



ORIGINAL PAPER

Power Networks in Romania during the Reign of Charles I: Family, Political and Economic Ties

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Abstract

Promoting the Western model by the political elite led ineluctably to the gradual modernization of the various levels of Romanian society. During the reign of Charles I, a visible antagonism sketched around the two currents was noted, being gradually organized into two modern political parties, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, which dominated the political life of the country between 1866-1914. Networks of power in the Romanian political system have been built along time and they were tightly connected with: the process of political parties establishment, the relationship between government and opposition, the electoral competition, parliamentary life and government activity. After 1866, a new political regime was established and this allowed for clear directions of evolution both in the domestic life of the country and in its foreign affairs. Thus, the existence of a new regime, supported by the 1866 Constitution, allowed for the consolidation of both the liberal and the conservative political groups, which eventually led to the establishment of modern political parties throughout time: the National Liberal Party (1875) and the Conservative Party (1880). The alternation of government in different stages of Charles I's reign gradually led to the strengthening of the networks of power, which had important consequences at all levels of society: on both relationships within the families and on political and economic relationships. Power networks established at the political, economic and social level enabled the consolidation of the fledgling Romanian state.

Keywords: *Charles I, conservatives, liberals, political elite, power networks*

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The present article intends to analyse a particular feature of the Romanian political life during the reign of Charles I. It is a scholarly attempt to study the importance of the networks of power during the reign of Charles I on three levels by actually pursuing the establishment and operation of different types of relationships: within families, in political life and, last but not least, in the economic sector. Through our study, we intend to use analysis and comparison as research methods that would help us better illustrate the networks of power within the Romanian political regime.

The process of creating the political elite was achieved gradually, since the 19th century. The construction of the Romanian political elite was, chronologically, a well-defined process that intersected with the events which succeeded domestically in both Principalities, in the context of certain external influences visible at the time. Thus, the elite can be defined as a concept that “encompasses the finest elements of a community, whose superiority should not be only relative but also absolute, representing a sum of human qualities” (Manoilescu, f.a.: 61).

At that time, the elite emerged as an essential tool, manifesting itself as a power network, generating, in time, networks of families with political, economic and social implications, causing that nearly all members dispose of influence being in relationship with other members. The opinions, ideas and political beliefs were naturally adopted in a gradual manner, in order to articulate a different kind of political, social, cultural but also economic conduct, according to the European model. In this perspective, « depuis le début du XIXe siècle, l’Occident et sa pensée politique, de même que la politique et les pratiques occidentales, constituent la référence et la source d’inspiration pour les auteurs et les hommes politiques roumains» (Marton, 2009: 30). Today, it is obvious that, for the history of political ideas, “the political life of the nineteenth century was dominated by the idea of reform; in their great majority, the members of the political class in the Old Kingdom were educated people in the West, its rulers were mostly people of culture, scholars, whose politics were following a precise goal: modernizing the country according to the Western model, the only one in which they believed and wished to see introduced in Romania” (Georgescu, 1992: 151).

The Western influences on the first Romanian modernity were not foreign to contemporaries either. Radu Rosetti was of the opinion that: “*The French Revolution and the Napoleonic epic aroused the public interest in our country as well*” (Rosetti, 2011: 79), given that “*the number of foreigners coming to the country and remaining there since the end of the Napoleonic wars onwards had greatly increased; among those foreigners, the fortunated class had acquired complex information on the Western way of living, information to which the news brought by those boyars who had travelled to the West and had even spent months in Paris, Vienna and Berlin added up*” (Rosetti, 2011: 174). And for Nicolae Iorga: “*sending young people to the West passed through several phases in our country. After the first one, at the end of the Phanariote era or at the beginning of the indigenous reign, when very few crept abroad and had plenty of choice in terms of learning sources, as evidenced by the tremendous influence which the contact with the West had on Poenaru, on Eufrosiu Poteca, on Simion Marcovici, on Constantion Brăiloiu, from whom so well-behaved letters were preserved during studies in Geneva, young people crowded Paris and brought back from there what was needed to make the revolution in Bucharest in 1848, with Filaret’s speeches, with proclamations to the people*” (Iorga, 1937: 9). Later, “*some who went back to the West, a West around 1870 and, especially, one following the year of the great conflict between German and French*”

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(Iorga, 1937: 11). Political leaders were using the correspondence, as it was the "primary means of information and communication /.../ the revolutionary struggle increased the role of correspondence, because it was through it that personal ties maintain and ideas continue spreading" (Zane, 1975: 273). The French influence manifested linguistically at the beginning. The boyars wanted to adopt the style of French civilization: "to be civilized, one really needs to know French /.../ in their homes, the number of preceptors and French ministers increases. French becomes the language of salons /.../ in many families, the language spoken daily" (Eliade, 2006: 279). In the high society of the Principalities, ideas of French culture are being imposed, beneficiaries of these influences being, initially, children of noblemen, who had French teachers and who, later, wanted to study in France. Through the French teachers and consuls, the relations with France intensified, and the results soon became visible. The French influence was thus achieved on several levels: psychological, social, cultural, political and economic. In the 30s and 40s, most Romanian politicians who would compose the elite of the year 1866, studied abroad, in France or in the German space, adopting ideas, opinions, political beliefs, which were later found in their vision about how the Romanian state had to be organized on different plans: cultural, social, economic, and especially political.

The modernization process was generated by this political elite, who "had made their university studies in the West and fervently desired to change the state of affairs in the country according to what they had seen" (Rădulescu, 1998: 11). The major change initially occurred in the lifestyle, subsequently politically, socially and economically. The political elite militated for a more profound change at the level of mentalities. Some politicians wanted this change to be a slower process, others wanted it radical, fast. However, the common point proved to be the transformation of the Romanian society at all levels and creating a modern and strong State. In the period in question, we can join the vision which expresses that: "of all areas of the Romanian society – national, economic, social, political, spiritual etc. – subject to turning into the modern society, most difficult and costly proved to be the economic and social field" (Axenciuc, 1997: 40).

The role of the political elite was essential in this respect: "*proud of their Latin blood, of French influence, and friendships made in school days spent in Paris, they are intensely Western in ideas and mode of life and are as removed and different from their neighbors in Russia, Serbia and Bulgaria as if the whole width of Europe divided them*" (Gordon, 1918: 37-38). It is well known that political leaders who had studied abroad, promoted an innovative behavior on several levels - political, social, cultural, economic, both on the political scene and in the Romanian society. The achievement of national objectives was a landmark in the life of young people who had studied abroad and who, arriving in the Romanian Principalities, tried and managed in time to ensure that useful transformation at the level of mentalities, by which the European lifestyle became a model. "In all areas of modernization /.../ "the generation of 1848 manifest itself", people from the high nobility (Filipești, Crețulești, Golești, Ion Ghica, Ion Câmpineanu, Ion Bălăceanu, C. Grădiștanu, C. A. Rosetti) or from the "low nobility", as called by C. D. Aricescu (as well as Brătianu brothers, Chr. Tell, Magheru, Heliade Rădulescu, Bălcescu), educated in the West, updated with the modern development of Europe and whose main concern was to bring Europe on the banks of the Danube" (Bulei, 2011: 46).

In the specialized literature, generally speaking, *power* can be defined as "the way the government and the state in opposition to society are sometimes designated. But power is /.../ a relationship between two groups or two individuals, relationship which is asymmetrical" (Colas, 2003: 248). We can apply this perspective in case of liberal and

conservative groups, which were structured in power networks, first locally and after 1866, at the modern state level.

Creating a new political regime in 1866 allowed the elite to impose a wide range of power networks, useful in the Romanian political life. The objectives and interests of this elite intersected with the requirements of the different social groups in society, bringing benefits to both parties. The political elite had to initiate a comprehensive process of measures, norms, laws in order to strengthen the Romanian state, creating thus a relationship between governors - governed, even if incipient, consistent with the political culture of the Romanian society.

The political mechanism that functioned in Romania was based on the alternation in ruling between liberals and conservatives, supported by Charles I, who often claimed its utility. Between 1866-1914, the governance represented the mean through which the Romanian political elite created and consolidated such social networks. The two political trends, liberal and conservative, built useful power networks, in order to achieve the desired results with a view to meeting their objectives: the union, the autonomy, foreign prince, constitutional government, totaling the four essential points voted in the Ad-hoc Divans in 1857 (Mamina, 2004, p. 15); they were supplemented by other desiderates: obtaining and recognizing the country's independence (1877, 1878 respectively), the proclamation of Romania as a Kingdom (1881) etc. Also, by strengthening the political regime, the political elite sought to modernize the Romanian state institutions by initiating various reforms in: education, army, health, social welfare, agriculture, industry, trade etc. The reality of those times detected a visible gap between the European states and Romania in all fields. "In the West, the modern institutional and legal system – of the market economy - was formed within a few centuries; in the mid-19th century, it was fully formed and matured"; instead "in Romania, the institutions and the new social and economic legislation were developed as a part of the overall process of modern institutionalization, of creation of the rule of law, at the foundation of which was the basic law – the Constitution of 1866 – and the whole range of institutions and civil modern legislation" (Axenciuc, 1997: 45).

The power networks were built both in the conservative spectrum and in the liberal one, acquiring, in time, almost similar features. On the one hand, liberal leaders as Ion and Dumitru Brătianu, Nicolae and Constantin Kretulescu, Constantin Rosetti were in Paris, at that time, and intensely enjoyed the manifestations of that cultural, social, economic space etc. On the other hand, conservative leaders such as Manolache C. Epureanu, Petre Carp, George Manu and Theodor Rosetti chose the German space, which marked their life along their political careers (Parusheva, 2011: 144). Their influence was crucial in the Romanian political life, imposing gradually, after 1866, another style of political practice, more consistent and more elegant. The transformation occurred mainly at the level of mentalities and the political elite, with its qualities and limits, tried and succeeded, in time, to initiate a process of political education, at the society level (public manifestations, street demonstrations, electoral campaigns etc.).

In the Romanian case as well, *family networks* with a great influence in the political life were built. In this case, Romania "*unlike the neighboring states of Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria, is the only one which has preserved an aristocracy. The boyars or nobles were the great feudal landlords of the past and through their property and rights have been greatly curtailed they still survive, a fairly powerful class /.../ Some of them are disfigured by devoting themselves to a ceaseless pursuit of pleasure, an existence given up to luxury, living out of their country and spending their fortunes in a luxurious life at*

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Monte Carlo and Paris. Others happily with a higher sense of national duty have taken up the interests of their estates and tenants, and aided by their natural gifts as a Latin race, have proved themselves patriots of marked political ability, as well as diplomats of acknowledged ability and acumen" (Gordon, 1918: 35).

Dobrinka Parusheva analyzed this politico-social phenomenon, identifying two types of family networks: "intra-family and inter-family. Intra-family relations lead to a certain extent to a delimitation of which families 'produce' the political elite in one country. Inter-family networks, in their turn, connect the elite members horizontally: marriage relations among politicians take place beyond their political orientations and contribute to the creation of homogenous political elite" (Parusheva, 2011: 155). In the construction of the Romanian political elite, strong family networks with major impact in the Romanian state developed, based on well-defined values, on rules imposed and on a series of objectives. Such networks built both within the liberal spectrum and the conservatory one, proved to be at that time, indissoluble, as long as there were objectives and political and economic family interests. Within the network, sympathies and important cooperation functioned. The politicians' objectives and interests intersected on the family, political and economic plan, there often existing a mixture between the three levels: "the strong liberal network in Romania /.../ in terms of business relations, was backed up by family relations too - not only by intra-family ones but also by the new marital relationships" (Parusheva, 2011: 158).

The competition that resulted on the political scene between the two parties led to a certain antagonism. There were moments, however, when the competition also worked between different liberal or conservative groups, with divergent reasons and interests. However, it was proved that "in the Romanian case the liberals, it seems, created a larger web" (Parusheva, 2011: 165). A reasonable explanation shows that the liberal party was based on a better organization, respecting the party hierarchy, the party discipline, a marked solidarity among its members and a strong leadership network. Instead the conservatives, forming a party of notable people, generated tensions which proved, long term, harmful in their construction. Later, infighting even induced the inability to survive politically. The disunity constantly represented a political rift, and the internal struggle between different political leaders as P. P. Carp, Take Ionescu, Alexandru Lahovari, and so on, generated a permanent instability, which indirectly favored the consolidation in the political life of the Liberals in the period between 1866 and 1914. This also continued in the interwar period, thanks to the way the party managed to adapt to the political and social reality of the time. The liberals understood and implemented better than the conservatives the primary objective of a political party, namely to come to power, but as a united party, not a divided one: "the relationship between "bonding" and "power" has consequences on the life of the party, since it means that a divided party is often regarded as not being effective" (Blondel, 2009: 140-141).

In the Romanian political life, the presence of leaders proved to be particularly important, especially after 1866, when, gradually, the political groups, liberal and conservative coagulated, forming thereafter, the two major historical parties, the National-Liberal Party (1875) and the Conservative Party (1880). In the case of the liberal group, Brătianu family asserted consistently, having Ion C. Brătianu – and later Ionel Brătianu as a landmark and practice model, political experience and prestige. Other important liberal leaders also stood out on the political stage, namely: D. A. Sturdza, Eugeniu Carada etc. On the other side of the Romanian political spectrum, in the case of the Conservative group, we meet Lascăr Catargiu, recognized as a leader, who united the Conservative

groups in the difficult times of the Romanian political life (for example, in 1871); we can also refer to other prominent conservative leaders: Take Ionescu, P. P. Carp, Titu Maiorescu etc.

The political leaders, both liberals and conservatives, created power networks around them and had experience, knowledge and political skills (studies abroad, governmental experience etc.), in order to influence and persuade others in favor of their political construction. They gradually imposed as leaders and set up patterns and landmarks in the Romanian political life, since that period up to present. Such political figures, as well as those mentioned above, enjoyed a remarkable reputation within the network, but also beyond it. Although they were constantly attacked in the struggle for political power, the prestige that they acquired, the experience gained in Government and the holding of information, offered them the opportunity to keep alternating in power during 1866 - 1914. The power network exceeded the political boundaries and strongly manifested socially and economically, at the level of whole families of that time: the Brătianu family, Costinescu, Sturdza, Krețulescu, Câmpineanu etc. On the conservative side, the economic and business network prevailed in the Cantacuzino, Ionescu, Marghiloman, Maiorescu families etc. (Parusheva, 2011: 167). Relying on these power networks, the Romanian political elite, formed in the early 30s and 40s had the opportunity to maintain and strengthen after 1866, under the new political regime. The continuity of the Romanian elites was also asserted by Edda Binder - Iijima: "in Romania - unlike the other Balkan countries, where a new elite had to be established after the formation of the new states - the same elite had preserved its political role since the establishment of the principalities in the Middle Ages /.../ Romanian elite, represented in the boyars" (Binder-Iijima, 2011: 180).

Structuring the political elite occurred mostly after 1866, at the political level in the context of operation of the alternation in power between liberals and conservatives. Many politicians, either from the liberal spectrum or the conservative spectrum came to power. The foreign policy constituted a special place, determining that "the diplomatic elite of the Old Kingdom, like most other European elites, has a predominantly aristocratic profile" (Dinu, 2014: 191). From this perspective, "members of Ghica, Lahovari, Mavrodi, Cantacuzino, Manu, Catargi, Mavrocordat, Rosetti-Solescu families etc. ensured "the shining surface" of all Romanian legations" (Dinu, 2014: 192). In an open society, with a well-defined political scene, a certain movement of the political elites was needed in order to ensure the mobility of debates and solutions: "*since the disappearance of the great Romanians, who founded modern Romania - Barbu Catargiu, the Golești brothers, the Brătianu brothers, of Mihail Kogălniceanu, Nicolae Krețulescu, Ion Ghica, Vasile Boerescu, C. A. Rosetti, Manolache Costache, Lascăr Catargiu etc. /.../ the political parties /.../ ceased to be fields of free thoughts and collective exertions in the field of national prosperity. They became true soldierly regimentations placed at the disposal of a chief. In each of them soldiers and hierarchical leaders can be distinguished*" (Brătianu, 1908: 51-52).

For C. I. Brătianu, politicians from the 1948 generation were unitary attached to the ideal of fulfilling the national aspirations. However, once these goals achieved, the two political groups demonstrated pragmatic and rational, in the sense of building two powerful parties in the Romanian state. Both political parties adopted, in time, the characteristics of modern political parties, related to organization, hierarchy and discipline of the party, in order to create a normal competition space, following the model of the other European states of that time. Charles I "discretely and openly engaged in the act of

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governance, but also played the role of mediator according to the maturity of the Romanian political life and the two ruling parties, the National-Liberal Party and the Conservative Party” (Damean *et. al.*, 2014: 54).

Consequently, the government allowed the creation of power networks at the family level. Close relationships at the economic level were also formed, beneficiaries being both the two major political parties, liberal and conservative, and the Romanian society. In these circumstances, ”the Romanian capitalism being definitely parallel and conditioned by the development of communication lines, of credit institutions etc., but, at the same time, being also a creation of state intervention through industrial incentive laws, customs laws, investment policy in the field of transportation, banking system, urban system etc.” (Bulei, 2011: 43). This gap between the West and Romania prompted the Romanian political elite to impose a rapid process of modernization: ”along with the onset of hasty modernization, recovery /.../ the import of techniques, technologies, means of labor, organizational methods, capital and even capitalists, organizers and specialized workers for non-agricultural sectors - transport, industry, trade, credit etc.” (Axenciuc, 1997: 74).

In this sense, the political elite created power networks in different fields of activity: industrial-commercial, banking etc. Thus, after 1866, Romania initiated an industrialization process, creating trade relations with the European countries. Thus, “the adoption of a policy to encourage the industrial development after 1885” (Murgescu, 2010: 141) is noted. At the same time, the desire of the political elite to take over the Western model stood out in all areas. ”From a strict economic standpoint, adopting the Western model primarily meant increasing imports” (Murgescu, 2010: 113). Even though there was a strong desire for modernization, “the Romanian society of the mid-19th century, the social behavior of the population, both of the dominant classes – boyars, aristocracy etc., and the producing masses – freely working peasantry etc., with all the cash economic penetration in certain this layers of small and medium-sized nobility, was far from meeting, in large proportion, the modern qualities of traders” (Axenciuc, 1997: 72-73). At the same time, an effective and strong banking system was gradually limned, supported by the National Bank of Romania “(Discount and Circulation Bank), established by law on 17th April, 1880, “which started its activity on 1st December 1880” (Țurlea, 2011: 23). Moreover, the financial-banking system consolidated in time by creating other major banks, credit institutions and insurance companies, leading ineluctably to the modernization of the Romanian state (Țurlea, 2011: 36-100). Also, “the NBR, since 1880, introduced /.../ the national currency”, observing how “the purchasing power of the Romanian currency was high until 1916” (Axenciuc, 1997: 154-155). The Romanian banking system represented a central pillar of the Romanian state modernization. In this framework, “apart from the commercial banks and the insurance companies, all other credit institutions – The National Bank, Land Loans, Popular Banks, Deposit and saving banks, consumer cooperatives etc., had either a state equity participation, or their operations were guaranteed by the state”; thus, “also in the credit area as well as in the industry field, the state encouraged and stimulated the specific economic activity” (Axenciuc, 1997: 161).

Another modernization factor is represented by the development of the railway network. From this point of view, "railways were directed towards Western Europe, as was the entire Romanian society in its start towards modernization” (Bulei, 2011: 74). The reality of that time points out that “in the late 19th century, had a density of the railway network larger than Bulgaria’s and Serbia’s, but noticeably less than that of Hungary”

(Murgescu, 2010: 146). In addition, trade was a boost for the economy, namely: “between 1880 and 1914 Romania exported 80 million tons of grains, being among the first grain exporters (even in the first place in maize, surpassing USA). For Romania, the active balance of trade was a vital issue. The annuities (installments) of public debt, raising costs for the country, all were paid by foreign trade, the costs for raising the country, all were paid by the foreign trade” (Bulei, 2011: 77). Another economic and financial aspect is determined by the consolidation of ports. In this respect, the link between Romania and the other countries did not manifest only culturally, but also economically and financially, especially after 1866. The policy makers sought to consolidate the industry, especially after 1885, by adopting laws to encourage this sector necessary to the economic and social development of the country. At the same time, “funding the modern Romanian industry, equipping it with modern technology and funds could not be achieved without the participation of foreign capital; they had a large positive contribution in starting the process of industrialization; the national economic cost was, however, considerably high; but a new way could not be foreseen” (Axenciuc, 1997: 67). Creating power networks focused on political connections, family ties or simply on economic and financial reasoning generated both advantages and disadvantages. Thus, we may remark some limitations of the political regime of the time. A limit resides in the inability of policy makers to resolve the existing gap between social classes. In that period, there was a real gap between the village and the town. In these circumstances, “the capture of the most agricultural income by thousands of families of important landowners contributed not only to the social misery of the peasants, but also the deterioration of their ability to invest in the modernization of their economic activity /.../ The social structure of the rural world thus proved an economic and social blocking factor” (Murgescu, 2010: 129). Another limitation refers to the degree of illiteracy of the population that hindered thus the development of the Romanian society: “In 1899, the lettered represented only 22% of the population, the illiterate 78%” (Colescu, 1915: 12). Even so, the political actors took steps in the field of education. Agriculture occupied an important place in the Romanian state during the reign of Charles I, representing the “main source of production and the material economy of the country, of the national income; it assured the alimentation of the whole population and an amount, almost equal, of goods to be exported; agriculture produced most of the raw materials needed for industry development: food, building materials, textiles, leather etc.- but especially, for the domestic and craft industry: meat, dairy, skins and furs, fat, wool, vegetable fibers – flax, hemp /.../ tobacco etc.” (Axenciuc, 1997: 121). The modernization process had gradual effects in the Romanian society, but “the most active sectors proved to be those of the industrial, commercial and banking economy” (Axenciuc, 1997: 121). Policy makers, regardless of the political color, encouraged different areas of society. “Creating an institutionalized legal legislative system with economic character, organizing public finances and the credit system on modern basis, responding to the needs of objective nature, strongly boosted and accelerated the development process of the Romanian society in a capitalist way” (Platon, 1985: 284).

The power networks in the reign of Carol I were naturally created and proved useful within the political regime, but also on the economic and financial realm, both in terms of developing the Romanian society and consolidating the political elite. It is true that the collective effort of the political class regarding the social field did not unravel all the requirements of a significant part of the Romanian society – the peasantry –, however, in the short and medium term, the measures of the political elite represented a dressing, having as main objective diminishing the existing disparities between the social layers in

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Romania. With all these shortcomings and disappointments of the Romanian state, the political, family and economic connections existed and created the premises of the consolidation of the Romanian state, allowing starting a quick modernization process necessary for the Romanian society at that time.

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