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Political cleavages in post-communist Europe. Romania as a case study

Cristina Matiuta^a

^a University of Oradea, Romania

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Cristina Matiuta

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Abstract: The concept of cleavage, as it was theorized by Stein Rokkan in the late 1960s, sends to a deep and lasting division between groups, based on a certain type of conflict. It links the individual behaviour to macro-historical processes that will shape the political field for decades. A controversial issue is the application of the Western Europe-specific cleavages, where national and industrial revolutions have produced profound transformations with a lasting impact on party systems, outside this area. By focusing on the Romanian case, the paper explores the cleavages before the establishment of communism and those emerged after its collapse, results of this regime and/or of the process of transition to democracy. The adopted perspective is to use Rokkan's typology as a reference point, to analyze the extent to which it has descriptive capacity for the Romanian space, and even if losing the rigor of definition, to refer to the tensions and divisions which, although not necessarily leading to the emergence of political parties, have the potential to shape the political action.

Keywords: political cleavages, political parties, Romania, post-communism

1. How do we define the cleavages?

The differences between political parties are determined, among other factors, by their history, by the circumstances in which they emerge within a political system and which will mark their future evolution. Maurice Duverger, whose work, *Les partis politiques* (1951)¹, is a reference point in the tradition of party studies, says that, just as people bear all their lives the mark of their childhood, so the parties

1 M. Duverger, *Les partis politiques*, Paris: Armand Colin, 9^{ème} édition, 1976.

deeply feel the influences of their origins. Nearly two decades later, Norwegian comparatist Stein Rokkan, in collaboration with Seymour Martin Lipset, proposes an explanation of the genesis of political parties that occupies a central place in the political literature on party origins and electoral behavior.² In Rokkan's approach, resumed and perfected by Daniel L. Seiler³, the emergence of the parties would be the result of adapting the political structures to three successive revolutions – national, industrial and international – each of them causing a division into society and these cleavages have been translated into political terms. Each revolution is pursued on two conflicting axes or dimensions: functional and territorial-cultural. The national revolution produces two cleavages, first on the functional axis, between the Church and the State, opposing the partisans and the rivals of ecclesiastical control over social and political life; the second, on the territorial-cultural axis, between the center and the periphery, opposing the partisans of centralization and national unity to those of federalization, regionalization and autonomy. The Industrial Revolution generates the cleavage between capitalists and workers on the functional axis, with a socio-economic origin and considered as essential from a Marxist perspective, putting in opposition the interests of the owners of the means of production with those of workers and other proletarians. The second cleavage resulting from the industrial revolution, on the territorial-cultural axis, is the primary sector *versus* secondary/tertiary sectors, also with a socio-economic origin. In Marxist terms, it could be read as an opposition between the remaining pre-capitalist production sectors and the rest of the production sectors, opposing in fact the peasants and the agrarian world to industrial and urban society in general. These are the four fundamental cleavages from Rokkan's perspective, which gave birth to modern party systems in Europe. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the Soviet model have caused an additional cleavage which only affected the workers' parties born out of the industrial revolution, separating them in partisans of alignment with the Sovi-

2 S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, 'Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction', in: S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan (eds), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York and London: The Free Press-Collier-Macmillan, 1967, pp. 1-64.

3 D.L. Seiler, *Les Partis Politiques en Europe*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978.

et model and subordination of the national goals to the imperatives of the international revolution and opponents of this alignment. It is actually a sub-cleavage that opposes the communist left to the non-communist one.

One of the merits of Rokkan's theory is its ability to link the individual behavior to macro-historical processes that will shape the political field for decades. His approach helps us to understand the origins of the similarities and differences between party systems, the particular configuration of the various cleavages creating country-specific combinations and reflecting the historical conditions that gave rise to them. The meaning of the cleavage is therefore a deep and lasting division between groups, based on a certain type of conflict.

A conceptualization of cleavages that enjoyed a wide acceptance in literature as it attempts to overcome the descriptive level and to confer an analytical status to the term was proposed by Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair⁴, according to which a political division should contain three elements to constitute a cleavage: 1) a socio-structural element that makes individuals or groups to differentiate according to significant social characteristics: ethnicity, religion, status, education; 2) an element of the collective identity of the social group, namely the ensemble of beliefs and values that confers self-awareness to the group and the willingness to act on its basis; 3) an organizational element, meaning a set of interactions, institutions, organizations (e.g. political parties) that are born as part of the cleavage.

Cleavages are therefore ruptures, faults, complicated scissions that include interests, norms, attitudes and a solid organizational foundation. Not every tension in society or differences in electoral, social, cultural or mentality preferences can be considered as cleavages. A central problem in their research remains their analysis in a dynamic perspective. Simon Bornschieer, for instance, reviews some approaches on the stability of party systems defined by historical cleavages and on the extent that these cleavages persist in Western European societies.⁵ A first approach, usually shared by those who emphasize the

4 S. Bartolini and P. Mair, *Identity, competition, and electoral availability. The stabilization of European electorates 1885-1985*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

5 S. Bornschieer, 'Cleavage Politics in Old and New Democracies', *Living Reviews in Democracy*, 2009, https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/specialinterest/gess/cis/cisdam/CIS_DAM_2015/Work-

role of socio-structural determinants (class, religion, rural-urban residence) on electoral behavior, is that the relationship between certain segments of society (e.g. social classes) and parties representing their interests have been set in the process of party system formation and have remained largely unchanged, the groups divided by cleavages supporting the same parties generation after generation. Explaining the relative stability of party systems in this way is rather unrealistic, given the important changes in occupational structures, religious beliefs and demographic mobility. Such a hypothesis of “freezing” would be correct only if the society itself would have been “frozen”. A version of this approach focuses on the persistence of divisions between parties beyond the conflicts that have given rise to them, thus explaining the stability of party systems formed by historical cleavages. In this reading, historical cleavages involve collective political identities and organizational loyalties that determine individual political behavior and are not easily broken down or diluted by new political movements. The validity of these approaches has been questioned in the last decades of the 20th century, when new conflicts of values have arisen on the political arena in advanced industrial democracies, disrupting traditional cleavages. Another type of theory focuses on this new reality and is based on the concepts of *political alignment* and *re-alignment*. It claims that modernization leads to changes in the social structure where the old cleavages were anchored. For example, the emergence of a post-industrial economy has led to a decline in the traditional working class, while secularization has led to a decline in the number of religious attendants in Western European countries. The party system becomes less rooted in the social structure than a few decades ago, the predominant alignments defined by the old cleavages have weakened and we are witnessing the establishment of new links between social groups and political parties. In Daniel Bell’s argument, for example, the “post-industrial” society brings with it a new middle class (“white collar” employees, civil servants), surpassing the Marxist dichotomy of the owners/workers.⁶ The new middle class is the key element in understanding the changes in po-

ingPapers/Living_Reviews_Democracy/Bornschiefer.pdf [2018-05-04].

6 D. Bell, *The Coming of Post-industrial Society*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.

litical alignment in advanced industrial democracies, which not support unconditionally the right or the left parties, and which is more receptive and concerned with post-materialist themes and new ideologies such as ecology.

Another controversial issue is the application of Western European specific cleavages, where national and industrial revolutions have produced profound transformations with a long-lasting impact on party systems, outside this area. In particular, can the paradigm of the four fundamental cleavages theorized by Stein Rokkan explain the emergence and development of party systems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe for example? Researchers' responses vary, from the transposition of Rokkanian paradigm to the social and political realities of this part of the continent, to the argumentation that the communist regime, the 1989 revolutions and the transition to democracy have produced in the former communist countries their own cleavages whose validity persists more or less in time. In an extensive study, entitled "Can we apply Rokkan's cleavages to Central Europe?", published in the early 2000s, Daniel-Louis Seiler take into consideration two working hypotheses: 1. including in the analysis the party systems which, at the fascist and then communist turn, could be read through the four cleavages defined by Rokkan; and 2. considering the double transition process (towards communism, followed by the return to democracy) as a revolution in Rokkan's meaning. As regards the first hypothesis, the author advocates for prudence in using the Rokkan's model outside the cultural area of Western Europe and highlights the diversity of Central Europe or "the other Europe", the "second lung of Europe" (paraphrasing the words of Pope John Paul II, who invites the Church to breathe with both lungs: the Western and the Oriental traditions). If some countries or regions of this space have come closer to the Western development model, others have been characterized by the shift from post-slavery agrarian systems to "real socialism", poor associative traditions, or autocephalous church obedient to political power. Referring to the second hypothesis, Seiler points out that it would be stupid and unprofessional to regard the almost fifty years of the communist regime just as a parenthesis, as if nothing had happened, since the mentalities, the cul-

ture, the ethos of the individuals, the social structure has undergone dramatic changes.⁷

By focusing on the Romanian case, we will try a brief analysis of the cleavages before the establishment of communism, but also of those that emerged after its collapse, as results of this regime and/or of the process of transition to democracy. In an essay dedicated to post-communist cleavages, Stephen Whitefield notes that the existence of political cleavages in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism depends substantially on how the concept is defined, and that the authors who consider cleavages as absent or weak in this region use a rigorous definition.⁸ The perspective of this paper is to use Rokkan's typology as a reference point, to analyze the extent to which it has a descriptive capacity for Romanian space, and even if losing the rigor of definition, to refer to the tensions and divisions which, although not necessarily leading to the emergence of political parties, have the potential to shape the political action.

2. Political cleavages in pre- and post-communist Romania

Underdeveloped and overwhelming peasant country, Romania has undergone in the nineteenth century a modernization process subordinated to the achievement of national objectives. In the decade after the adoption of the 1866 Constitution (a bourgeois document prepared for a country with a quasi-absent bourgeoisie), the peasantry represented over 80% of the population, the situation remaining almost unchanged in the following century, after the building of the national state: in 1930, city residents represented about 20% of the total population. Despite the impressive development of some industrial branches (mining, oil, metallurgy), in 1939, 78% of the active population relied on agriculture as a source of income and only 10% of it was employed in industry. In these conditions, the role of agriculture in the national

7 D.L. Seiler, 'Peut-on appliquer les clivages de Rokkan a l'Europe Centrale?', in: J.-M. De Waele (ed.), *Parties politiques et démocratie en Europe centrale et orientale*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002, pp. 115-144.

8 S. Whitefield, 'Political Cleavages and Post-Communist Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2002, <http://polisci.annualreviews.org> [2018-05-16].

economy and as determinative of social relations, its relations with the industry, the necessity (or not) of industrialization and urbanization as solutions for the development of the national economy and the amplitude of these processes, the connection of the country to Europe through “the import”, more or less critical, of Western development models or, on the contrary, the emphasis on the maintenance of social structures and traditional cultural values, all these issues have been at the heart of a debate of ideas involving sociologists, economists, writers, politicians, and which lasted from the mid-nineteenth century to the World War II.

The debate was not just an intellectual exercise, it moved into the field of political competition with the founding and development of political parties. The Conservative and the Liberal parties have structured the political life of the country until the First World War. As Keith Hitchins remarked, “...agrarian economic interests and traditional social values have been reflected in the policy of conservative governments, while the Liberal Party, which represented the growing middle class in industry and commerce, tried to impose the construction of a national economy inspired by the Western model”⁹ We can say that Romania has developed, like other East-Central European countries, a rural-urban cleavage that organizes the political competition until the establishment of the communist regime. In the interwar period, after the dissolution of the Conservative Party, the peasants’ interests were taken over by the National Peasant Party, which proposed the creation of a peasant state meant to promote the aspirations of the vast majority of population, namely the peasantry. The party that would meet the needs of the peasants would be, in its founders’ vision, different from bourgeois or socialist political structures. The program of the National Peasant Party (resulting from the fusion, in 1926, of the National Party from Transylvania led by Iuliu Maniu with the Peasant Party from Moldavia and Wallachia headed by Ion Mihalache) brought together conservative ideas (private property as a source of material and moral life, the appeal to tradition, the peasant state, rural democracy, the reaction to industrialization) and those related to the sup-

9 M. Bărbulescu, D. Deletant, K. Hitchins, Ș. Papacostea, P. Teodor, *Istoria României* [The History of Romania], Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, p. 395.

port of small peasant farms and co-operatives as a counterweight to the capitalist financial structures. The Peasant Party has dominated, together with the Liberal Party, the political life of the interwar period, fully committed to increasing the economic and political power of peasants and to maintaining parliamentary democracy. According to Corneliu Coposu, deputy secretary general of the party during the interwar years, in 1945 (the year of coming into power, with the Soviet support, of a government dominated by communists), the Peasant Party counted 2.125.000 members.¹⁰

With the full establishment of the communist regime, the efforts to flatten and to equalize the society and to destroy the previous structures included the collectivization of agriculture and the abolition of peasant properties. The peasant elite was sent to prison or labor camps and the industrialization and urbanization processes, through the absorption of the rural labor hand, gradually changed the structure of the population in favor of the city. If, after two decades of communist regime, the urban population reached 38% of the total, at the time of the regime's collapse, the report was modified in favor of the city: according to the first post-communist census from 1992, 54% of the Romanians lived in the urban environment, 46% in rural areas and only 35% of the active population was still involved in agriculture.¹¹

Immediately after the fall of communism, parties with a rural speech have appeared (or re-emerged) to defend peasants' interests: the National Peasant Christian Democratic Party (PNTCD), the successor of the National Peasant Party and the Democratic Agrarian Party (PDAR), with an agrarian doctrine, have been established since January 1990. Both have played, in a very different proportion, a role in the first post-communist decade. The PNTCD, with a modest start at the first elections in May 1990 (approximately 2.5% of votes), becomes the main ruling party within the Democratic Convention between 1996-2000, while PDAR remains within 2-3% (but holding the Minister of Agriculture's portfolio in the first two post-communist governments) and ceases to exist in 1998 when it merges with the New Romania Par-

10 C. Coposu, *Confesiuni. Dialoguri cu Doina Alexandru* [Confessions. Dialogues with Doina Alexandru], second edition, Bucharest: Vremea Publishing House, 2014.

11 O. Vaida, 'Clivaje politice în România post-comunistă' [Political cleavages in post-communist Romania], *Sfera Politicii* [The Sphere of Politics], nr. 123-124/2006.

ty. The PNTCD supports, in the new context of the early 1990s, the idea of restitution of peasant properties, according to the principle of “*restitutio in integrum*”, where possible, or the right to compensation in other cases. The efforts of PNTCD deputy Vasile Lupu in this respect are well-known. He contested the Land Fund Act, adopted in 1991 (Law 18/1991) by the ruling party (The Front of National Salvation – FSN, heritor of the former Communist Party), and which reconstituted the peasants’ ownership of an area of their land limited to 10 hectares, proposing a new law, systematically postponed from the debate. Only in the early 2000s, a new law, that symbolically bears his name (“Lupu Law” – Law No.1/2000), increased the returned area to 50 hectares, but its application was made difficult by the reconstitution of former properties on the same sites and the issue of property titles. The return of the lands, even partially, made by the post-communist government, a fact associated with the image of Ion Iliescu, the new elected president and his charisma in the village world, have contributed to the FSN’s massive support in rural areas from the beginning. This electoral support has been transferred to its main successor, the ruling Social-Democratic Party (PSD), which gathers most of the votes in a depopulated, aging and deprived environment, dependent on social benefits and state subsidies. On the other hand, the PNTCD, associated with an anti-communist message, was voted by the young urban and more educated people, but has paid the lack of expected performance, in 1996-2000, when they were in government, being practically eliminated from the political arena.

The existence of a cleavage between rural and urban Romania has often been the subject of political speeches, but, in contrast to other former communist countries (Poland is often quoted as an example of a pronounced transposition of this cleavage on the political field, especially through the Polish Peasant Party, but also the Baltic countries¹²), in post-communist Romania the representation of the rural electorate did not fall under the responsibility of a peasant party, but of a social-democratic one.

The rural-urban cleavage has primarily an economic nature, opposing the agrarian economic interests to industrial competition and

12 Vaida, *op. cit.*

originates in the industrial revolution, like the other one from Rokan's theory, between wealth holders and workers. Considered the central axis of the political opposition in the Western capitalist industrial society, laying the foundations for the distinction between the left (socialist) and the right (bourgeois, liberal, conservative), the owners-workers cleavage was, however, little visible in Romania. The left-wing parties, supported by urban workers, had a modest influence on the Romanian political life until the establishment of communism. Founded in 1893, the Social Democratic Party of Workers in Romania failed to impose itself too much until the First World War and to be a threat for well-grounded parties, and the dissensions within it even made some of its leaders to move to the National Liberal Party in 1900 (a fact known in historiography as "the generous' betrayal"). Nor between the two world wars did the Socialists and the Communists not attract consistent electoral support, their lack of efficiency being explained by the low percentage of the proletariat in the entire population, by the fact that they neglected national and religious traditions and, in the case of Communists, by the persecution from authorities. But, in the name of the cleavage between the proletariat and the "former exploiting classes" (small and middle bourgeoisie, wealthy peasantry, landowners, kulaks), the communists, after taking power, passed on reprisals against these "class enemies", sending them to the prisons and labor camps.

After the collapse of the communist regime, the owners-workers cleavage has taken, in the opinion of some authors, in the economically equalized societies of East-Central Europe, the particular form of conflict between maximalists and minimalists, in other words, between the partisans of rapid economic reforms ("shock therapy") and those of gradual reforms. For J.M. De Waele, for example, three issues separate maximalist parties from minimalist ones: the pace of reforms, their magnitude and the management of the social factor.¹³ However, the author points out that it would be wrong to conclude that the left is minimalist and the right maximalist (because reality is

13 J.-M. De Waele, 'Consolidation démocratique, partis et clivages en Europe centrale et orientale', in: J.-M. De Waele (ed.), *Parties politiques et démocratie en Europe centrale et orientale*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002, p. 153.

much more complex and right-wing parties can be on the minimalist slope, just as the left, we add, sometimes supports right-wing policies as the single tax rate), and that, over time, the tensions, more or less circumstantial, between maximalists and minimalists may turn into the classic cleavage “workers-possessors”. But, beyond the tensions or disputes about the pace of reforms, the economic transition in the former communist countries takes the form of “paradoxical capitalism,” in Daniel-Louis Seiler’s statement, in which “the old masters become the new possessors,” meaning that the exponents of the communist nomenclature are reconverting themselves in the economic field, they become managers, patrons, they are the new capitalists, and the old party-state turns into the new capitalist party.¹⁴

More consistency has had, in the Romanian space, the center-periphery cleavage, resulting from the process of nation-state formation, in which the central culture of the nation in formation has collided with the increased resistance of populations (distinct from ethnic, linguistic and/or religious point of view) from provinces/peripheries. In Seiler’s view, Transylvania is an emblematic case that verifies step-by-step the Rokkan’s conceptual model. Having “its own national revolution during the Reform”, Transylvania experienced a “profound pluralism – Hungarian rulers divided into Calvinists and privileged Catholic, Germans divided into Catholics and Lutherans, Calvinist Saxons with a Catholic minority, dominated Romanians divided into Orthodox and Greek-Catholics and, of course, Jews – that imposed a cohabitation between communities and a representative regime”.¹⁵ The representative practices – even if they were unfair (the Austro-Hungarian compromise in 1867 ruining the inter-communal balance) – did, however, at the time of the unification of provinces within the borders of the national state, that the political class possessing the culture and practices of representative democracy to be, primarily, the Transylvanian one. With this moment, when the issue of administrative, economic and cultural management of the new state was raised, the dominant cleavage becomes another, that between the “national”

14 Seiler, ‘Peut-on appliquer...’, p. 160.

15 Ibid., p. 159.

(patriotic) parties and the Communist Party (the only internationalist and anti-national party, in fact a branch of Komintern).

Transylvania is, in the conceptual map of Rokkan, “a buffer-periphery between the East and the West”, a feature that is still preserved and reflected, among others, in terms of the distribution of electoral preferences. The difference between Transylvania and the rest of the country has been visible since the first presidential election in May 1990, became as clear as possible in the presidential elections in 1992 (when, excepting Maramures and Hunedoara counties, Ion Iliescu did not get the majority of votes in any other county in Transylvania), while in 1996 Transylvania decided the results of the elections in the whole country. The difference was maintained in the second and the third post-communist decades, the right-wing parties and their presidential candidates (Traian Basescu, Klaus Iohannis) winning most of the votes in Transylvania.

But the clearest form of the cleavage between the unifying center, represented by the national state, and the peripheries, calling for decentralization and autonomy has been expressed, after the fall of communism, not only in Romania, but also in the other countries of the region with important ethnic minorities, in the appearance of the parties representing the interests of these minorities. The Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (UDMR) is a political organization that supports the interests of the Hungarian community, minority concentrated in Transylvania (counting, according to the 2011 census, 6.5% of the whole population and over 19% of Transylvania's). The Union's objectives are the encouragement of the decentralization process, the application of the principle of subsidiarity, “the realization of the process of cultural autonomy for the small communities and the self-determination for the ethnic Hungarians in the regions in which they live mostly”. The political reflection of UDMR, on the centralist side of the cleavage, emerged shortly, in March 1990, under the name of the National Union of Romanians in Transylvania (renamed as Romanian Nation Unity Party – PUNR), a defender of the centralized national state and of the majority culture, but in reality also a regional party, having the electoral base in Transylvania. Also, the Great Romania Party (PRM), born of the old communist apparatus, promoting the nostalgia for this regime and a nationalist, anti-European, anti-justice, anti-Semitic, anti-Hungarian discourse, is on

the same side. These parties have taken different paths: reaching the apogee of its electoral success in the 2000 legislative elections, when it gains more than 20% of votes, and its presidential candidate reaches round 2, the PRM no longer acquires parliamentary representation since 2008 and is faced with the difficulty of surviving to the death of his leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor in 2015. The PUNR, with some electoral success in the first post-communist decade (about 8% of the votes in the 1992 general elections and 4.5% of those in 1996) disappears from the political scene in 2006, fusing with the Conservative Party. In exchange, UDMR, having behind the votes of the Hungarian minority, passed all post-communist electoral tests, and from 1996 until 2016 it was part of the majority of the governments that have succeeded in leading the country.

The Romanian legislation has practically obstructed the establishment of regional/local parties, the law of political parties, in force until 2015, imposing the condition of 25.000 founding members, residing in at least 18 counties and Bucharest, but not less than 700 persons in each of these counties and the municipality of Bucharest (article 19, paragraph 3). Often criticized, it was replaced in 2015 by a law requiring only three founding members to set up a political party and whose effects were felt by the appearance of many local/regional parties. In the future, they could represent an alternative to existing national parties, whose failure to represent the electorate is attested by the continued decline in voter turnout and the dynamics of its choices, namely the frequent change of preferences, caused by dissatisfaction, from a party to another.

If the center-periphery cleavage found its political articulation in the Romanian space, the one between the church and the state, resulted also from the process of building the modern state, in Rokkan's words the "the conflict between the nation-state, centralizer, standardizer and mobilizer and the corporate privileges historically consecrated by the church"¹⁶ remains rather absent. The fact is explained by the different nature of the church-state relationship in the Orthodox countries by comparison with the Catholic ones, where this cleavage has led to the birth of powerful Christian-Democratic parties. To the

16 Lipset and Rokkan, *op. cit.*

Romanian Orthodox Church “it was not given to cross modernity in opposition to the state, but was modeled by it. First, the liberal state gave its autocephaly, unity through patriarchy, and domination over the other denominations”, and later, the totalitarian state exempts it “from the dangerous competition, as it unfolded on the ground of the national merits, of the Greek Catholic Church, guaranteeing its security in exchange for a partial withdrawal from the public sphere”.¹⁷ After the collapse of the totalitarian regime, the confidence at high levels that the church enjoyed and still enjoys among the public opinion (we could say without too much exaggeration that this trust is inversely proportional to that one in the rule of law institutions such as the government, parliament, political parties) did not materialize in the appearance of a powerful Christian Democratic Party (despite the PNTCD’s claims of belonging to this doctrine). The moral-religious themes were and are run by the parties of the moment, the most recent and contradictory – the traditional family (redefinition of family as being based on the marriage between a man and a woman, not between husbands, as the Constitution stipulates now) and civil partnership (as a form of legally recognized same-sex union) – camouflaging populist temptations under the masks of traditionalism or progress and diverting attention from governance issues. Thus, Romania still lives “the paradox of being mostly religious, without this social reality always being reflected in political decisions. From abortion-friendly legislation to the denial of religion in public schools, from the miserable salary of clergy, irrespective of confession, to the issue of postponing the restitution of property confiscated by communist power, there are enough chapters where the political class shows either incompetence or indifference, cynicism or all together”.¹⁸

Let us also say that, beyond the attempt to transpose, in one form or another, the classical theory of Rokkan on Romanian realities, briefly undertaken here, the literature on political cleavages in post-communist societies in general and Romanian one in particular, highlights the

17 D. Barbu, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă* [The Absent Republic. Politics and Society in Post-communist Romania], Bucharest: Nemira, 1999, p. 255.

18 R. Preda, ‘Ortodoxia și democrația postcomunistă. Cazul românesc’ [Orthodoxy and post-communist democracy. The Romanian case], in: C. Ungureanu (ed.), *Religia în democrație. O dilemă a modernității* [Religion in democracy. A dilemma of modernity], Iași: Polirom, 2011, p. 349.

fact that, with the collapse of the communist regime (which tried to abolish the differences between social classes), the cleavage that is born in the former popular democracies is communist/anticommunist. It is manifested, with more or less vigor, from one country to another, and opposes the hereditary parties of the communist regime to the parties born out from the opposition to this regime.¹⁹ In Romania, it is often considered the founding cleavage of the post-communist politics, opposing the political party born around Ion Iliescu and other former members of the communist party/former communist nomenclature, to the democratic opposition, made by old (PNTCD, PNL, PSDR) and new political parties and civic organizations. Other approaches are seeing in the opposition between former communists and anticommunists “a superficial tension into Romanian society”, since “the exclusive identification of a party with the coagulation of the remnants of the old regime is impossible”.²⁰ From my point of view, even if it did not turn into a proper cleavage, losing its validity with the passing of time, the communist/anti-communist opposition structured the political competition in the first post-communist decade and it was the coagulating factor of the Democratic Convention of Romania, as an alternative to the National Salvation Front.

In contrast to other countries of the former Soviet bloc, Romania missed a real lustration and de-communization in the first post-communist decade, despite attempts from civil society to do so. Avoiding to confront its past, not dealing with its demons, Romanian society will have to deal with them in the future.²¹ This is very visible today, when, almost three decades after the fall of communism, new important names of supposed collaborators of former communist secret police agency (*Securitate*) still appear, and the guilt of the December 1989 Revolution “file” is still investigated. *Securitate* continues to be, in one form or another, at certain intervals, a topic of debate on the public arena, from the “privatization of communism” for their own use

19 De Waele, op. cit., p. 156.

20 C. Preda and S. Soare, *Regimul, Partidele și Sitemul Politic din România* [The Regime, the Parties and the Political System from Romania], Bucharest: Nemira, 2008, p. 148.

21 D. Deletant, ‘Confruntarea cu trecutul comunist. Democrația și lustrarea în România’ [Confronting the communist past. Democracy and lustration in Romania], *Revista* 22, 24 September 2008, <https://www.revista22.ro/confruntarea-cu-trecutul-comunist-brdemocratiea-si-lustratia-in-romania-4837.html> [2018-06-06].

made by its former members, to the discourses about the new and the old members of this secret service, indicating an unresolved problem of transition. Moreover, it is invoked today also in the speeches of the leaders of the governmental alliance about the “deep, underground and invisible state” and about “the abuses of justice”, incarnation of new and old *Securitate*; a *deep state* that has become the slogan of populist leaders, not just in Romania.

Conclusions

The authoritarian-democratic cleavage, identified by J.M. De Waele in the early 2000s as “the contemporary expression of the historical conflict between traditionalists and Westerners”, opposing “nationalist and populist parties for which the defense of national identity and specificity is a priority in relation to democratic functioning of the institutions” to those favorable to political and economic modernization, Europeanization and Westernization of political systems and to the fast adhesion to the European Union²² seems to embody today the reinvigorated form of the cleavage between populism/illiberalism, on the one hand, and liberal democracy, on the other, and not only in the East-Central Europe. The attack to the constitutional foundation of the rule of law and to the values of liberal democracy, manifested by actions such as blocking the judiciary, capturing the press, discrediting civil society (which does not have to do with the *real people*, being controlled by foreign forces), the mass clientelism (offering material or immaterial favors in return for political support) etc., became the “unofficial ideology” of the political regime established in Romania in December 2016, in Hungary or Poland even earlier. Today, we are witnessing a recession of democracy that affects not only East-Central Europe and Western Europe (the strengthening of populist/extremist parties in several countries, Brexit, Italian elections, Catalan separatism, etc. are its manifestations), but also Turkey, Russia or the USA. After velvet revolutions, we now have velvet dictatorships, as Adam Michnik remarks, and this new phenomenon, indicating a crisis of representative democracy and including elements of com-

22 De Waele, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

munism, fascism and populism, is also linked with globalization and Europeanization, which dealt a blow to national identities and other forms of identity. What would it do in the face of these trends and new realities? Hannah Arendt, says Michnik, has taught us to not be afraid of truth, to think freely, to take risks, because no one can enslave us without our permission.²³ This was one of the lessons of the success of 1989 anti-communist revolutions, and today is our hope for a democratic community capable of embracing everyone (“including those who now side with authoritarian tendencies, but who may decide to participate in future public life by respecting the rules laid out in a democratic constitution”).

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23 A. Michnik, *From Velvet Revolution to Velvet Dictatorship. Reflections on Democratic Regression*, 2018, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2018/05/from-velvet-revolution-to-velvet-dictatorship/> [2018-06-26].

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