

## ELECTORAL PRACTICES IN A CHANGING WORLD: STUDY CASE OF THE PATRIOTS' UNION ORGANIZATION. BIHOR COUNTY ORGANIZATION (1945–1947)

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(Abstract)

Situated in the category of “the traveler fellows” of the communists, the Patriots' Union of Romania played an important role in the effort to conquer the power, along with other such structures as Plowmen Front, Hungarian People's Union, Patriotic Defense etc.

The Union of Patriots was founded by the communist circles in Romania as an illegal organization in the summer of 1942, in order to contribute to finalize a comprehensive internal opposition as against the war unleashed against the Soviet Union. After August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, its work was quickly redirected in order to *un-fascism* the country.

The Union of Patriots joined the platform draft of the National Democratic Front prepared by the communists and claimed Dr. Petru Groza government installed on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1945, under which the government had 5 ministries<sup>1</sup>. That in the conditions under which one of the party's leader, Gheorghe Vlădescu-Răcoasa, said in September 1944 that the Union of Patriots was not “*a political party that splits posts and ministries*”<sup>2</sup>. Since September 1944 the Union of Patriots assignment remained the coordination of the *citizen committees* and *village committees* recently emerged. Structures of the Union of Patriots have been established throughout the country, with the purpose of “*cleaning enterprises, institutions, faculties and schools of Guard elements*”<sup>3</sup>. In the world of villages, the members of the Patriots' Union joined first the organizations of the Plowmen Front to “share as” the greater properties than 50 hectares. In cities, the “guards” of the organization dealt with “unmasks” within the frame of the “*saboteurs of enterprises, speculators and owners who dose goods*”<sup>4</sup>.

The General Congress of the Union of Patriots in January 10–12<sup>th</sup> 1946 decided to turn this organization in the National People Party. Among the 120 members of the Central Committee of the new party were among others Dr. Dumitru Bagdasar, Petre Constantinescu-Iasi, Traian Săvulescu, Andrei Oțetea, Alexandru Philippide, George Călinescu, etc. It was passing to a new stage in the conquest of the power by the communists, and they had to be stronger organized, the year 1946 being a decisive year in this respect with regard to runoff election in November.

The first organization of the Patriots' Union in Bihor County was founded on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1944 in Beiuș even before the total release of Bihor County by the Romanian and Soviet armies, at a setting meeting, followed by a call on the purpose and program exposure of the organization<sup>5</sup>. This meeting was attended by several residents of Beiuș city, the most of them attending out of curiosity rather than of a real interest. The population was not extremely eager to enroll in the new political structure. This can be found also from a report of January 17<sup>th</sup> 1945, where they were placed 200 members on the lists of Beiuș organization. But only 50 of them paid regularly their membership fee and only one, in the person of the branch president, Alexandru Rițiu, could be considered active, the other members remaining “*inactive*”<sup>6</sup>. Also, the

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<sup>1</sup> The National Bank of Romania, *Restitutio. Viața și opera lui Mitiță Constantinescu*, nr. 4, Martie, (2004), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări între partidele politice din România (1944–1947)*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, (1996), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, De la Uniunea Patrioților la Partidul Național Popular, 1942–1949, *Anuarul Societății de Științe Istorice din România. Filiala Prahova*, tom III–IV, (1992), 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 165.

<sup>5</sup> Arhivele Naționale – Serviciul Județean Bihor, *fondul Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 4/1945, f. 1 (în continuare A.N.-S.J.Bh).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

report mentioned that despite of this situation, the political party supporters were numerous, at least 3000 – 4000 people, “*closely grouped around the P.U.*”<sup>7</sup>. Given this situation, only a small number of persons of the supporters of the crowd succeeded to be worked in, the document noted that there was “*a defect in the organization*”<sup>8</sup>; blamed on the “*lack of propaganda and the small number of the held meetings*”<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, it was specified here, “*the lack of a democratic political party*”<sup>10</sup> more difficult to organize because people wanted “*to join not the organization but the democratic political parties*”<sup>11</sup>, cause of which it was believed that the “*Plowmen Front would be more successful*”<sup>12</sup>.

Since January 1945 they started the expansion of the Patriots’ Union, moving the party delegates in over than 30 communes and towns of the county area and the organization of some constituent assemblies. Of the 30 localities only 20 were able to begin the organizing of the committees of the Patriots’ Union. In the other region of the county the structure of the organization was in progress.

In the northern part of the county, the Union of Patriots was founded on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1944, soon after setting free of Oradea. The starting point was the general meeting of the day of November 12<sup>th</sup> 1944, held in a building in Oradea, 6 no. Theater Street<sup>13</sup>, when it was formed a provisional County Committee composed by 9 members. Two were intellectuals, a clerk, a craftsman and five workers. Also, on this occasion it was set the political line, taking the decision to fight “*against the national chauvinism existing between the cohabitant peoples (Romanian-Hungarian) and against the Nazi-fascist enemy until his final destruction*”<sup>14</sup>. The first initiative in this regard was the exclusion of the two intellectuals who belonged to the provisional committee for that they proved to be “*unhealthy elements, one of them having a fascist past*”<sup>15</sup>.

About how to conduct the Union organization in Oradea we find from a report of the local leaders of the party at December 30<sup>th</sup> 1944: “*The village organization is running slowly and very hard, because the city population majority is Hungarian, in terms of propaganda we should act in two languages, Romanian and Hungarian, and the field of organization of the P.U. is the middle population stratum*

*– intellectuals, merchants, craftsmen – and until today they withdraw to enter the political organization. But mostly that withdrawal is felt from the Romanian population, which both intellectual and the rest of the population is tested by chauvinist ideas and we are regarded as communists*”<sup>16</sup>. However, in the first month of 1945, the Patriots’ Union organization in Oradea had registered 170 members of whom 30 Romanian, 60 Hungarian, 50 Jews and 30 other nationalities (Germans, Serbs, Bulgarians)<sup>17</sup>.

During this period, the Union of Patriots carried a little more consistent propaganda through the press articles explaining “*What is the Patriots’ Union?*”<sup>18</sup> So, according to that “*the P.U. is an organized mass movement. To it can participate and can be joined by all the patriots determined to fight against the oppressor and exploiter Hitlerism and fascism without difference of gender, age, language or religion, being excluded only the enemies of democracy*”<sup>19</sup>. Meanwhile the political line of the Patriots’ Union is defined as one which “*is reflected in its platform of fight and it is alongside the political struggle of the Romanian Communist Party, the most achievable progressive political line*”<sup>20</sup>.

An overview of the political life in the north-central part of our county is presented by Imre Tóth, an activist of the C.C. of the R.C.P. sent from Bucharest to Oradea in February 1945 to organize, control and direct the activities of the Patriots’ Union – Oradea. A few days after his arrival in the city on the Crisul Repede River he found that the political scene was monopolized by the left forces: “*The M.N.S. groups (n.n. Magyar Nepi Szövetség – the Hungarian People’s Union), the Plowmen Front and Union Organization are highly organized, but M.N.S. grouped inside many Hungarian reactionary elements*”<sup>21</sup> – the activist warned. The conducted survey reveals the exclusiveness practiced by the Hungarian revanchist circles infiltrated in the leftist parties, particularly the communist<sup>22</sup>. This situation is aggravated in his view as the Communists of Bihor sat the Hungarian national interests before those of the party. “*The Communist Party, composed of the Council of 11 persons attending*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ce este Uniunea Patrioților?*, în *Viață Nouă*, an I, nr. 17, 4 februarie 1945, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> A.N.- S.J. Bh., *fond Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 4/1945, f. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ion Zainea (coordinator), *Democrație occidentală și democrație populară: evoluția spectrului politic în nord-vestul României (1944–1950)*, Oradea, Editura Universității din Oradea, (2004), 166.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, d. 5/1945, f. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, d. 1/1944, f. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 2.

the board: Mikloş Gyarmati, Boros Janos, Feldman and Balasz Emil lead the N.D.F. organization following their own principles”<sup>23</sup>, says the report by Tóth Imre. Regarding the Union of Patriots, the Romanian Communist Party put its great expectations to attract people on its side; the activist sent from Bucharest noted that “the line of the Union of Patriots is no existing”<sup>24</sup>.

In the report drawn up on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1945, Imre Tóth specified that if till that moment the organization had registered 350 members of all nationalities, after that “it has ceased to be even a democratic mob directly to the Communist Party, with the main influence of Mikloş Gyarmati, who sent a circular to all members of the U.P.”<sup>25</sup>. The same figure was presenting a bleak picture of the party: “Their indiscipline (n.n. of U.P. members) led to the disintegration of the Union of Patriots that deliberately dissolved in several ethnic cells. We notify all the members of other origin than Romanian, women, youth, and friends that the organization of Oradea does not accept any more as so far members of any ethnicity – as instructed from the center. So, only people of Romanian ethnic origin can be members of our organization. For this purpose we please the friends – who we are sure they will understand the political deep meaning of this issue – to be enrolled in Madosz<sup>26</sup> and Jewish Democratic Union”<sup>27</sup>.

In a letter on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1945, concluded with the slogan of FREEDOM! (text broadcast in Hungarian and translated into Romanian), signed on behalf of the Patriots’ Union – Oradea organization of Balogh Dumitru, Aranycs M., Szabo Dumitru, Riffod M., Zuh Alexandru, Juhasz G. and Lusztig I., addressed “To all the members of the ns organization in Oradea of non-Romanian origin”, it was clearly called on ethnic segregation. It was, clearly, a text and an action of ethnic discrimination, produced, in fact, of political calculations, invoking inexistent provisions whereby the members of the Patriots’ Union who were not Romanian, were encouraged to enroll in the Hungarian People’s Union and the Jewish Democratic Union. The address asked the Romanian exclusivity of this organization, “without any justification for those who had

registered or intended to join and without any real benefit for the Romanian population and beyond any of its requirements, in the place of this expected justification, just the expressing of the confidence in the friends who we are sure they will understand the political deep meaning of this issues...”<sup>28</sup>

In fact, the measure to forbid the non-Romanians to enter the Union of Patriots, despite the invocation of some provisions received from the higher bodies, was found to be abusive and – in a determined way – local generated by obvious political interests of group.

The conclusions drawn by Tóth Imre led to eliminate from the Union of Patriots in Oradea of all those who were not ethnic Romanian. Therefore, only 40 people remained registered. This fact actually showed something else, the desire of the power to implement a new stage of organization and struggle of the Hungarians, that of regrouping in a single pole of power, of the Hungarian People’s Union, which could provide a better coordination of the planned actions, but also the discipline necessary to achieve the final objective<sup>29</sup>, namely to keep the Northern Transylvania on Hungary.

In short time, the Union of Patriots – the organization of Bihor County, has become a structure composed exclusively of Romanian ethnics. They have organized a meeting on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1945, where “with Dr. Simonca presidency all the ethnic Romanians joined the block and entered the Union of Patriots but without any program, any organization and any instructions given by us with the principles they had from various chauvinist parties. Being a special Romanian party, under the camouflage of the U.P., taking the first meeting, there was divergence between the principles of the U.P. and of the new congeries and, in fact, I wanted to intervene to explain the U.P. line, I was off being Jew...”<sup>30</sup>. We are here in a paradoxical situation in which after Tóth Imre’s report practically prompted the leaving of Hungarians from the organization of the Patriots’ Union, it is him who deplores all this in an ostentatious gesture of facade.

On February 18<sup>th</sup> 1945, in the Heymann cinema hall of Oradea, the general meeting of the Union of Patriots took place, attended, in addition to representatives of the other democratic organizations in the county, about 600–700 Romanians. As we learn of the daily *Viața Nouă* (New Life) “during this great assembly, the intellectuals and Romanian democratic citizens of the town joined the organization of the

<sup>23</sup> A.N.- S.J. Bh., *fond Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 4/1945, f. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>26</sup> It is certainly a confusion, as they are Nepi Szövetség Magyar – Hungarian People’s Union Madosz, as an organizational structure of the Hungarians in Romania has been in the interwar period.

<sup>27</sup> A.N.- S.J. Bh., *fond Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 4/1945, f. 3

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Ion Zainea (coordinator), *op. cit.*, 166–167.

<sup>30</sup> A.N.- S.J. Bh., *fond Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 4/1945, f. 4 and back1.

*Union of Patriots*<sup>31</sup>. Also during this meeting, they elected the Union of Patriots County Committee, composed of 7 members, and the Board of Directors of the Union of Patriots of 22 people<sup>32</sup>. On February 20<sup>th</sup> 1945, the first sitting after the general meeting of the management structure was completed in the following structure: first president – Gheorghe Șimonca (General Attorney), President – Ștefan Lipcei (Lawyer), Executive Chairman – Virgil Ciacan (Lawyer), First Secretary – Dumitru Balogh (Official), Secretary – Iosif Tăutu (Official), treasurer – Michael Arania (Craftsman) plus two members of the Board – Ioan Magdu (Official) and Teodor Popa (Lawyer)<sup>33</sup>.

The Board consisted of: Laurențiu Botoș (Judge), Aron Popoviciu (Court Official), Traian Surducian (Sedra Orphan County Chairman), Teodor Prodan (City Hall First Advisers), Gavril Seleșiu (Senior Official of the Municipality), Ioan Abrudan (T.T.P. Engineer), Petre Fărcașiu (Inspector T.T.P.), Iosif Caba (Conductor T.T.P.), Iosif Pop (Police, retired), Alexandru Pop (Police, retired), Alexander Caloș (Finance Official), Ioan Florea (Finance Official), Ioan Rosca (Bank Director), Dumitru Hera (County School Inspector), Ernestine Tiponuțiu (Official), Ioan Mezei (Trader), Vasile Oraș (Craftsman), Peter Hușca (Craftsman), John Breban (Craftsman), Teodor Bențiu (R.R.W. Official), Traian Leu (Worker) and Dumitru Sabău (Worker)<sup>34</sup>. In the same meeting, there were also elected the members of the organization that would represent the Union of Patriots in the County Parliament of the N.D.F., respectively Șimonca Gheorghe, Ciacan Virgil and Aranici Mihai, as the old representation in the person of Mr. Pop Ionel should be changed. As it can be ascertained, the management structures were composed exclusively by Romanian ethnic citizens.

In conclusion, we can say that the whole situation was caused not by any xenophobic attitude of the local political leaders, Romanian or Hungarian, of the Union of Patriots – the organization of Bihor County. This successful attempt to segregate the formation on ethnic criteria had joined the effort almost general of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania ceded to Hungary after the Vienna Dictate, which aimed at preserving the territory to Hungary. This did not hesitate to separate from the Romanians

constituting its own political structures to campaign in this regard. The Hungarian People's Union was the most important of them being in close alliance relationship adjunct to the Romanian Communist Party, a Romanian Communist Party dominated in that period at the decisional level of Hungarian and Jewish ethnic elements in Transylvania, the latter of Hungarian culture. The very representative of the C.C. of the R.C.P. sent to Oradea to target the local organization of the Union of Patriots, Tóth Imre, was a Hungarian Jew of Transylvania, as he himself acknowledges. The conclusions of his report are relevant in this regard. Even he, a messenger of the C.C. of the R.C.P., suggests the separation on ethnic principles which shows us the official line of at least a substantial part of the central management of the Romanian communists.

The leaders of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania did not hesitate for a moment during that period being involved in their national interest, to *acquire* communist feelings, hoping that they will come to meet Moscow and Stalin who has not decided yet the fate of the Northern Transylvania, showing be more loyal and more reliable to the Soviet power than the Romanians. Moscow's decision of March 9<sup>th</sup> 1945, according that Transylvania lost by Romania after the Vienna Dictate is in the composition of the Romanian state has produced disappointment among the Hungarian minority leaders. Their effort to *communize* after in the interwar period they had, as members of the Hungarian Party, an anti-Soviet position had been in vain. They have not however dropped the idea and the examples are numerous in the years following the World War II.

After the return of the Romanian administration in the Northern Transylvania, the Hungarian local political structures have temporarily suppressed their impulses, even if only of surface, bound to accept the international realities of ethnic cohabitation with the Romanians until the arrival of better times. Locally, shortly after returning of the Transylvanian territories to Romania, on March 18<sup>th</sup> 1945, were published "The Appeal of the Patriots' Union and of the Plowmen Front to the Romanian Brothers in Oradea and Bihor County" and "The Appeal of the Hungarian People's Union to the Hungarian Population of Bihor County", produced and disseminated in the context of restoring the Romanian administration in the Northern Transylvania, which was urging the citizens to discipline and mutual respect<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Înaintea marii adunări a U.P., *Viața Nouă*, an I, nr. 30, 18 februarie (1945), 1.

<sup>32</sup> A.N.-S.J. Bh., *fond Partidul Național Popular – Organizația Județeană Bihor*, dosar nr. 5/1945, f. 3

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Comitetul de conducere al U.P., *Viața Nouă*, an I, nr. 38, 28 februarie (1945), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Apelul Organizațiilor democratice de masă ale Frontului Național Democrat adresat populației române și maghiare a județului Bihor, *Viața Nouă*, an I, nr. 47, 18 martie (1945), 3.