

## **BEHIND-THE-SCENES: THE ABRUPT DAWN OF ROYAL AUTHORITARIANISM SEEN AS A REACTION TO THE NATIONALISM OF THE GOGA GOVERNMENT**

On February 11<sup>th</sup> 1938, one of the last remaining democratic countries of Europe switched to a royal authoritarian regime led by King Carol II. After 44 days of a government originating in a freely elected Parliament, democracy officially ended in Romania, returning only after 52 years<sup>1</sup>. Romania's transition to authoritarianism has been explained by historiography (Al. Gh. Savu, Florea Nedelcu, M. Mușat and I. Ardeleanu and Ioan Scurtu) mainly through the failure of the democratic system and especially because of King Carol II's dictatorial tendencies, who fragmented the main parties and created his destructive power-absorbing clique. However, the role of the nationalist attitude of the Goga Government in a background full of events which took place behind-the-scenes at the Royal Palace, has not been sufficiently analysed as a plausible additional catalyst for authoritarianism.

By using primary sources from the National Central Historical Archives Service in Bucharest (S.A.N.I.C.), press of the time, documentary literature, daily notes and memoirs and secondary sources, this paper seeks a connection between the nationalist attitude of the Goga Government and the abrupt dawn of royal authoritarianism, by analysing the dictatorial tendencies of King Carol II. In other words, can the nationalism of the Goga Government, out of a democratic framework, be also responsible for the birth of the one party-system in interwar Romania, taking into account the events taking place behind the scenes, in the Royal Palace? How did nationalism manifest itself through the activity of the Goga government? To what extent are the King's dictatorial tendencies plausible in explaining the dawn of authoritarianism?

In interwar Europe, democracy, as well as democratic regimes, was in a crisis of legitimacy and in disrepute. France and Great Britain kept losing their

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<sup>1</sup> When using the term "democracy", we refer to Western European-style liberal democracy, which involves concepts like a constitutional separation of powers in a state, a multiparty system with free elections and press, coupled with alternation in power. With the Red Army there, the 1946 elections in Romania were far from democratic, violence, fraud and abuse dominating a largely falsified electoral process, which gave birth to the communist single-party system.

foreign political prestige through the policy of appeasement towards the Nazis and the agreements with the U.S.S.R. Until 1937, Romania, still democratic, became surrounded by authoritarian and/or revisionist states. While Italy came to support Hungarian revisionism, Germany wished to dominate South-Eastern Europe economically and afterwards, politically. Even so, Romania wished to maintain a foreign policy oriented to the French and British border guarantees.

The 1937 election results seemed to have jammed Romania's political system as both the *National Liberal Party* (P.N.L.) and the *National Peasants' Party* (P.N.Ț.) more or less refused to form a new government. The previous one, ruled by the former (with 35.92% of the votes) and appointed in November, had failed to obtain the 40% electoral margin which would have ensured the necessary majority, also due to its desire to step down from power and the P.N.Ț.-*Iron Guard* non-aggression electoral pact<sup>2</sup>. At the end of P.N.L.'s Tătărescu four year cabinet, the King had offered the term to P.N.Ț. (with 20.40% of the votes), who refused due to the King's condition of including some former, more nationalist, members in the cabinet. The King did not want to appoint the radical anti-democratic *Iron Guard* (15.58 % of the votes) in the government as it also declared it would immediately join the *Axis*. The nationalist and anti-Semitic, but monarchic and parliamentary *National Christian Party* (P.N.C.), led by Octavian Goga (9.15 % of the votes)<sup>3</sup>, seemed to have been the least worst solution (according to the king's notes<sup>4</sup>), spawning a hybrid government called the *National Christian Peasant Union*, which included politicians close to the crown and its intentions, framed between December 29<sup>th</sup> 1937 and February 10<sup>th</sup> 1938. This government was also supposed to counterattack the *Iron Guard*, by adopting a nationalist behaviour, while maintaining the traditional foreign policy oriented towards France and Britain.

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<sup>2</sup> Box *Nicolae Caranfil*, folder 465, fol. 1, SANIC.

<sup>3</sup> About the electoral system and the 1937 elections, see results in box *Ministerul Justiției. Direcția judiciară. Comisia Centrală Electorală*, folder 4/1937, fol. 258-260 and folder 11/1937, fol. 4-39, SANIC.

<sup>4</sup> Carol al II-lea of Romania, *Însemnări zilnice, 1937-1951* [*Daily Notes, 1937-1951*], vol. I [*11 martie 1937-4 septembrie 1938 (caietele 1-6)/ March 11<sup>th</sup> 1937-Septembrie 4<sup>th</sup> 1938 (Notebooks 1-6)*], eds. Viorica Moisuc, Nicolae Rauș, Bucharest, Scripta, 2001, pp. 129-135.

With the aim of sorting out the role of nationalism in setting off authoritarianism, it is crucial to review the nationalist behaviour of the Goga Government<sup>5</sup>. When trying to understand some of the roots of nationalism and anti-Semitism<sup>6</sup>, statistics show that after having received full political rights, Jews (3.7% of the total population in 1938<sup>7</sup>) became an important factor in trade, industry, liberal professions, owning at least 31.14% of all industrial and commercial companies in Romania, other minority groups 20%<sup>8</sup>. Hence, in total, all minorities

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<sup>5</sup> Before becoming prime-minister, Octavian Goga had achieved notoriety as one of Romania's national poets and also as a political rights militant for Romanians in Austro-Hungarian Transylvania. He served as a soldier during World War One and afterwards was involved in the events which led to the Great Union of 1918. After taking part in the first governments of Greater Romania, in 1932 he left general Averescu's *People's Party* to found the far-right *The National Agrarian Party* which did not have any political success. In 1935, he partners with A.C. Cuza's anti-Semitic far-right *National Christian Defense League* to form and co-lead the *National Christian Party*, an organization which received support from Hitler's N.S.D.A.P.. The Goga government was not only made up of National-Christians since most of the important ministries such as the Internal and External Affairs, Justice and Defense being led by politicians who fled from P.N.Ț. or P.N.L. (Armand Călinescu and Istrate Micescu among others) and by general Ion Antonescu, a figure for whom the *Iron Guard* had to utmost respect. The non-National-Christians (infiltrated by the King) had to keep Romania on its traditional external orientation and hold back Goga from allying with the legionnaires. A.C. Cuza (P.N.C.'s other leader, party ideologist and author of the government's nationalistic program) was only given a ministry without portfolio, becoming rather isolated, much like his supporters, a situation which fomented dissension among party members.

<sup>6</sup> Nationalism is a political ideology revolving around the importance of defending (sometimes exacerbated) an individual's national identity in relation to his rights and national aspirations. The Romanian version had always been grounded in the struggle to obtain state independence and territorial unity for all Romanians. Furthermore, before the Great Union of 1918, Romanians living outside Romania were severely discriminated by other states or empires in the sense that they were refused any political rights or freedoms. After 1918, even though most Romanians were then finally living in a unified state with full political rights, many branches of society, especially in economy, were not "Romanian" but dominated by minorities, particularly Jews. Thus, anti-Semitic propaganda metamorphosed out of an original nationalist message, being delivered by politicians who had little electoral success and less political vocation.

<sup>7</sup> Box *Sabin Manuilă*, folder X153/1939, fol. 1, SANIC.

<sup>8</sup> Lya Benjamin, *Naționalism și antisemitism în legislația regimului autoritar al regelui Carol al II-lea, România, 1938-1940* [*Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in the Legislation of King Carol II's Authoritarian Regime, Romania, 1938-1940*], in *Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae*, IV, 1999, p. 209.

had a majority of 51.14% of the companies. Romanians (73.8% of the population in 1938<sup>9</sup>) had a 48.49% share. In terms of economic geography, Romanians held the advantage in the *Old Kingdom*<sup>10</sup> while in Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania, minorities were in the lead<sup>11</sup>.

Jewish owned newspapers *Adevărul*, *Dimineața*, *Lupta*, *Lumea*, *Noutatea*, *Ziua*<sup>12</sup> and four others<sup>13</sup> were suspended, while free travel permits for over 120 Jewish journalists were cancelled. On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the issue of withdrawing alcohol licenses for Jewish pub owners was raised<sup>14</sup>. Also, a decision of the Ministry of Labour which forbade Jews to be able to hire Christian female servants and cooks under the age of 40<sup>15</sup>, taken apparently without Goga's knowledge or approval, was later revoked<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, the government proposed an increase in the percentage of Romanian staff in companies to 90%<sup>17</sup>, similarly to Tătărescu's 80% law, which did not function in reality<sup>18</sup>, thus being unsuccessful<sup>19</sup>. Other decrees were issued, which abrogated an agricultural tax<sup>20</sup>, lowered or fixed the prices for lamp oil<sup>21</sup>, peasant cotton and salt<sup>22</sup>, and reintroduced mandatory religious marriage<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Box *Sabin Manuilă*, folder X153/1939, fol. 1, SANIC.

<sup>10</sup> The term "Old Kingdom" refers to the territory of Romania before the additions brought by the Great Union of 1918, a territory comprised of the medieval principalities of Moldova and Walachia, which were united in 1859 and became independent in 1878.

<sup>11</sup> *Minoritățile Naționale din România, 1931-1938. Documente* [*The National Minorities from Romania, 1931-1938. Documents*], ed. Ioan Scurtu, Bucharest, Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 25/1937, fol. 102-103 and folder 33/1938, fol. 100, SANIC.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască* [*Contributions to the Romanian History. The Jewish Question*], vol. I [*partea I, 1933-1944/ Part I, 1933-1944*], Bucharest, Hasefer, 2001, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Presă Internă*, folder 379/1937-1938, fol. 11, SANIC.

<sup>15</sup> Box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 67/1938, fol. 14, SANIC.

<sup>16</sup> Box *Nicolae Caranfil*, folder 465, fol. 21, box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Presă Internă*, folder 397/1938, fol. 54, SANIC, Box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 33/1938, fol. 49, ANIC.

<sup>17</sup> *Curentul*, XI, 8.01.1938, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Minoritățile Naționale*, doc. 96, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României*, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Presă Internă*, folder 379/1937-1938, fol. 23, SANIC.

<sup>21</sup> *Buna Vestire*, II, 16.01.1938, 263, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> C. Hamangiu, *Codul general al României (codurile, legile și regulamentele în vigoare) 1856-1938* [*The Romanian General Code (the Current Codes, Laws and Regulations)*], vol. XXVI

The citizenship revision decree-law from January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1938 required Jews to submit several documents, which sustained the validity of their citizenship<sup>24</sup>, contrasting with the 1919 laws, which gave out Romanian citizenship to them after only a simple declaration of option, without additional papers<sup>25</sup>. It seems that the decree-law was in effect even after the demise of the Goga Government and caused the loss of citizenship for 225.222 Jews<sup>26</sup>. When looking at some of the details, which make Carol II's personal dictatorial plans seem sometimes questionable or unoriginal – the fact that he gave up his throne three times (for romantic reasons involving women) first comes to mind<sup>27</sup>. In 1918, the King eerily declared that "I know very well that in 20 years Romania, like all other countries, will be a republic; so why then must I be prevented from living as I desire?"<sup>28</sup> In 1938, Romania that had yet to happen, but there was an authoritarian regime, led by Carol II, which only lasted until 1940, after which he abdicated and left most of his power in the hands of general Ion Antonescu<sup>29</sup>. However, Romania became a communist republic shortly after World War II.

So far, King Carol II does not seem to fit the "dictator" profile. Would a genuine tyrant not pursue acquiring all the power all his life? Why would a dictator give up his rights to the throne three times and especially, why would he abdicate only after two (out of ten!) years of almost absolute power (leaving aside the historiographical hypotheses)? Why did he wait so much to install his "carefully planned-out" authoritarian regime? Needless to say, with the exception of Czechoslovakia (which was invaded and divided by Nazi Germany), Romania was the last country in the region to give up democracy. When we think about the traditional end of dictators, King Carol II yet again surprises us: he did not commit

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[*Coduri, legi, decrete-legi și regulamente, cuprinzând prima parte din legislațiunea anului 1938, partea I / The Codes, Laws, Decree-Laws, and Regulations*], Bucharest, Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, 1938, pp. 56-62.

<sup>23</sup> *Curentul*, XI, 17.01.1938, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Hamangiu, *Codul general al României*, pp. 39-44.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, *Naționalism și antisemitism*, p. 210.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 211.

<sup>27</sup> I. Scurtu, *Criza dinastică din România (1925-1930) [The Romanian Dynastic Crisis (1925-1930)]*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 1996, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice, 1897-1924 [Political Notes, 1897-1924]*, vol. IV (1918-1919), Bucharest, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Eminescu” S.A., 1927, p. 137.

<sup>29</sup> Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu. Documente, studii, relații și comentarii [Romania with and without Antonescu. Documents, Studies, Reports, and Comments]*, Jassy, Moldova, 1991, p. 17.

suicide to escape dishonour from his enemies, was not lynched by an angry mob, was not executed or assassinated like most dictators or absolute rulers end up. He installed his regime with no opposition and left as quietly as he came in, only to die of natural causes, next to his lover, years later, in Portugal.

If we were to take a glance at the King's personality, more questions regarding his own dictatorial abilities arise. Timid but ambitious, passionate with a contradictory temperament, Carol II was described by his contemporaries as highly undecided and impressionable<sup>30</sup>. Since his last throne abandonment in late 1925 and until his return in 1930, countless political personalities (some known as *Carlists*) visited him numerous times while in exile, trying to convince him to return, even if some in a temporary political interest and gain<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, all throughout the 1930s, his camarilla (led by his mistress Elena Lupescu and consisted of a great number of businessmen<sup>32</sup>) and other political figures developed an important influence on the suggestible king and put together dictatorial plans<sup>33</sup>.

In April 1937, Carol II wrote that he was very impressed after a meeting with Constantin Argetoianu, who tried to convince him of the necessity to step in and take all the power<sup>34</sup>. When this occurred in February 1938, Argetoianu was notified by the King's chamberlain that *his* program had been adopted<sup>35</sup>. During the twilight of Goga's term, the King met, sometimes secretly, late at night, with numerous political figures, including P.N.L. president, Dinu Brătianu (probably seeking their opinions or approval)<sup>36</sup>, and with Ministry of Home Affairs, Armand Călinescu – whose daily notes from that time reveal an outline of the plan to

<sup>30</sup> Cristian Sandache, *Viața publică și intimă a lui Carol al II-lea* [Carol II's Public and Private Life], Bucharest, Paideea, 1998, pp. 10-14.

<sup>31</sup> Mihail Manoilescu, *Memorii* [Memoirs], vol. I, ed. Valeriu Dinu, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 1993, pp. 104-194, Scurtu, *Criza dinastică*, pp. 37-213.

<sup>32</sup> Box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 12/1936, fol. 14-17, SANIC. See also Petre Țurlea, *România sub stăpânirea camarilei regale (1930-1940) (I)* [Romania under the Rule of the Royal Camarilla (1930-1940) (I)], in *Analele Universității Creștine „Dimitrie Cantemir”*, 1, 2010, 2, pp. 93-115.

<sup>33</sup> *Istoria Românilor* [The History of Romanians], vol. VIII [România întregită (1918-1940)/ Reunited Romania], ed. I. Scurtu, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 2003, p. 298.

<sup>34</sup> Carol II, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice* [Daily Notes], vol. IV [1 ianuarie 1938-30 iunie 1938/ January 1<sup>st</sup> 1938-June 30<sup>th</sup> 1938], Bucharest, Machiavelli, 2002, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Presă internă*, folder 379/1937-1938, fol. 83-90, SANIC, and box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 33/1938, fol. 1095-1096, SANIC.

relinquish democracy<sup>37</sup>. In addition, it seemed that the military was not going to stand in the way of a coup d'état, but actually encouraging it<sup>38</sup>.

In his daily notes from late December 1937, referring to the Goga cabinet, the King wrote "I am perfectly aware that a government with these profound anti-Semitic elements cannot be a long one and after its demise, I will be free to enforce stronger measures, measures which can unchain the country and me from the ever unpatriotic tyranny of the petty interests of the parties"<sup>39</sup>. Though this famous text is used by historians as a conclusive proof of the King's dictatorial plans, the next pages, dating January 1<sup>st</sup> 1938 until the demise of the Goga Government, have been torn from his daily notes – the publishing author mentions that while the notes had for long been considered inexistent, upon publication they showed evident signs of intentional selective mutilation. The person who had kept his notes had been his mistress and head of camarilla, Elena Lupescu<sup>40</sup>. Still, this shows that the King was aware of what powerful impact nationalism or anti-Semitism would have in setting off authoritarianism.

Carol II stated that Goga's government represented the entire nationalist trend at the last elections (including the *Iron Guard*), defending it from press comments of fascism. The King also mentioned that this was *his* government and when and if he was no longer satisfied with it, *he* would change it<sup>41</sup>. However, one of his closest personal servants, Eugeniu Arthur Buhman, noticed that the King seemed to lose control of internal politics<sup>42</sup> as he reproached Goga for the lack of authority during violent political street incidents, resembling an anarchic situation<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916-1939* [Political Notes 1916-1939], ed. Al. Gh. Savu, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1999, pp. 370-377.

<sup>38</sup> Aurelian Chistol, *Cronica unui eșec așteptat: Guvernarea Goga-Cuza* [The Chronicle of an Expected Failure: the Goga-Cuza Government], Craiova, Aius, 2011, p. 478.

<sup>39</sup> Carol II, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>41</sup> Box *Nicolae Caranfil*, folder 465, fol. 36, SANIC, box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Informații*, folder 676/1938, fol. 46-47, SANIC.

<sup>42</sup> Eugeniu Arthur Buhman, *Patru decenii în serviciul casei regale a României. Memorii, 1898-1940* [Four Decades in the Service of the Romanian Royal House. Memoirs, 1898-1940], ed. Cristian Scarlat, Bucharest, Sigma, 2006, p. 434.

<sup>43</sup> Box *Nicolae Caranfil*, folder 465, fol. 5, SANIC.

Following a dinner with the British envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Romania, Sir Reginald Hoare, Argetoianu noted that Britain was mainly concerned with the anti-Semitic measures of the Government, but hesitated to risk any direct intervention, hoping the King will step in himself<sup>44</sup>. British archive documents from February 5-10<sup>th</sup> 1938 depicting conversations between the Foreign Office and Sir Reginald Hoare, reveal an astounding favourable attitude towards a possible royal intervention. Concerns about their implication surfaced when they feared being considered accountable for the disappearance of the Romanian democratic institutions from then on<sup>45</sup>.

After Goga's exit from government, the state of mind of the population was one of generalized relief. Romanians appreciated the King's intervention, in a way which made it seem like "everything came back to life again after the Goga-Cuza madness had terrified everyone"<sup>46</sup>. However, some argued that Carol II, with a good European image, had brought to power all sorts of governments not for the good of the country, but to show that they were good for nothing; also, a lot of people had voted the new Constitution without really knowing why, believing that the King wanted what was best for them<sup>47</sup>. Indeed, the referendum for the validation of the new Constitution passed with 99.87% for and 0.13% against<sup>48</sup> as the votes were expressed orally, while those voting against were registered separately<sup>49</sup>. An economic recovery was in progress<sup>50</sup>, as the stock exchange and trade volume in Bucharest skyrocketed very soon after Goga's departure<sup>51</sup> and, surprisingly enough, the pinnacle of Romania's interwar economic growth turned out to be 1938<sup>52</sup>. Even the Jews were described as being "relieved and content, like their foreign protectors"<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Bela Vago, *Umbra Svasticii. Nașterea fascismului și a antisemitismului în Bazinul Dunării (1936-1939)* [*The Shadow of the Swastika. The Birth of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin*], Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2003, pp. 299-300, doc. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> Box *Inspectoratul general al Jandarmeriei*, folder 16/1938, fol. 17, 25, SANIC, and box *Direcția generală a Poliției*, folder 10/1938, fol. 75, 148-151, 157-158, SANIC.

<sup>48</sup> Box *Ministerul Propagandei Naționale. Presă internă*, folder 379/1937-1938, fol. 42-47, SANIC.

<sup>49</sup> Radu Rosetti, *Pagini de jurnal [Diary Pages]*, eds. Cristian Popișteanu, Marian Ștefan, Ioana Ursu, Bucharest, Adevărul, 1993, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Box *Direcția generală a Poliției*, folder 10/1938, fol. 50-52, SANIC.

<sup>51</sup> Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, p. 126.



Italy, through its leaders and press, were not impressed by Goga's fall from power, but considered the King's intervention auspicious<sup>54</sup>, hoping to pressure him, together with Germany, to bring the *Iron Guard* to power<sup>55</sup>. *L'Europe nouvelle* believed the King was fundamentally accountable for the downfall of democracy, the disorder caused by Goga also being Carol II's responsibility<sup>56</sup>. However, *Le Temps* alleged that the government was taken down by the King due to the measures taken and its international policy – a radical solution to get Romania out of the economical crisis. Overall, the French public opinion regarding Romania redressed considerably<sup>57</sup>. The departure of the Goga government also immediately made a very good impression in Britain, as the press there dedicated ample favourable articles to the King's intervention<sup>58</sup>. Winston Churchill noted that people did not want to be forced towards an ideology, as Goga's Government fell and failed to turn Romania to the *Axis*, while Romanian-French armament deals were restored<sup>59</sup>.

It is hard to believe that the interwar Romanian democratic system, though stronger than others in the region, could have remained intact much longer, given the general unfavourable surrounding territorial situation and the wider European trajectory. Still, though the system seemed blocked at the 1937 elections, which included a significant rise of nationalist parties, the majority of the population preferred democratic continuity. Combining democracy and nationalism seemed like an attempt to update internal politics to external evolutions. Having only a 9% of the voters' confidence, but with the purpose of representing the whole nationalist trend, the Goga Government issued decree-laws in the absence of a Parliament which remained dissolved for new elections, thus deepening the crisis of democratic legitimacy<sup>60</sup>. While we have seen that the King's dictatorial tendencies,

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<sup>54</sup> Box *Casa Regală. Diverse*, folder 5/1938, fol. 17-19, SANIC.

<sup>55</sup> Box *Inspectoratul general al Jandarmeriei*, folder 21/1938, fol. 61, SANIC.

<sup>56</sup> Box *Nicolae Caranfil*, folder 465, fol. 151-154, SANIC.

<sup>57</sup> Box *Casa Regală. Oficiale*, folder 76/1938, fol. 1 and folder 138/1938, fol. 1-12, SANIC.

<sup>58</sup> Gheorghe Pașcalău, *România și Marea Britanie. Relații politico-diplomatice. 1933-1939* [*Romania and Great Britain. Political and Diplomatical Relations. 1933-1939*], Bucharest, Albatros, 2001, p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> Al. Gh. Savu, *Dictatura regală, 1938-1940* [*The Royal Dictatorship, 1938-1940*], Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1970, pp. 166-167.

<sup>60</sup> Given the authoritarian behavior of the Goga cabinet, one could speculate that democracy had already collapsed prior to the royal intervention. This was not the case since until February 10 1938, the democratic 1923 Constitution was still in effect and a plurality of active political parties existed. Out of these parties, PNC was chosen to organise the next elections,

though real, were unoriginal and came from his camarilla and other external pressures, the royal intervention against party nationalism was ultimately legitimated and popular both inside and outside Romania. Party-based nationalism delivered a fatal blow to the democratic system from where it emerged, unintentionally discrediting it. The Goga Government proved that the “Democratic Nationalism” it symbolized was not possible.

Henceforth, the downfall of the Romanian democratic system can no longer be put solely on the shoulders of King Carol II, who, we have seen, was an unstable and impressionable figure and not just a power-hungry scheming dictator, as historiography sometimes present him. Still, the backstage events in which the King was involved do not entirely absolve him and his clique. Without the influential and sometimes manipulative figures of his camarilla and the activity of the Goga Government, it would have been significantly harder for Carol II to install his authoritarian regime. So, while acknowledging a tendency of democratic erosion with a plurality of external, royal and democratic parties’ causes (already treated by historiography), we cannot now overlook the important role that nationalism played in setting off authoritarianism, taking into account the events which took place behind-the-scenes in the Royal Palace.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

*SANIC* – Serviciul Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale (National Central Historical Archives Service), Bucharest

*ANIC* – Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (National Central Historical Archives), Bucharest

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after which Goga hoped to obtain the democratic majority and legitimacy required to govern. Issuing decree-laws without the Parliament in session was a concept sometimes familiar to the previous cabinet (Tătărescu) and even to French statesmen during interwar Europe. After the royal intervention in February 1938, the Constitution was changed with an authoritarian one; thus, political parties and their press were dissolved and elections for Parliament were suspended indefinitely.

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Abstract

On February 11 1938, one of the last remaining democratic countries of Europe switched to a royal authoritarian regime led by King Carol II. After 44 days of a government originating in a freely elected Parliament, democracy officially ended in Romania, returning only after 52 years. This paper seeks a connection between the nationalist attitude of the Goga Government and the abrupt dawn of royal authoritarianism, by analysing the dictatorial tendencies of the King. In other words, can the nationalism of the Goga Government, out of a democratic framework, be made also responsible for the birth of the one party-system in interwar Romania, taking into account the events taking place behind-the-scenes, in the Royal Palace? Acknowledging the existing trend of democratic erosion, which had a series of causes already discussed by historiography, this paper highlights the fact that without the nationalist activity of the Goga Government within that political and historical context, it would have been much harder for the King to install his royal authoritarian regime. Also, the arguments brought forward certify the lack of originality and absence of utterly personal initiative of the monarch in the quest to discredit the democratic system, hence revealing the characters behind-the-scenes who contributed to this complex process.

KEYWORDS: interwar Romania, democracy, King Carol II, dictatorship, Constantin Argetoianu