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Heirs of the Archangel? The 'New Right' Group and the Development of the Radical Right in Romania

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Introduction

The collapse of communism brought to Eastern Europe not only the long-awaited processes of democratization of the political space and liberalization of the economy, but also the reappearance of radical discourses in the public space. While significant academic contributions to the debate on the role that radical movements and parties play in post-communist Eastern Europe have already been made, research on recent developments among such groups is still in an incipient stage. This is possibly due to the fact that these developments are considered marginal, as they do not command sufficient political support to represent a serious threat to democracy. Also, the fact that they differ to some extent from similar occurrences in Western Europe and display specific country or regional features, makes them all the more difficult to study from a theoretical perspective. Therefore, the first task of a researcher approaching such phenomena is to address them in a direct manner, tackling initially the elements of such movements' doctrine as they are presented by the movements themselves.

This article attempts to examine the main tenets of the doctrine of a group that calls itself the 'New Right'. Given that so far no academic work, in either Romanian or English, has concentrated

on this group,[1] the present research seeks to critically examine the principal statements of the group, against the background of its establishment among the radical right movements in Romania. At the same time, since the group looks for inspiration to 'The Legion of the Archangel Michael', Romania's inter-war fascist organization, the validity of its claimed 'heritage' will represent the principal question followed throughout the analysis. The primary sources examined are mainly drawn from the movement's website. This is justified by the fact that their publications have a sporadic character, and the Internet seems to be the group's preferred medium of communication.

Theoretical Considerations

In terms of methodology, a qualitative analysis is preferred over a quantitative one. This choice is motivated on two grounds. On the one hand, attempting to quantify data pertaining to groups that do not take part in the electoral process is quite difficult, if not altogether impossible. On the other hand, given that this research addresses the ideological tenets of a radical movement, one can agree with Cas Mudde that

> qualitative content analysis is a far more effective approach to studying phenomena like the core features of a party ideology. It provides the proximity to the data and flexibility in operationalization necessary for studying highly complex concepts such as nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. (2007, p.39)

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[1] The only mentioning of the group in the literature is a paragraph in 'Romania' by Gabriel Andreescu. The author characterizes it as 'the most visible and open neo-legionnaire organization […] Its posters can be encountered in the city centers of Bucharest and other important cities, and especially on universities' walls' (Andreescu 2005, p.190).

The importance given to the language employed by the group is further motivated by the consistency it displays in the case of radical right movements with the programme it expresses. As Hans-Georg Betz & Carol Johnson point out,

> radical right-wing parties are radical both with respect to the language they employ in confronting their political opponents and the political project they promote and defend. (2004, p.312)

This element is especially important to follow in the case of a movement that has not been studied before, and in an attempt such as the present one, of establishing some basis for further analysis based on the group's own definition of their beliefs and aims.

At the same time, one must make the best of the valuable contributions that have already been made to the study of radical movements and parties in Eastern Europe when addressing the 'hard data' of these movements' proffered ideologies. The extensive work of Michael Shafir (1993, 1994, 1999a, 1999b) on manifestations of radical discourse in post-communist Romania appears to be a good starting point. This should be coupled with more theoretical understandings of the phenomenon in a broader European context, such as those put forward by Diethelm Prowe (1998, 2004) in his attempt to distinguish the new radical movements from their fascist predecessors in the interwar period. Moreover, in terms of approaching the notion of the radical right theoretically, Mudde's extensive work on this topic remains one of the most valuable reference points in any analysis of this kind. In addition to the already mentioned methodological focus on 'what the party says (partly literature) and not on what the party does (party policy)' (Mudde 2000, p.21), his attempt to distinguish what characterizes the

radical right, or justifies its identification as such represents one of the most compelling efforts to steer through the vast array of terms that have been put forward.[2] The definition of the 'radical right' in this context largely follows the one suggested by Mudde: 'radical' is understood in terms of 'opposition to some of the key features of liberal democracy, most notably political pluralism and the constitutional protection of minorities' (2007, p.25) and 'right' – in the general sense of 'a belief in a natural order with inequalities' (2007, p.26).

However, I have chosen to move away from the 'populist' element in Mudde's definition for two main reasons. Firstly, as Mudde notes, 'in Eastern Europe it [populism] is considered to be a more general phenomenon, spread across the ideological spectrum' (2002, p.214). That is partly understandable, given the generalized lack of political education among the population: direct appeals are more likely to be successful than elaborate programmes. As such, it does not appear to be a feature of the radical right, but rather of post-communist politics in general. Secondly, while radical right groups may resort to populist appeals, 'as a political style that builds on the rigid dichotomy between the "pure people" and a "corrupt elite"' (Mudde 2007, p.216), their definition of the 'people' is quite restricted, and becomes even more so when right-wing groups come to power.

The 'Right' in Romania

Qualifying groups in Romania as 'radical right' must be done with caution, as there are some specific features that deserve closer

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[2] When discussing the concept of the radical right, Mudde identifies no less than 23 different terms that have been used in this context, from 'extreme right' to 'reactionary tribalism'. Mudde 2007: 11-12.

attention. The first one has to deal with a peculiarity of Romanian political culture, briefly summarized by Maria Bucur in her observation that 'the nation's pre- and post-communist political scene does not include a significant left wing, despite 50 years of communism' (Bucur 2004, p.159). The second reason is that distinctions between 'left' and 'right' as understood in Western Europe are often considered by scholars as having relatively limited validity in the Romanian context (Shafir 1999a). Thus, going against the argument put forth by Hans-Dieter Klingemann et al., Stephen Fischer Galaţi argues that nationalism was the common denominator in the political platforms of post-communist parties, and that

> in both cases [i.e. the left and the right] historic nationalism was the indispensable legitimizer of any political program that would replace the communist system in 'liberated' Eastern Europe. (1992, p.9)

The first assumption's direct implication is that 'fascism occupies a different place within Romanian politics and culture than within Western Europe' (Bucur 2004, p.160). Leaving aside for a moment the validity of the term 'fascist' in contexts other than the interwar period, to which we will return later, it appears possible to argue that politics in Romania have generally gravitated towards the 'right' end of the political spectrum. In the interwar period even the liberal party often envisioned authoritarian solutions to the political problems confronting Romania.[3] The interwar 'Legion of the Archangel Michael', a formation displaying evident fascist

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[3] A notable exception to this general trend was represented by the National Peasants' Party which in the interwar period envisaged certain reforms that correspond to the traditional Western understanding of 'the left.' However, their short time in government, for only two years, from 1928-1930, as well as their pro-monarchist orientation that contradicts their general 'leftist' views and induces some authors even to classify it as 'conservative,' argue toward understanding it as an exception (see Roberts 1951).

characteristics, appears to be the only lasting mass movement in modern Romanian history. Even the Communist Party of Romania displayed 'a shift toward a form of nationalist populism under the Ceauşescu regime' (Bucur 2004, p.160). This feature of Romanian politics – nationalism that is encountered throughout the political spectrum[4] – is to be kept in mind when analysing contemporary manifestations of radical discourse, as it adds an aura of legitimacy to extremist movements.

'Radical Continuity' and 'Radical Return'

As a consequence of the problematic distinction between 'left' and 'right' in Romania, Shafir replaces it with one between what he terms 'radical continuity' and 'radical return' when dealing with post-communist radical developments in the country. It is hardly surprising that the main distinction between such groups is 'chiefly in their terms of reference, since both groups indulge in xenophobic appeals and extreme nationalism' (Shafir 1999b, p.213). The 'radical continuity' parties look to the communist period for inspiration and maintain the nationalism professed by the Ceauşescu regime, albeit in a more aggressive and explicit manner. This form of nationalism was defined by discriminatory policies toward the Hungarian minority, the pursuit of a foreign policy independent of the Soviet line, and the encouragement of a Romanian national identity. On the other hand, the 'radical return' groups, not only in Romania but in Central and Eastern Europe in general,

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[4] For the nationalism of the main left-wing party in post-Communist Romania, the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naţionale, or FSN) which later became Social-Democrat Party (Partidul Social-Democrat, or PSD), see Shafir (1993, pp.157-162).

> look to the neotraditional values associated with fascist parties in the interwar period and find models in such leaders as Josef Tiso, Andrej Hlinka, Ion Antonescu, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ferenc Szálasi, and Ante Pavelić. (Shafir 1999b, p.213)

During the communist period, the aforementioned characters were strictly proscribed, and movements such as Codreanu's 'Legion of the Archangel Michael' were practically non-entities, with their members imprisoned and discourse on the movement reduced to a one-sided demonization with no critical insights.[5] However, the very same suppression of their activities and discourse during communism can be indirectly linked to their re-emergence in the period following the collapse of the communist regime. As the communist regime was never popular with the masses in Romania and in Eastern Europe in general, after its demise the perceived 'enemies' of communism subsequently came to be perceived as 'heroes'.

In terms of their political representation, 'radical continuity' parties appear to be significantly more important than the 'radical return' ones. This can be explained by two factors. Firstly, they benefit from a direct connection with the immediately precedent communist regime. Secondly, they choose to participate directly in the political process and forge alliances with mainstream Romanian parties. Shafir identifies three such parties in the 1990s: the Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare, or PRM), the Socialist Labour Party (Partidul Socialist al Muncii, or PSM), and the Party of Romanian National Unity (Partidul Unității Naționale Române, or PUNR) (Shafir 1999b, p.214). The most influential of these has proven to be the Greater Romania Party, PRM, which

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[5] The best known work on the Iron Guard during communist times by Fătu & Spălățelu (1980) is 'famous' only for its one-sided 'official' ideological presentation of the history of the legionary movement.

> rose from a meagre 3.9 percent representation in the
> Parliament in 1992 (16 seats) to receive almost 25
> percent of the popular vote in the 2000 presidential
> elections and a fivefold increase in seats in Parliament,
> namely 84. (Bucur 2004, p.168)

Led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a former 'court poet' of the
Ceauşescu regime, the party has been described as 'a fascist–autocratic
variant of right-wing radicalism' (Beichelt & Minkenberg 2002,
p.16). One can identify xenophobia as the main ideological tenet of
the party. It functions according to a tripartite oppositional structure:
anti–Hungarian, anti–Semitic, and anti-globalization (Urban 2001,
pp.22-27).

The anti–Hungarian orientation of the party directly continues
a similar feature displayed by the Communist Party under Ceauşescu:
it ascribes both domestic and international concerns about Romania's
position to the activity of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania
and to the nationalism of Hungarian governments. The discourse of
radical right-wing parties in Hungary which advances revisionist
claims over Transylvania is also addressed, and a similarly radical
response provided to it. Although the Jewish minority in Romania is
estimated to add up to less than 20,000 people out of its population
of 22 million (Shafir 1994, p.381), the party's anti–Semitism is
manifested in its leadership's participation in the Marshal Ion
Antonescu League, an organization for the rehabilitation of
Antonescu (and associated with a form of Holocaust denial). There
are also various allusions to politicians in Romania as Jews or to the
Romanian economy being taken over by forces of 'international [i.e.
Jewish] finance' (Shafir 1994, p.355). The latter aspect is tied in with
the party's suspicion of globalization, and of Romania's inclusion in

NATO and EU structures – a feature that we will encounter in the doctrine and programme of the 'New Right' political group discussed later in the paper as well. The reference to Antonescu's rehabilitation, as well as the occasional use of images and symbols associated with the legionary movement, indicate that 'radical continuity' parties sometimes refer to interwar realities. However, this is not done on a permanent or pervasive basis, as is the case with the 'radical return' movements.

While the 'radical continuity' parties represent a significant and preoccupying Romanian political reality, as exemplified by the results of the 2000 elections, the 'radical return' formations have operated until this point outside the parliament. The first movement of this type was the Movement for Romania (Mişcarea Pentru România, or MPR) which was officially registered by Marian Munteanu with the Bucharest Tribunal on December 23, 1991 (Shafir 1999b, p.220). The publication of the party was called *Mişcarea* (The Movement), the common denomination of the interwar legionary movement. While some aspects of the party would suggest it should not be included in the 'radical return' category, its ideology clearly indicates a direct link to Codreanu's Legion. This relates to what Piero Ignazi described as the 'historic-ideological criterion' in his classification of extreme right-wing parties. This criterion, identified as a vague one, contains

> references to myths, symbols, slogans of the interwar
> fascist experience, often veiled as nostalgia, or in terms of
> a more explicit reference to at least part of the ideological
> corpus of fascism. (Ignazi 1992, p.10)

As we will see, this is a recurrent feature of the 'radical return' groups discussed below, one which distinguishes them from the 'radical

continuity' parties. The programme mentioned a 'solid metaphysical ground,' which is

> a revival of the organic view of history, with its emphasis on communitarian values, and on that brand of religious fundamentalism which had been the Iron Guard's distinguishing mark among fascist movements. (Shafir 1999b, p.220)

The present community's links with the past and the future, which was a central aspect of legionary ideology,[6] is also mentioned, as well as 'Romanianism' – a key element for the interwar radical right (Volovici 1991, pp.31-35). The open admiration expressed by the leadership for Codreanu was coupled with an organizational structure that closely resembled the legionnaires' nests. While sharing the anti-Hungarian, anti-Semitic, and anti-globalization views of the PRM, the MPR rejected the communist legacy in all its forms. This was done on the basis that communism, as an internationalist movement, could not be associated with genuine nationalism. This was reinforced by the idea that only nationalism that incorporates the Christian Orthodox traditions can be representative for the Romanians (Shafir 1994, pp.361-362). Thus, the 'radical return' parties added the anti-communist element to the anti-capitalist orientation (understood as anti-globalization) they shared with the PRM and other formations representing 'radical continuity'.

A new formation, the Party of the National Right (Partidul Dreapta Națională, or PDN), was founded in 1992 by Radu Sorescu. The party's *Manifesto to the Country* was published in *Noua Dreaptă*

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[6] Codreanu defined the nation as comprising: 'i) all the Romanians currently living; ii) all the souls of the dead and the graves of the ancestors; iii) all those who will be born Romanians'. According to Codreanu, 'a people reaches self-consciousness only when it reaches the consciousness of this *whole*, not only of its interests' (1999, p.334).

(The New Right), which went on sale in 1993 (Shafir 1994, p.362). At this point for the first time we come across the 'New Right' as the official publication of the PDN party. What was really 'new' about it, was the party's endorsement of an 'ethnocratic state' which accepted minorities only if they were willing to be assimilated into the Romanian nation. The Roma minority became important in the manifesto, as they were perceived to be 'at war with the Romanian nation,' an expression probably adopted from the writing of interwar anti–Semites. The manifesto further proposed 'to set up "reservations for their isolation" as a "final solution"' (Shafir 1994, p.363). The rest of the party's orientation can be viewed as an adaptation of legionary ideology to contemporary realities. The establishment of a corporatist state was suggested as a 'third way' between capitalism and communism; the legitimacy of European organizations was questioned (just as the League of Nations was opposed in the interwar period); and a 'military and economic orientation towards Germany or Japan' was advocated (Shafir 1994, p.363). All of this was completed with the announcement of the establishment of a paramilitary organization – which was illegal according to the Romanian constitution – called the Civic Guards.

Proliferation of Neo-Legionnaire Movements and Competition over Legitimacy: The 'Purist' Debates on the Historical Heritage of the Legion

While the MPR and PDN tried to adapt the legionary legacy to contemporary reality, a movement that openly declared its legionary orientation – the New Christian Romania (Noua Românie Creştină, or NRC) – was set up by Şerban Suru in November 1992. Although it was denied official recognition by the Bucharest Municipal

Tribunal and by the Notary General on the basis of its connection with the legionary movement and thus unconstitutionality, the movement went on and established nests not only in Bucharest, but also in Craiova, Braşov, Sibiu, Constanţa, and Chişinău (Shafir 1999b, p.220). Suru also organized a 'summer legionary work camp' which followed the interwar model where 'participants wore the green shirts of the legionary movement and were supposed to divide activities between work, indoctrination, and prayers' (Shafir 1999b, p.220).

The primary target of all 'radical return' organizations was young people. The legionary ethos in the interwar period was itself primarily directed at youth, and its contemporary heirs or imitators made no exception to this principle. Participation in the ceremonies that celebrated legionary 'martyrs' such as Ion Moța and Vasile Marin was 'a mixture of the very old and the very young' (Shafir 1994, p.366). That the appeal of these organizations to the young was not a minor issue can be inferred from the annual report of the Romanian Intelligence Service (Serviciul Român de Informații, or SRI) delivered by Virgil Măgureanu, head of the agency, to the Romanian Parliament on November 23, 1994. On the occasion, 'Măgureanu stressed that with help from abroad the legionnaire movement in Romania was growing to target Romanian youth' (cited in Kürti 2002. p.302).

Although in the mid-1990s the radical right movements, which looked for inspiration to the Legion and adopted legionary symbols and costumes, seemed to be thriving, by the end of the decade their significance had 'faded as its members were swallowed by other more overtly political groups' (Bucur 2004, p.168). Indeed, the electoral success of Tudor's PRM in the 2000 elections appears

to indicate that most of the radical right vote was concentrated in his party. Moreover, there was another reason for the decline of the so-called 'radical return' organizations, which to a large extent explains Tudor's success in the elections. The summoning up of the legionary legacy had led to competition among various organizations over the exclusive right to proclaim themselves the heirs of the legionary tradition. In Donald Horowitz's terms, this takes place because an 'emerging group in a new context will still be psychologically tied to the older, narrower context' (Horowitz 1975, p.131), in this particular case the legionary one. Given the presence and central role played by many former legionnaires in these organizations (the element of 'the old' mentioned above), the disputes were 'purist' in nature, and regarded the specifics of the legionary movement.

The main dispute was between *codreniști* and *simiști*. The *codreniști* faction were adepts of the view that Codreanu was the only authentic leader of the Legion. They believed that Horia Sima, Codreanu's follower, fundamentally modified the legionary movement and imbued it with a preponderantly political and paramilitary attitude which was different from the original, moral-spiritual one (Codrescu 2001, pp.16-17). On the other hand, the *simiști* perceived Sima as a true follower of the original line, and affirmed an identity between the two legacies: 'fundamentally, *simiștii* are *codreniști* themselves' (Vălenaş, cited in Fundaţia 'Profesor George Manu'). A secondary line of division, within the *simiști* themselves, was between the 'new ones' (grouped around Şerban Suru) and the 'old ones,' centred mainly around Horia Sima, and, after his death, Mircea Dimitriu (Fundaţia 'Profesor George Manu'). Further dissensions were related to the understanding of anti-Semitism, to accusations of some members of collaboration with the secret police

during the communist regime, and so on. The outcome of all these internal divisions was summarized by one of the participants in 2001 as follows:

> We have reached an unbearable atmosphere where scissions have appeared, in a kind of suicidal and meaningless euphoria. This transformed the Legionnaire spirit and the right wing […] from the scarecrow of the early 1990s to a topic of irony for leftist politicians and intellectuals. (Codrescu 2001, p.123)

Emergence of the 'New Right' Group: The Adaptation of the Historical Heritage

Horowitz claims that if people external to a certain context

> have had little previous experience with the emerging group, their judgments will be less hampered by knowledge of the old context, and hence they will blur subgroups more readily. (1975, p.131)

In this particular case the subgroups represent the various factions which lay claim to the legacy of the Legion, divided primarily between *codreniști* and *simiști*. In addition to that, the young people who founded the group known as the New Right (Noua Dreaptă, or ND) in 2000 were also external to this context. The establishment of this group may be viewed as one of the final developments of the radical right organizations in Romania. ND represents the most visible contemporary presence in the media and on the Internet which is their preferred medium due to its popularity among the young and to its very broad target public.

The New Right put forward two main arguments regarding the justification of their emergence. The first one refers to the idea that unity is a fundamental ideological feature of all nationalist

movements. In the case of Romania it can be traced back to the very beginnings of the Legion, in Codreanu's split from the League of National Christian Defence (Liga Apărării Naţionale Creştine, or LANC), motivated by a secession within the League, and expressed as follows:

> I decided to go together neither with one side, nor with the other. I wanted not to renounce [the fight], but to begin the organization of the youth on my responsibility, by my own soul and my own head, and to continue the fight, not to capitulate. (Codreanu 1999, p.229)

This notion of unity is also prominent in the first lines of the New Right's presentation:

> The New Right came into being at the beginning of the year 2000 […] at that time, a void existed within the nationalist movement in Romania […] The New Right appeared out of the need to change this state of facts, reuniting all young nationalists in a militant, radical, and united front (Noua Dreaptă)

Adopting a neutral (or 'united') line in the debates between *codrenişti* and *simişti*, its list of major Romanian intellectuals is composed of Mihai Eminescu, Romania's national poet, Codreanu, Sima, and Radu Gyr, the most talented legionary poet (Noua Dreaptă). The second argument of the 'New Right' group tackles the dissensions between different camps in the radical right spectrum and their counter-productiveness. It argues for 'addressing the salient issues of the present and choosing the *right* path, the path of the creative act and not of sterile debates' (Noua Dreaptă 18.11.07).

The section on the objectives of the ND opens with the statement: 'The New Right is a movement, not a party' (Noua Dreaptă 18.11.07). Reminiscent of Codreanu's own view of the

Legion, this aspect, together with various other elements, points toward a return to the legionary principles, rather than to one of its particular expressions. An interesting example along these lines is that of the speech that was delivered at the New Right's celebration of the 104th anniversary of Codreanu's birth (September 13, 1899), and contained Sima's references to Codreanu. This carelessness with regards to the origin and 'purity' of the message indicate that what is important for ND is the message itself, cut out of its original historical context, and applied to contemporary reality.

The Enemies of the 'New Right'

While the Legion displayed a virulent anti-Semitism as a central feature of its ideology,[7] the New Right extends its list of enemies to other minority groups, such as the Roma population, Transylvanian Hungarians, homosexuals or religious sects (Noua Dreaptă). In this context, by minority we understand any group which is regarded to be marginal in relation to what is considered the norm: ethnic origins, religious affiliations or sexual orientations. Other objectives of the New Right include i) the 'unification, on the German model, of the two Romanian states, Romania and the Republic of Moldova'; ii) the protection of the 'ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity' of Romanian communities outside Romania; iii) the cult of heroes; iv) the 'education of Romanian youth in a nationalist and Christian spirit'; v) the struggle against the 'manelization[8] and Americanization of Romanian culture'; vi) the

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[7] According to Codreanu, 'the historical mission of our generation is the solution of the Jewish problem. All our battles over more than fifteen years had this purpose, and all efforts henceforward will have this purpose' (1951, p.199).
[8] Manele is a music style from the Balkans, mainly derived from Turkish, Greek, Arab or Serbian love songs. It originates in Romania, but is also present and widespread in Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, parts of Turkey.

'promotion of the idea of social justice and the struggle against international capitalism'; and

> the building of a Europe of nations, keepers of its identity, traditions and Christian roots, in the face of the threats exercised alike by American imperialism, radical Islam and the project of the European Constitution that entails the creation of a bureaucratic and totalitarian European super-state. (Noua Dreaptă)

These objectives clearly spell out the fact that ND, unlike other radical right movements that adhere to a specific tradition, are merely selectively adopting only those elements from the legionary tradition which suit their respective current needs. At the same time, they display a remarkable capacity of adapting a traditional discourse (the religious aspect of the Legion, for example) to contemporary realities (religious sects, abortion debates, or homosexuality). An idealized vision of the past is rejected and replaced with a perception of the saliency of a 'nationalist struggle' that addresses the current situation.

However, old enemies are not forgotten. The issue of Bessarabia, for instance, often brings to the fore anti-Russian and anti-communist sentiments as the Russian Federation is still associated with the Soviet Union. The New Right state that the group 'will actively support any action of Romanian resistance against the Russification and Bolshevization of Bessarabia' (Noua Dreaptă). Moreover, the strategic partnership of the Republic of Moldova with the Russian Federation is viewed as a complete surrender of Moldova's independence and it becoming a vassal state of Moscow (Noua Dreaptă). Paradoxically, this vision has not prevented the New Right from putting a link to the ultra-nationalist Russian group *Russkii Obraz* on the main page of their website.

The old enemies are, as we have seen in the overview of the movement's objectives, supplemented by new ones. The image of the United States – the Americans whom, as a colloquial Romanian saying goes, 'we waited for 50 years,' has undergone a significant transformation: they are seen as responsible for 'the new world order' and as representatives of imperialism that they impose directly or indirectly upon the world. Anti-American sentiments – ranging from the opposition to 'Western cultural imports of the type of Valentine's Day', to protests against the war in Iraq, denouncing 'the official American mass-media, controlled by Jews', and to 'Hollywood [that] transformed genocide in romance, war in soap opera' (Noua Dreaptă) – are pervasive. Moreover, the New Right emphasize their commitment to a 'Romania of Romanians and the Europe of nations' (Noua Dreaptă).

A 'Europe of Nations': Opposition to the EU Project

The 'Europe of nations' brings us to another interesting feature of the New Right's orientation. The inclusion of Romania in Euro-Atlantic structures represents a challenge for Romanian society, and, as Bucur puts it,

> most people would like to draw upon the benefits involved in becoming a member of the EU and NATO, but they understand only vaguely the requirements for such membership. They are much more familiar with the facile negative statements made by EU and NATO representatives in Romania, and their immediate consequences, such as the humiliating visa restrictions. (Bucur 2004, p.169)

Given that radical right groups aim to address 'most people', and are devoted to a nationalist vision of international relations, they can

only adopt a negative vision of European integration and membership in NATO. Thus, Romania's accession to the EU is viewed as an 'annexation of Romania to an economic empire, where Romania will have an inferior status' (Noua Dreaptă). Some of the specific negative consequences associated with the integration are identified on the group's webpage as follows: i) the EU is an atheist structure whose principles contradict the Christian ones; ii) Romania will lose a significant part of its independence and sovereignty; iii) lower living standards for the majority of the population, especially peasants, will ensue; iv) a double process of emigration (of Romanian specialists lured by material gain) and immigration (of African and Asian immigrants pushed to Romania by poverty) will take place; v) multiculturalism, a political ideology identified as 'the dictatorship of minorities' will be imposed, destroying national values; and vi) the press, radio, television, and internet will be censored in the name of the fight against terrorism, similar to the censorship that was performed by the secret police under communism (Noua Dreaptă). Moreover, it is stated that these acquired 'freedoms' are not the ones that the youth died for in December 1989 (Noua Dreaptă). At this point, legionary 'martyrs' are completely abandoned in favour of a common, 'street-wise' appeal to the public, one that has a more recent resonance to the Romanians. An image of a European Union flag with the communist symbol of the hammer and sickle at its centre completes the picture (Noua Dreaptă).

The alternative to the EU proposed by the New Right is the aforementioned 'Europe of Nations'. ND is a member of the European National Front which counts among its members the Spanish 'La Falange', the German NPD, the Italian 'Forza Nuova', the Greek 'Hrisi Avgi', and the French 'Renouveau Français', with

the affiliates Netherlands' 'Nationale Alliantie', and the Bulgarian National Alliance. Other nationalist movements which ND had links to in the past include the Belgian 'Mouvement Nation', the Polish 'Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski', the Slovak 'Slovenská Pospolitost', the Czech 'Národni Sjednoceni', the Latvian 'Nacionālā Spēka Savienība', and the Austrian 'Bund Freier Jugend'. This list, by no means exhaustive, shows that while at home the members of these groups may be easily dismissed as 'a lunatic fringe' (Prowe 2004, p.134), their presence is not an isolated occurrence, limited to a particular country displaying a particular set of socio-economic and political conditions. As Lars Rensmann has argued, 'researchers recognize that the renaissance of right-wing extremism has become a more or less Europe wide phenomenon' (2003, p.95). It represents a common trend in most of the European Union member states, with specific differences related to the respective national contexts. While for the moment due to their limited numbers they can be disregarded as an extreme that poses no real threat to the prevailing political order, such a complacent attitude has proven problematic at other times in history.

Conclusion: Heirs of the Archangel?

Two possible problems are worth highlighting. On the one hand, these extremist groups represent a problem when, as shown above, they do not appear in a 'radical void', but rather in societies that display a tendency towards authoritarianism and intolerance. As Shafir observes in the case of post-communist Romania,

> the only two institutions that seem to enjoy unbound
> public confidence are the Church and the army, hardly
> the most solid pillars of tolerance. All other institutions,

and above all parliament and the judiciary, are held in
low esteem. (Shafir 1999b, pp.229-230)

This trend, prompted in part by the corruption associated with
democratic institutions, is present in many former communist
countries, rather than being a particularity of Romania alone. This
poses a problem of potential alliances between these groups on the
fringe and other radical parties that are part of 'mainstream' politics.
History teaches us that the potential for further radicalization of such
parties when they are in contact with small extremist groups, as
happened for example in interwar Hungary (Janos), is by no means
lacking. When pitched against the electoral success of PRM in the
2000 elections in Romania, such possibilities of alliances between
groups that do not necessarily share the same view, but only a similar
ultra-nationalism, should be treated seriously.

On the other hand, it took the Legion of the Archangel
Michael one decade to grow from a group of five young students to
the mass movement that it eventually became. According to Shafir,

for the time being, its inheritors seem to be relatively few
and, moreover, to be mere poor epigones of the
'generation of *Angst* and adventure'. (1999b, p.231)

As was demonstrated above, there are little if any real connections
left between the ND and the legionary movement in terms of
ideological content. Those that remain tend to be mostly symbols
and paraphernalia, shirts, portraits and flags, while the doctrine is
adapted to contemporary realities. Referring to radical movements in
Western Europe, Diethelm Prowe observes that

in their relative powerlessness and isolation, the radical
anti-immigration groups seek legitimacy and a sense of
power by identifying with the fascists, invoking the once

> triumphantly powerful symbols, slogans, and published
> ideas [of the interwar movements]. (Prowe 2004, p.134)

Prowe makes an excellent argument that is in line with the conclusions that can be drawn from the present analysis of Romania's contemporary radical right. While addressing the dispute between scholars who use the term 'fascism' in relation to contemporary movements and those who contest such usage and limit it to the interwar period, he identifies a major line of demarcation in the understanding of fascism and its potential 'heirs':

> The first type of definition asks primarily about
> mentality, general political behaviour, and goals of the
> fascists, while the second kind stresses the specific
> historical setting from which the extreme rightist
> movements of the inter-war years emerged. (Prowe
> 1998, p.308)

We have thus established that the alleged connections of the 'New Right' group, as well as of many other 'radical return' organizations, with the interwar legionary movement are purely formal and arise out of their quest for legitimacy.

At the same time, since different historical contexts of interwar and post-communist Romania make up for different varieties of the radical right, it can be argued that any such associations address the issue of 'mentalities'. In this context, a certain degree of coherence between the legionary movement and its self-proclaimed 'heirs' can exist. If one adopts this definition of fascism, one would agree with Nagy-Talavera that

> the mood which creates it comes from the very depth of
> the human psyche. In this sense fascism is a universal
> phenomenon […] Today this 'metapolitical
> phenomenon,' if not checked, could cause incomparably
> more damage than was caused by that largest holocaust in

> recorded human history – and that disaster was unleashed on unsuspecting mankind by such a mood, the mood known in our time as fascism. (1970, p.375)

While many researchers and politicians alike disregard this possibility, relying on the importance of institutions such as the European Union for the implementation of democratic structures in Eastern Europe, history may teach us a different lesson. In times of a crisis, the legitimacy of such institutions may be undermined, as it happened many times before, and these groups, with their pronounced 'anti-system' dimension (Ignazi 2003) would be direct beneficiaries of the crises.

Moreover, the same democratic process may bring to power groups which are radically opposed to its principles, as it happened in Nazi Germany. Therefore, demonstrating the fragility of the alleged link of the new radical right groups to the Legionary movement could represent not only a further step in understanding them, but also an efficient way of undermining their quest for legitimacy. As the first academic attempt to analyse the ideology of the group which represents the most visible neo-legionnaire organization in Romania, this project necessarily suffers from obvious limitations. It is hoped, however, that it will help stimulate interest in the further exploration of this delicate aspect of post-communist Romanian politics, and that future research will cover the unjustified gaps in the literature dealing with this topic.

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