences et mémoire. Partager en français la diversité du monde*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2008, p. 416-427.

⁵⁸ Michael SHAFIR – “The Mind of Romania’s Radical Right” , *op.cit.*. For more on the repudiation of the nationalism promoted by Vadim Tudor and other national-communist representatives by an intellectual belonging to the so-called new, post-communist right, see Răzvan CODRESCU – “Cine se teme de naționalism?” (an article from 1991 reprinted in the journal *Puncte Cardinale*, nr. 200/2007 http://www.punctecardinale.ro/aug_2007.html).

therefore, considered to have been merely a ‘fake’ nationalism, and, according to Munteanu, one cannot be a Romanian and a communist at the same time. Second, a genuine Romanian nationalist doctrine must, according to him, incorporate the Romanian Orthodox religious element, for the two are indivisible. What Romania needs, Munteanu stated in December 1991, is a ‘genuine right’, one that leaves no room ‘for ambiguity’.⁵⁹

The project of creating ”a genuine right” was fueled by the fascination exerted by the **Archangel Michael Legion / Iron Guard** and its founder, ”captain” Corneliu Zelea Codreanu as well as by a series of rediscovered interwar intellectuals, political theorists or philosophers of culture with nationalist leanings. In the early 1990s, these radical reference points exerted the attraction of a long forbidden fruit among a part of the youth who entered political life in the aftermath of the anti-communist revolt in December 1989. Hence the irresistible temptation of mimeticism which determined several groups and political leaders belonging to this current to revive, even if only partially, the organizational structure, the ritual and symbolism of the **Iron Guard**.⁶⁰ This mimetic revival was facilitated by three factors. First, it turned out to be a convenient and at the same time ostentatious way of asserting a group political identity designed to fascinate the viewer and confer upon the group members a sense of belonging. Second, imitating the defunct **Iron Guard** was facilitated by the merging carried out by the Romanian interwar fascism between the political ritual and the religious one, between the idea of ”românism” (”Romanianism”) and Orthodox identity, so that, for some Romanian young people, the rediscovery of Christian Orthodoxy after 1989 went hand in hand with the rediscovery of interwar fascism. Finally, the new political current was directly influenced, in the 1990s, by the abiding tradition of the **Iron Guard**, promoted by former members of the movement, exiled and organized in western Europe or on the American continent.⁶¹

Another feature of this current is its extremely fragmentary character and the ephemeral existence of most of the groups and parties that stood for it, especially during the first decade of the post-communist period. The annual reports of the new Romanian secret services – **Serviciul Român de Informații** (SRI), presented starting with 1994, show the great number and the variety of political-ideological groups illustrating, in the 1990s, what these documents

⁵⁹ Michael SHAFIR, *op.cit.* p. 222.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219, 221-222. Groups such as *Mișcarea Legionară* and *Noua Dreaptă* adopted and exhibited, starting with the late 1990s, when they appeared on the political scene, the Iron Guard uniform.

⁶¹ Gabriel ANDREESCU, *op.cit.*, p. 15-16.

refer to as “right-wing extremism” : parties, foundations, associations, magazines, publishing houses, and “clandestine nuclei.” The June 1999 report mentioned 28 such organizations on the national level, pointing out that “steps have continued to be taken towards rebuilding a national-scale structure similar to the Iron Guard, in view of its accession on the political scene.”⁶² The same report mentioned that some of these groups “make an open apologia for political violence,” but that, at the same time, as far as the larger picture of the right-wing movements is concerned, “the persisting structural precariousness and reduced audience of those particular groups do not pose a high level of direct and immediate danger for national security.”⁶³

The number of members making up the extreme right-wing groups is difficult to determine – it has generally remained quite small⁶⁴, and this is reflected in the very poor results – considerably under 1 % of the votes – obtained by those parties (**MPR**, **PPP** and **PDN**) that took part, in the 1990s, in the local or parliamentary elections.⁶⁵

Unstable and politically divided, often competing with one another, the majority of these groups disappeared after a few years. They have never reached the same level of visibility and intensity in the Romanian public space as **PRM** or, in the early 1990s, **The Party of the National Unity of Romanians**. Their leaders, unknown to most public opinion, except for Marian Munteanu, the **MRP**'s leader, could not dream of the notoriety of Vadim Tudor or Gheorghe Funar. The rehabilitation and imitation of the **Iron Guard** by the Romanian neo-fascists did not prove, after 1989, to be as profitable politically as Ion Antonescu's rehabilitation by former national-communists. In the mid-1990s only 5% of the Romanians approved of a newly formed **Iron Guard**, while 62% stated that they had a good opinion of Ion Antonescu.⁶⁶

The second decade of the post-communist period witnessed a stabilization of the extreme right-wing movement around a few political groups and a few publications. Since the

⁶² SRI Report, June 1998-June 1999, p. 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ In 1994 the PDN “had a membership of some 5,800 with branches in ten out of Romania's forty-one counties” (SHAFIR, *op.cit.*, p. 217). In 1997, *Mișcarea Legionară* led by Șerban Suru had, according to some data, only 51 members (Liviu VĂLENAȘ – *O istorie comentată a Mișcării Legionare, 1927-1999. Interviul istoric cu liderul mișcării, Mircea Dimitriu* <http://www.scribd.com/doc/3312289/>)

⁶⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty – “Radical Politics in East-Central Europe (IX): the Romanian Radical Return” (East-European Perspectives-February 7, 2001) – <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1342523.html> ; V.G. BALEANU, *op.cit.* p. 10, 15-17.

⁶⁶ Michael SHAFIR, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

tumultuous 1990s until the present there have survived certain political groups for which the **Iron Guard** remains the essential reference point; these groups include **Mișcarea Legionară** (*The Legionary Movement* – another name under which the **Iron Guard** was known in the interwar period), **Noua Dreaptă**, founded in 1999 or the association for legionary propaganda **Fundația George Manu** which publishes the magazine *Permanențe*. Added to these are the magazine *Puncte Cardinale*, whose "traditionalist" ideology typically combines Orthodox fundamentalism, anti-Westernism, attacks against the Freemasonry, and anti-Semitic ideas with a nostalgia for the **Iron Guard**.

If the **Legionary Movement** [Mișcarea Legionară], founded in 1997 under the leadership of Șerban Suru and publicized around 2000 as a resurrected **Iron Guard**, especially due to its ostentatious display of the latter's uniform, entered a shadow cone, consisting, in September 2008, of only 100 members,⁶⁷ **Noua Dreaptă** [*The New Right*], is today the best known and most dynamic neo-fascists movement in Romania.

6. The New Right – Noua Dreaptă

Created in 1999 by the young lawyer Tudor Ionescu, **ND** purports to be the political expression of a new generation of nationalists, made up of young people who entered adult life after the fall of Communism. Its "president" Tudor Ionescu is 31 years old, and the oldest of its 10 leaders is 35. On the other hand, **ND** positions itself explicitly outside the system of parties in today's Romania and has never participated in any elections: "For us, the nationalists within **ND**, the criteria and motivations of our implications are very different from those of a typical 'party follower.' We do not look upon **ND** as an endeavor pursuing any electoral goals, but as a center for constant militant formation," said, on March 13, 2009, Tudor Ionescu.⁶⁸ This option, however, can be dictated by the example of total failure suffered, in the 1990s, by the neo-fascist Romanian parties, in all of the elections they participated.

ND claims, without complexes, the importance of the model represented by the **Iron Guard** and by the figure of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. "His example/Our fight" is the catchphrase

⁶⁷ "Șerban Suru, liderul legionarilor români, simpatizant al lui Băsescu" – <http://freenews.ro/> din 22.09.2008.

⁶⁸ "Interviu în exclusivitate cu Tudor Ionescu, președintele *Noua Dreaptă*" in www.napocanews.ro – 13 martie 2009.

commonly featured on the badges showing Codreanu's face, badges which the movement either commercializes or freely distributes. Codreanu's posthumous cult also manifests itself through the annual pilgrimages at the place where he was murdered, in a forest situated north of Bucharest. Tudor Ionescu's group adopted the legionary symbolism – especially the uniform of Codreanu's movement and associated the symbol of the **Iron Guard** – the six superimposed bars of a jail window – with the official symbol of **ND** – the Celtic cross. The latter symbol – internationally recognized, yet not unanimously adopted by European right-wing movements – points to another characteristic of **ND** : the desire to situate itself within an international network of right-wing radicalism. **ND** is one of the founding members of the **European National Front** which, since 2003, has brought together not only the **NPD** from Germany but also a series of right-wing groups from Italy (**Forza Nuova**), Spain (**La Falange**), Poland (**Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski**), Greece (**Chrysi Avgi**), etc., to whose congresses **ND** has regularly sent its delegates. Moreover, **ND** has attended the summer camps of right-wing extremists from neighboring countries such as Slovakia and Poland, and participated in the joint manifestations of the extreme right-wing movements from several countries, against Turkey's potential accession to the European Union, etc.

On a national level, the political message of **ND** integrates many of the traditional themes and attitudes of the Romanian nationalist fascism: antisemitism, anti-Hungarianism, anti-rroma racism, panromanian propaganda, anticommunism combined with antiliberalism, the political use of Christian orthodox symbols, etc. **ND** recuperates symbols and themes which **PRM**, due to its national-communist roots, was not able to deploy, such as the Romanian revolution in December 1989 and the experience of the Romanian *gulag* during communism. Combined with these are new themes and attitudes, circulating among right-wing extremists worldwide, such as the protests against the *gay pride* parades, which got their start in Bucharest in 2005, the nationalist radicalization of the anti-abortion movement, and anti-American manifestations – protests against the setting up of American military bases in Romania, as well as against the “Americanization of national culture,” the “You'll be left without your country” campaign, against Romania's adherence to EU, the propagation of the “Europe of Homelands” theme, etc. The propaganda means of **ND** are varied – a well-built website, occasional appearances on various TV stations and in the pages of both national and regional newspapers, and poster campaigns. The four newspapers published by **ND** after its founding in 2000 appeared at irregular intervals and are mainly accessed online. **ND** has also recruited

a nationalist rock band (*Brigada de asalt*) and distributes baseball caps (a tolerable American symbol), T-shirts and badges with the **ND** logo.

ND has taken advantage of every single opportunity to draw attention to itself in widely circulated papers, as well as on radio and tv stations. The main occasions on which it was mentioned have been the *gay pride* parades towards which **ND** has publicly displayed a hostile attitude, having organized, since 2005, so-called “marches of normality” in the streets of Bucharest, manifestations with flags and placards, and around 50-100 participants.⁶⁹ **ND**’s radical opposition to homosexuality and abortion have given this movement the opportunity to make known its connections with some anti-abortion groups or members of the Orthodox clergy. Some clerics have not hesitated to reinforce, through their presence, the anti-gay and anti-avort militantism of **ND**, thus extending an older closeness on this field, going back to the mid-1990s, among the Orthodox Church or some of its members, the Orthodox youth associations and the extreme right-wing movements.⁷⁰

Even though the mobilization power of **ND** has generally remained very limited, the movement increased the number of its small-scale manifestations, both in and outside of Bucharest. Many of them have been organized in cities from Transylvania and have in the last years been explicitly directed against the autonomy claims made by some Hungarian political groups in Romania. On the occasion of a **ND** manifestation that took place in Cluj, on March 15, 2008, the beating of a Hungarian young man was blamed on some neo-fascist militants or followers, as a result of which the **Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania** officially requested that the movement should be outlawed.⁷¹

These kind of manifestations orchestrated by **ND** in Transylvania force us to think of an alarming scenario. After its success at the Euro Parliamentary elections, in June 2009, the **Jobbik** party in Hungary seems more and more interested in sending out its message among the Hungarian youth in Romania who are leaning towards radical nationalism. At the beginning of August, Vona Gabor, president of **Jobbik**, participated in the **Transylvanian-Hungarian Youth** (EMI) camp organized in Transylvania at

⁶⁹ ND claims that “over 400 people” took part in the latest “march of normality” which it organized in Bucharest on May 23, 2009. That could be seen as an indirect proof of its visibility and modest capacity for mobilization (<http://www.nouadreapta.org>).

⁷⁰ Michael SHAFIR, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

⁷¹ Dan DUCA – „UDMR cere interzicerea ‚Noii Drepte’,, , *Cotidianul*, 17 martie 2008.

Gheorghieni/Gyergyoszentmiklos,⁷² and the extremists of the neo-fascist Hungarian party seem to have become a common and highly visible presence at some of the commemorative manifestations of the Hungarian community in Romania,⁷³ just as with the extremists of the **ND** participating in Romanian commemorative manifestations. Historian Radu Ioanid, Director of the International Archives Division at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, has recently stated in a Romanian newspaper: "At the moment I am much more worried about what is going on in Hungary. From the information I have, Hungary is currently exporting anti-Semitism into Romania. What is happening there in terms of right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism is much more dangerous than what is happening in Romania."⁷⁴

Although no serious incidents have occurred yet, could Transylvania become the theater of violent clashes between Romanian and Hungarian neo-fascists in the near future? Both groups could be spurred by the inaction or the weak response from the authorities and the political forces, Romanian as well as Hungarian, which makes their presence seem banal in the public space. **Noua Dreaptă** could also be encouraged by the recent proposal launched in Cluj on behalf of the **PRM** – through Gheorghe Funar's voice - and of the **PNG** to participate in a "nationalist pole."⁷⁵ This proposal has not been turned down by the **ND** leader, Tudor Ionescu, who could see in it a chance to launch his movement, left marginal until now, on another political level, that which includes better known figures of radical nationalism, such as Vadim Tudor, Gheorghe Funar and George Becali.

⁷²Cora MUNTEANU – "'Noua Dreaptă' s-a împotmolit la intrarea în tabăra de la Gheorghieni", *Evenimentul Zilei*, 9 august 2009.

⁷³Alex NEGRU – "Extremiști maghiari la manifestările din Arad", *Evenimentul Zilei*, 6 octombrie 2009.

⁷⁴Interview with Radu IOANID published in *Evenimentul Zilei*, October 17, 2009 : "I have no doubt. Antonescu was a criminal".

⁷⁵ See above note 55.