

## ROMANIAN PEASANTRY AND BULGARIAN AGRARIANISM IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD: BENCHMARKS FOR A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*This article is a comparative study that attempts to highlight the similarities and differences between Bulgarian agrarianism and Romanian peasants during the Interwar period, the Second World War and period of transition towards the Leninist-Stalinist totalitarian regimes. The objectives of our approach are integrated within the boundaries of the main research directions and concrete levels, namely: the general context from the two countries, early agrarian/peasants' movements, the political program, election results, the promotion of certain legislative measures, and the relationship with other political and institutional entities. Without trying to offer an exhaustive view or reveal new aspects in the strict sense of the term, our contribution confronts, in a coherent whole, a series of data and information on the basis of which one could make value judgments. These judgments might help to shape a global, comparative image. Among the main sources of the article we included the monographic works signed by Ioan Scurtu, Pamfil Șeicaru, Apostol Stan, Dimitrina Petrova, John D. Bell, R.J. Crampton, supplemented by data from several other publications (encyclopedias, syntheses etc.).*

*One can identify several distinct stages within the period under review (1918-1947).*

*The broad picture is that the Bulgarian agrarian group was more popular and better organized than its Romanian counterpart, but more inclined towards Leftism and*

*authoritarianism, which led to its political isolation in 1923 and subsequent fragmentation, whilst the Romanian peasants' movement managed, after 1924, to remain at the forefront of the political scene, showing an interest for dialogue and sometimes for compromise, first with The National Party, then with the authoritarian monarchy, but also with the Antonescu regime and, to a lesser extent, with the communist regime.*

**Keywords:** general framework, program, elections, legislative measures, external relations.

## 1. Introduction

During Interwar years, the agrarian parties (peasants' parties) were by no means a negligible political reality in Central and Southeastern Europe. In itself, agrarianism (peasants' parties) did not achieve a similar degree of systematization and coherence as other doctrines and political orientations: liberalism, conservatism, socialism etc. Without being an exhaustive analysis, this article intends to draw up a comparison between the evolution of Romanian Peasants' parties and Bulgarian Agrarians for nearly three decades, from the end of the First World War until the establishment of totalitarian Leninist-Stalinist regimes.

In one of his monographs, dedicated to The National Peasants' Party, written before 1989 and later republished without major changes, Romanian historian Ioan Scurtu included some references regarding Romanian peasants' relations with Bulgarian agrarians and some sporadic comparative considerations about the two movements (1). Previously, another study on The National Party, The Peasants' Party and The National Peasants' Party had been published in exile by the great journalist Pamfil Șeicaru and then republished in Romania, in 2002 (2). Also after 1989, Apostol Stan published his monograph on the peasants' leader Ion Mihalache (1882-1963) (3). Among the many Bulgarian contributions about the agrarian movement or its dominant personality, Aleksandar Stamboliiski (1879-1923), the paper published in 1988 by Dimitrina Petrova (4) stands out. However, her approach is hindered by a double category of limitations: the fact that she only dealt with three years of agrarian government and the ideological constraints specific to the period when she wrote her study. Nevertheless, John D. Bell (5)'s study eliminated these shortcomings. Although it's not as extensive in length as the previous, it is very well documented and also analyzes the period 1899-1919. R.J. Crampton (6)'s study, published in 2009, deals with an even longer period since it also refers to the political and ideological legacy of Stamboliiski.

In our view, this microanalysis will focus on the following issues: the overall context from the two countries, the genesis of the agrarian/peasants' movements, the political program, the elections results, governmental activities and external relations.

## 2. Agrarian movements in Romania and Bulgaria during the interwar period

In the fall of 1918 both Bulgaria (defeated in the war) and Romania (allied of the victors) were faced with a precarious economic situation and an explosive socio-political context. Thus, Bulgaria's human losses amounted to 155,000 deaths in battle, almost the same number deaths because of diseases, and 400,000 wounded, in a country of 5-6 million inhabitants. A fifth of men aged between 20 and 50 had lost their lives (7) and the country had to bear the burden of more than 250,000 refugees (8). Romania's losses at the end of the war included 339,000 deaths, 200,000 seriously injured and 116,000 prisoners and missing, with additional civilian sufferings and immense damage to the national economy because of invading countries (railways, buildings, factories etc.) (9).

In such a context, this led to an increased popularity of Leftist forces. Thus, we can remark not only the rise of Socialists in Romania and an impetuous entrance of the Bulgarian Communists on the political scene (1919), but also, the spectacular revival of The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS), led by Aleksandăr Stamboliiski, and the creation of The Peasants' Party in Romania, on 5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> December 1918, which quickly became, under the leadership of Ion Mihalache, one of the most important political forces.

Besides some general, easy to notice, similarities between Bulgarian Agrarians and their counterparts, north of the Danube, there were, since 1918, major differences arising from different political contexts, socio-economic and cultural conditions separating the two Southeastern European constitutional monarchies, both with German dynasties on the throne.

The 1866 Constitution, amended in 1879 and 1883, included a series of civil rights and liberties but it left many responsibilities for the monarch (a king from 1881), and the suffrage was censitary, organised on the basis of colleges (initially three, then four) (10). In rural areas, the main issue was the blatant inequality between the large and the small landowners, worsened by the leaseholders' conduct (the majority of whom were non-Romanian), who only wanted to maximize their profits. The inequalities between the categories of landowners continued to rise, reaching a climax in the first decade of the 20th century. Thus, in the eve of the 1907

revolt, almost a quarter of all Romanian peasants had no arable lands and one third owned less than three hectares per family (11). According to the 1912 Population Census, two thirds of those living in the countryside were illiterate, as opposed to a "mere" one third of illiterate city dwellers. The nationwide illiteracy rate was of 60.7% (12).

In these circumstances, the trends and attempts to organize the Romanian peasants in a political party were spread over four decades (1878-1918) and shaped by numerous obstacles and setbacks. For 20 years (1878-1899), the teacher Constantin Dobrescu Arges (1856-1903) (13) was at the center of these efforts, followed by his brother-in-law, Alexandru Valescu, and Vasile M. Kogălniceanu until 1907, and, after 1913, by Ion Mihalache (14). Seemingly paradoxical, most of those who promoted Romanian peasants' parties originated from the northern and hilly regions of Oltenia and Wallachia (the counties Arges, Muscel and Gorj), regions with a large rural middle class, where the violent peasant movements that shook Romania between 1888 and 1907 were somewhat milder.

The Turnovo Constitution, enacted in 1879, was profoundly democratic but this fact did not stave off authoritarian governments or violent internal political confrontations. The land distribution was quite equitable but the excessive taxation, the agricultural ineffectiveness of small lots, the technological backwardness, the lack of capital and the activity of extortioners, the low productivity, they all made a difference (15). Nonetheless, the cultural and literacy levels were higher in Bulgaria as the primary and secondary school systems were unmatched elsewhere in Southeastern Europe (16).

The genesis of The Bulgarian Agrarian Union (1899; since 1901 The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union-BZNS), transformed into a political party in 1906, consisted in merging several groups that were acting independently during the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of Jordan Pekarev in the Varna area, Dimităr Dragiev in the Stara Zagora area, of Janko Zabunov in the Pleven area etc (17).

Also, the two movements did not achieve similar political results at this stage. The Romanian Peasants were never able to win more than four seats in the lower house of the Parliament and after 1899 they didn't have any representatives there (18). On the other hand, BZNS was in 1908 the largest opposition party in Bulgaria, with 100,000 votes and 23 parliamentary seats (19).

Furthermore, the Romanian Peasants' ideology displayed a greater openness towards the Right of the political spectrum, which manifested as a respectful attitude in regards to the monarchy and the importance given to religion and the Church. Subsequently, some Peasants' leaders even joined The National Liberal Party (e.g. Al. Valescu) or, after 1918, The People's Party (V. M. Kogălniceanu).

The bloody events of 1913-1918 would favor the coagulation of the Peasants' Party in Romania and of BZNS's rise to power in Bulgaria. The Second Balkan War disrupted the public opinion in both countries. For Bulgaria, it was a serious warning, unfortunately ignored, concerning an aggressive and offensive foreign policy in the Balkans, whilst for the great mass of Romanian peasant soldiers, the contact with Bulgarian rural realities, devoid of blatant social inequality, was a real shock, which prompted the Liberals, who were in the opposition, to relaunch in October 1913, the idea of agrarian and electoral reforms, and when in power in January 1914, to initiate the proceedings related to these reforms (20).

Ion Mihalache, elected as president of the National Council of Teachers in the December 1913 (21), viewed Bulgaria as a model in terms of the land tenure system and agrarian relations, but did not ignore the adventurous policy pursued by the Sofia government (22), openly and strongly criticized by Al. Stamboliiski (BZNS leader, since 1911) who, after the outbreak of the First World War, advocated the granting of territorial advantages in Macedonia and Southern Dobrudja by means of a favorable neutrality towards the Entente, not by an alliance with the Central Powers (23). King Ferdinand and the Vasil Radoslavov government would choose, after a year of deliberations exactly the opposite path; following a savory, casual and well-known exchange of words with the sovereign (24), Stamboliiski was sent to prison, his life being in permanent danger for three years. In the years 1916-1918, Ion Mihalache was also in imminent danger as a young, junior-ranking Romanian officer on the battlefield, convinced by the justice of his country's war, but also by the necessity of establishing a peasants' party (25). Moreover, even during the war, in the summer of 1917, the Romanian Parliament, which took refuge in Iassy, adopted the constitutional amendments that made possible major social and political reforms, namely the introduction of universal suffrage and land reform for peasants-soldiers, paving the way for the direct participation of peasantry in politics (26).

A few days before the armistice of Thessaloniki (September 29<sup>th</sup> 1918), Stamboliiski was released from prison, which meant that BZNS was *de facto* a legal movement again. He did not conceal his republican aspirations and was involved, shortly after his release from prison, in the military uprising from Radomir, whose main goal was the proclamation of the republic by overthrowing the entire dynasty, not only Ferdinand, considered however, by most Bulgarians, an ill-fated victim (27). On October 17<sup>th</sup> 1918, the Agrarians were included in the Al. Malinov government, as Ts. Tserkovski became the Minister of Public Works, then in the Teodor Teodorov government (November 28<sup>th</sup> 1918 – October 6<sup>th</sup> 1919), a conservative russophile, they would be better represented as Al Stamboliiski himself (Public Works), D. Dragiev

(Agriculture and Public Domains) and Ts. Tserkovski (Transport and Communications) also became ministers (28).

The demobilized reservist, Lieutenant Ion Mihalache was able to resume his political activity, in an expanded country after the union of Bessarabia (27<sup>th</sup> March/April 9<sup>th</sup>), Bukovina (15<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> November) and Transylvania (18<sup>th</sup> November/1<sup>st</sup> December) with the mother country during 1918. On December 5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> 1918, in Bucharest, there was the constituent congress of the Peasants' Party (a strong provincial peasants' party already existed in Bessarabia). On this occasion, an 11 points program-declaration was adopted, related exclusively to peasantry's issues such as the full ownership of all lands by peasants and, in return, reasonable compensations, or the restoration of ancient rights to use forests and pastures. Other claims were related to local and provincial autonomy, the enlightenment of villages, proportional taxation, the decentralization of cooperatives, Church autonomy, replacing the Gendarmerie, health service reforms and the punishment of those enriched during the war (29). The preamble of the document, highlighted the social importance of the peasantry, the workers and intellectuals were called to cooperate with the peasants "against the rule of the boyars and Bolshevism" (30). For a while, in 1919, the name "Peasants' and Workers' Party" was also used, informally, as propaganda; the party's electoral symbol was the sickle (31).

This direction was re-affirmed at the General Congress from 20-21 November 1921, when the merger with The Peasants' Party of Bessarabia, Pantelimon Halippa - C. Stere wing was validated and a more coherent program was adopted. The document criticized the "capitalist imperialism", "class struggle" was considered a reality, and the general view was that given the particular conditions from Romania, it was the great mass of peasants' task to eliminate this social system, which, together with the urban working class, would advance on a "third path", namely "the cooperative peasantry" (32), subsequently theorized by Virgil Madgearu (1887-1940). Referring to the slogan of "class struggle" Stamboliiski also disassociated himself from communists, accusing them of narrow-mindedness and superficiality. According to the Bulgarian Agrarian leader, antagonisms between occupational groups were stronger than differences in wealth, at least in his country, where, he argued, large landowners were scarce, unable to endanger the homogeneity of peasantry (33). Therefore, Romanian Peasants' movement members treated the industrialization and industrial workers problems rather differently, whereas Bulgarian Agrarians, led by Stamboliiski, were reluctant towards the workers' "occupational group".

In a historical coincidence, at the end of 1919, both the Romanian Peasants' movement and the Bulgarian Agrarians were part of ephemeral coalition governments, which had the urgent task of signing unpopular international treaties in

the eyes of public opinion, namely The Minorities Treaty for Romania and the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine for Bulgaria. Having obtained the relative majority at the August 1919 elections, the Bulgarian Agrarians were the core of the coalition government between October 6<sup>th</sup> 1919- April 21<sup>st</sup> 1920, and Stamboliiski became the P.M., who after new elections and post-election maneuvering, formed a monochromatic agrarian government, which was in power for the next three years (34). At the November 1919 elections in Romania, The Peasants Party obtained 61 deputies and 28 senators, being defeated by The Romanian National Party (P.N.R), based in Transylvania (169 deputies and 76 senators), P.N.L. (103 deputies and 54 senators) and The Peasants' Party from Bessarabia, which hadn't yet disbanded (72 deputies and 35 senators) (35). A governmental coalition was formed, called "The Parliamentary Block", dominated by P.N.R, which also included The Peasants' Party from Bessarabia, the similar party from Old Kingdom, N. Iorga's National Democratic Party, The Democratic Union Party from Bukovina and The Labour Party (Dr. Nicolae Lupu); the government leadership went to Al. Vaida Voivod, The Peasants' Party obtained two portfolios (Agriculture with Ion Mihalache and Public Instruction, with the zoologist Ion Borcea) and The Bessarabian Peasants' Party, three, namely the Ministry of Justice, with Ion Pelivan, and two posts of Minister of State for Bessarabia, with P. Halippa and Ion Inculeț (36).

The government was in power between December 1<sup>st</sup> 1919 and March 12<sup>th</sup> 1920. It's dismissal was due to King Ferdinand' dissatisfaction (1914-1927) towards a series of legislative initiatives (the Mihalache project for land reform and N. Lupu's proposals for the mandatory rental of vacant houses and reducing the responsibilities and numbers of the Gendarmerie) considered as Leftist by the sovereign; some suspicions were also stirred by establishing diplomatic contacts with the Soviets (37).

Mihalache's project for agrarian reform was halfway between the plans of past and future governmental leaders from Bucharest, on the one hand, and the ideological vision of the Bulgarian Agrarians, on the other hand, and was inspired by legislation adopted in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In essence, Ion Mihalache's project, remained in draft form (except for Bessarabia), provided that large estates would be limited to 100 hectares, except for those where modernizing investments had been made. For these, the maximum limit was of 250 hectares in populated areas, and 500 hectares in settlement areas. In order to promote efficient agriculture, it also proposed to encourage the establishment of cooperatives and model allotments, managed by industrious peasants (38). On the eve of the fall of the government, the land reform was enacted in Bessarabia and this sanctioned, *post factum*, the liquidation of big land properties in the province, which happened *de facto*, in the years 1917-1918; before the Russian Revolution, in Bessarabia, 95% of the villagers were totally or almost totally deprived of land, while 0.35% of them had a third of the

total agricultural area, and 4.5% around 60% (39). After the revolutionary turmoil of 1917-1918, the situation now became legal.

One of the causes that led to the fall of the first Al. Vaida Voevod government was the fact that it no longer had the king's support. The king's new attitude toward the party was influenced by a radical law project, initiated by dr. N. Lupu, which sought to make it compulsory for urban house owners to rent extra rooms, at prices considered reasonable (40). In this respect, the Stambolyiski government went even further, adopting, *de jure*, in June 1920, the Turlakov law, which stipulated, right from its title, the possibility of expropriating some dwellings for public interest, in emergency situations; still, the law itself and its implementation were not as radical as its title (41).

In March 1920, the Romanian government was entrusted by the king to The People's Party, whose founder, General Al. Averescu (1859-1938), became president of the Council of Ministers, a position he would hold until December 1921; V.M. Kogălniceanu, now member in this new party, was appointed in July 1921 to read before The Assembly of Deputies, elected in May 1920, the agrarian reform project, which would also be adopted. The act, designed by Constantin Garoflid, set a 500 hectares limit for large estates and a 5 hectares minimum area for a viable farm (42). Thus, the most significant land reform in Southeastern Europe was enacted, which allotted six million hectares of arable land to 1.4 million peasant families. However, the law enforcement was slow and incomplete, and 600,000 families of the 2,005,477 entitled to allotment, did not benefit of their legal rights (43).

On May 12<sup>th</sup> 1921, a land reform was enacted in Bulgaria too, on a smaller scale (there wasn't much land available anyway), and about 330,000 hectares, belonging to the state, local authorities and monastic establishments, were distributed to a total of 64,000 families from within the country and 28,500 families of refugees from Macedonia, Thrace and Dobrudja (44). As a result of these measures, in Bulgaria, in the mid-1920s, 57% of Bulgarian agricultural holdings were smaller than 5 hectares and 28%, between 5 and 10 hectares (45).

Comparing Ion Mihalache's and Stamboliiski's views on the agrarian reform, we notice a different attitude toward the Church and clergy. I. Mihalache, a devout Orthodox Christian, believed that churches would become future micro-farms, where faith in God might spur work and good management (46). Thus, according to the reform of March 1920, in Bessarabia each monastery had 50 hectares of arable land, vineyards and gardens in addition to those already in their possession, and the churches, had "full allotment" (6-8 hectares) for each cleric (priest, parish clerk or deacon) (47). Al. Stamboliiski more skeptical about religion and prone to pragmatic and worldly things, made monastic areas the main targets of his program of

expropriation; he acknowledged the positive historical role of the Bulgarian Orthodox clergy for the Bulgarian revival, but probably influenced by Ernest Renan, he accused contemporary priests of undermining the authority of the teaching staff and lack of interest in people's concrete problems (48).

Compared to the Romanian Peasants' movement in first third of 1920's Stamboliiski was more preoccupied by the issue of agricultural land consolidation, strongly supporting the cooperative movement. As a result of this conduct, at the end of 1920, the cooperative associations membership reached 398,000, of which about 274,000 were conscripted into urban cooperative (trade, credit, handicraft production, services, etc.), and 124,000 into rural ones (agricultural, forestry, vineyards and wine etc.). In 1923, there were about 2,300 cooperatives, grouped by specialization (49).

Other important measures of the Stamboliiski government targeted the legal system, which became more accessible to ordinary people, taxation (progressive income tax was a reality) and especially education (50). Schools were subordinated to local authorities, and the school curriculum promoted practical activities and refuted chauvinistic elements. About 300 primary schools and 800 secondary schools were built, since secondary education was now compulsory in Bulgaria (51).

A goal of the Leftist forces in the twentieth century was the promotion of women in public life. For Stamboliiskist Bulgaria the best known example is the rise of Nadeždei Stančova, the daughter of Dimităr Stančov (52), a diplomat, promoted as the official translator of the P.M. and the first female diplomat, similar to Alexandra Kollontay's case. In Romania, a similar policy consisted in granting conditional right to vote and to go to the polls for women in local and regional elections during the Iuliu Maniu government on the basis of the administrative law from August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1929, proposed by Ion Mihalache (53).

Military restrictions imposed on Bulgaria by the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine facilitated the imposition of measures targeting the replacement of regular army troops with a popular militia (a long-time agrarian goal), by creating working troops *trudovacii* (54). In Romania, at the 1921 and 1922 congresses, where the left wing was underrepresented, Romanian Peasants' supporters were not that vocal with their demands for the "democratization" of the army and of the Gendarmerie (55).

A goal of both movements, from Bulgaria and Romania, was the administrative decentralization. Curiously, Romanian agrarians also considered provincial autonomy (also on the basis of the law promoted by Mihalache on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1929 that would set up seven directorates: Muntenia, Oltenia, Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transylvania, Bukovina, Banat) (56), whilst Bulgarian agrarians only thought of local and regional autonomy. In Greater Romania, granting substantial autonomy could favor segregating, separatist and even hegemonic provincial attitudes and plans of national

minorities in the newly united provinces of the country, groups that had acquired, due to foreign domination, a superior material and cultural situation compared to that of the Romanian majority: the Hungarians in Transylvania, Russians in Bessarabia and Germans in Bukovina and Banat. Bulgaria, as a country defeated in war, did not face the problem of integrating new territories, the Turkish minority was in a precarious state, Jews and Greeks were few in number and dissipated, thus being unable to endanger the unity of the state.

In foreign policy, we can identify, for the period 1919-1923, some similarities between Romanian and Bulgarian Agrarians. The former sought to promote Romania's relations with former war allies and a policy of collaboration and, if possible, reconciliation with bordering states and the latter aimed to improve Bulgaria's situation by winning the goodwill of the victorious states and promoting a peaceful policy towards her neighbors. The attitude toward Soviet Russia suggested a slight difference, while Stamboliiski restored *de facto* Bulgarian-Soviet trade relations in 1921 (57), the "Parliamentary Block" government, led by Al. Vaida Voevod (November 1919 - March 1920) undertook negotiations with the Soviets, in order to settle the territorial *statu quo* on the river Dniester (Nistru) (58).

In essence, Stamboliiski's government inaugurated a policy of so-called "peaceful revisionism", which would be a feature of Bulgaria's diplomatic conduct throughout the interwar period, with some slight changes influenced by the European context (59). The head of the Bulgarian government made no secret of his desire to revise the Treaty of Neuilly, but he opposed the irredentist and militaristic trends and, especially Macedonian organizations (60), as he wanted to reconcile with the Yugoslav state, and his main territorial claim was related to access to the Aegean Sea, won in 1913 and lost in 1919.

World War I had not made the BZNS leader abandon his pacifist vision and Balkan-type federalist and internationalist aspirations. He supported the initiative of his Czech Agrarian counterpart, Antonin Švehla, of setting up an "A Green International", encompassing all agrarian parties from Eastern Europe. The project, launched in early 1921, failed because of the divergent positions of potential participants in national-territorial issues. For example, Croats wanted support for separation from the hegemony of Belgrade, and Romanians were suspicious, fearing Slavic domination (61).

The Romanian peasants' promoted an open doors policy in the face of foreign capital and Stamboliiski too, a convinced anti-industrialist, had no objections to the idea of systematic trade with industrialized Western European states (62).

The direct relationship between the two party leaders peasant was neither constant nor fruitful. In January 1921, during his visit in Bucharest, Al. Stamboliiski

discussed with V. Madgearu and I. Mihalache about the collaboration between the two parties. Upon returning home, the Bulgarian Agrarian leader stated, at Rusciuk, that he had reached an agreement with the two Romanian Peasants' leaders concerning the return of Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria. Although he later denied this statement, which, in all likelihood, was false, it led to serious accusations against The Peasants' Party from political opponents. It was suggested the Bulgarian leader, had bribbed the two peasants' leaders whom he had met (63). These allegations were essentially fantasies, but, during the interwar years, The Peasants' Party and, after 1926, The National Peasants' Party (PNȚ), by its Leftist wing, were, among the major Romanian parties, the most receptive to claims from Southern Dobrudjan Bulgarians (64).

As a result of the negative campaign initiated after the Mihalache-Madgearu-Stamboliiski discussions and the unexpected statements of the latter, The Peasants' Party adopted a more reserved attitude towards BZNS and its international initiatives. At the Bulgarian Agrarians Congress in June 1922, The Peasants' Party just sent a telegram, not a delegation (65). A few months later, the head of the Bulgarian government visited Romania for the second time (from 4<sup>th</sup> until 8<sup>th</sup> November 1922), but this time he did not meet with any peasants' leaders (66).

In domestic politics, Stamboliiski's attitudes, speeches and deeds were more aggressive towards left and right wing political opponents, compared with Romanian Peasants. Even if the general policy of the Bulgarian Agrarian government was not anti-urban, as one would be tempted to believe, judging solely by Stamboliiski's statements, more categorical than those of his Romanian and Serbian counterparts, it is still true that BZNS's popularity was reduced in cities where there were cores of communist parties and of traditional center or right wing parties.

A symptom of BZNS's aggressive policy (otherwise, Bulgarian politics did not excel in tolerance) was the establishment of "The Orange Guard", made up of peasants armed with clubs during street riots in the summer of 1919 as a shock force against communists, who made their impetuous entrance on the Bulgarian political scene (67).

Al. Stamboliiski's relationship with The Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) was quite changing and ambivalent. In the period October 1919 - May 1920, the Bulgarian agrarian leader preferred to seek an alliance with elements of the former regime (M. Madžarov, A. Burov, St. Danev), not with the Bolsheviks, and in spring 1920 he obtained an absolute majority in Parliament only after invalidating several BKP deputies, but a year later, after Lenin softened his attitude towards farmers, adopting NEP, the BZNS praised the Bolshevik revolution and talked about "the democratization" of Soviet Russia (68). In 1922, the communists backed the

authorities' campaign against elements of the former government, but relations again worsen with the spring elections of 1923, when the Agrarians got 54% of the votes and a clear majority in *Săbranje*, as a result of the distribution of votes system (69).

In Romania, although some serious social inequities persisted after enactment and implementation of the major reforms, the socialists only asserted an ephemeral political influence during the period 1919-1921, after which they divided into communists and social democrats, the former being outlawed in 1924 due to their position in the national issue.

In 1921 and 1922, when the communists' anti-national deviations were less obvious, Romanian agrarians condemned the measures of force adopted by Al. Averescu and Ion I. C. Brătianu governments, directed at them, fearing that they themselves might be the victims of such unconstitutional practices, in terms of guarantees of civil rights and liberties, especially since they were constantly accused of "Bolshevism" (70). "The Peasants' are, for now, with us in the fight against capitalist oligarchy", wrote in February 1922, Romanian communist leader Petre Constantinescu-Iași (71); otherwise, in Leninist theory and practice, "fellow travelers" (*paputniki*) had important roles, but then followed marginalization and elimination, and most Romanian Peasants' did not choose such a path.

Monarchy was also regarded differently by agrarians from the two banks of the Danube. For Stamboliiski, it represented a foreign institution, parasitic and resource consuming, whose influence should be minimum, waiting the right time for the proclamation of the republic. Romanian Peasants' saw in monarchy, not necessarily in King Ferdinand, clearly dominated by the Liberal leader Ion I.C. Brătianu, a possible counterweight to PNL.

In June 1923, following a bloody coup d'état, which was planned by right-wing political forces, regular army officers, Bulgarian-Macedonian irredentists, with the complicity of King Boris III (1918-1943) and the total neutrality of the communists, Stamboliiski government was overthrown and its leader killed. The sympathy of peasant masses did not prove sufficient to overcome political isolation.

In view of the available data, it seems very likely that irredentist Bulgarian-Dobrudjan groups were involved in the events of June 1923 (72). The researcher Blagovest Njagulov states that, in 1921, the Stamboliiski government did not express its protests concerning the confiscation of lands belonging to ethnic Bulgarians in the Quadrilateral, as a part of the Romanian agrarian reform, because these measures affected a social category that was doomed even according to the rhetoric of Bulgarian agrarians (73).

In June 1923, the classic Agrarian period ended in Bulgaria and was near the end in Romania. A period of about a quarter of a century of slow decline, punctuated

by some moments of partial or apparent revitalization, would follow. Despite the persistence of a solid popularity among the peasantry, and its collective memory, from a historical perspective the political fragmentation and the ideological change were dominant for Bulgarian and Romanian Agrarians during this period, in a general context that did not lack changes, some peaceful, others, the consequences of the Second World War and its outcome.

During the interwar years, Romania and Bulgaria were the least urbanized countries in Europe, with a rural population of about 80% in both countries around 1930 (74), but the potential and trends for industrialization and urbanization were more relevant for Romania, especially after the union with Transylvania, where the economic importance of Hungarians and Germans was superior to their demographic significance.

A number of statistical indicators of this period reveal the inferiority of agriculture in both countries, not only in relation to the domestic industry but also with Western European agriculture. Thus, in terms of statistics, a Balkan farmer produced food for only 1.5 individuals, while in the West the ratio was 1 to 4 (75).

In Romania, the implementation of the agrarian reform, enacted in 1921 had significantly improved the lives of many peasant families, contributing, consequently, to broaden the cultural horizon and increasing the interest in social and political life, but the fragmentation of land lots led to a considerable decrease of agricultural exports, the proportion of plant and animal elements in Romanian exports plummeted sharply between 1922 and 1934, from 80% to 46%, reaching 56% in 1938 (76).

Meanwhile, the trend of polarization of land holdings and the (re)-expansion of large farms restarted, at the expense of smaller farms, a phenomenon facilitated by a law issued in 1929, initiated by Ion Mihalache. Towards the end of the 1930's, the Romanian agriculture included 3,280,000 holdings, totaling 19.75 million hectares. Three quarters of these farms (2,460,000) were less than five hectares, the minimum area set in 1921. They amounted to 5,350,000 hectares, or 28% of arable land, as much as 12,200 farms that exceeded 100 hectares each, of which 2,700 were more than 500 hectares each; 610,000 agricultural properties, or 18.6% of the total, were less than one hectare (77).

In Bulgaria, the Stamboliiski reform and further developments, until 1946, suggest a continuing trend of fragmentation and of polarization, the latter manifested in the form of cooperatives. The number, total area and the proportion of properties less than 10 hectares steadily increased between 1926 and 1946 in parallel with the decrease of these indicators for properties larger than 10 hectares. For example, in 1926, there were 800 farms larger than 50 hectares, with a total of 85,000 hectares,

which represented 2% of total arable land. By 1934, this number had dropped to 500 holdings, with a total of 69,000 hectares or 1.6% of the total arable land and, until 1946, these indicators had reached 200, 29,000 and 0.7% (78). The cooperative movement also showed a rebound between 1934 and 1944 from 4,888 units with 836,742 members to 4,114, with 625,000 members, but the share of rural cooperatives remained constant at 77%, most of which dealt with trade (79).

While Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had a rate of 70-80% of the population employed in agriculture, in Hungary this indicator was 53% and in Czechoslovakia 38%. In 1920 just 31% of Germany's population and 42% of France's were concentrated in agriculture; since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century more than half of England's working population was engaged in non-agricultural activities (80). Agricultural overpopulation led to the phenomenon of labor surplus in rural areas, and, given the low level of mechanization, this situation revealed, *ipso facto*, the utopian character of visions and projects of a "Peasants' state". Half of Bulgarian and Romanian peasantry was used under its normal working capacity in the 1930's (81). Even in these conditions, between 1920 and 1940, Bulgaria's and Romania's productions of grain and potatoes have increased more, in terms of percentage, than their populations. For Bulgaria, these indicators were 53%, 187% and 25%, for Romania, the figures were 32%, 49% and 23% (82). Agricultural labor productivity was higher in Bulgaria (110\$ compared to 90\$ in Romania) (83).

The literacy rate in Greater Romania, in 1930, was 57.6%, whilst in 1934, in Bulgaria, the illiteracy rate was below 32%, and this phenomenon was more present among the Turkish-Muslim minority (84). During the period 1920-1934, both in Romania and in Bulgaria, the infant mortality decreased from 207 to 179 and from 160 to 144, for every one thousand newborns. Still, during 1935-1939 this indicator showed a slight increase in both countries, reaching 181 and 146 cases (85).

In these internal conditions, the evolution or involution of agrarian movements from both countries had several stages. A first stage starts with the fall of Stamboliiski in Bulgaria (June 1923) and ends with PNT's rise to power (November 1928), and is characterized for Bulgarian Agrarians by political fragmentation after the violent demise of the founder (and other leaders), and for the Romanian by ideological concessions under the leadership of Ion Mihalache, resulting in certain manifestations of dissent and political fragmentation.

The anti-agrarian repression from Bulgaria triggered on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1923, caused an atmosphere of almost civil war in the country. Not only Al. Stamboliiski and his brother, Vasil, were among the victims, both martyred on June 14<sup>th</sup>, but many other activists and their supporters, including over 20 MP's (Spas Duparinov, Krum Popov, Dimităr Kemalov, Stojan Kolučev etc.) (86). The beheaded Bulgarian Agrarian

movement split into three wings: “moderates” willing to cooperate with the Al. Tsankov government, “centrists” (Tsanko Tserkovski, Petăr Janev and Petko Petkov, who was assassinated, in April 1924), and “left” wing, inclined to cooperate with the communists (Dimităr Grančarov and Rajko Daskalov, who was assassinated in Prague in August, by a Macedonian agent) (87).

In September 1923 the agrarian-communist rebellion, with the epicenter in northwest, triggered new reprisals and violence, the death toll reaching 20,000, of which 4,200 were Macedonian activists (88). Under the Andrej Ljapčev government (1926-1931), there was a gradual normalization of the political life that allowed the emergence of several agrarian groups, of which the most important were *Pladne* (“Noon”, in English), which published the gazette with the same name and *Vrabča1* (“Sparrow”), named after the street in Sofia where it had his headquarters. The first group, with a left-wing orientation, included G. Vălkov and Georgi M. Dimitrov, in connection with Al. Obbov și Kosta Todorov, pro-Yugoslavians. The second group, with a slight right-wing orientation, was headed by Dimitar Gičev, with a B.A. in Theology, and the jurist Kosta Muraviev, Al. Stamboliiski’s nephew (89).

The events from Bulgaria did not go unnoticed north of the Danube. Initially, the Romanian Peasants’ movement condemned the coup d’etat from June 1923, criticizing the National Liberal government’s attitude, considered to be favorable to the coup (89), but on the long term they reflected upon the issue of leaving aside radical slogans and claims to avoid the perspective of political isolation (90). Coincidentally or not, I. Mihalache’s personality was going through a process of elevation/refinement. The Peasants’ leader, who had a certain complex related to culturally refined politicians, wanted to assimilate everything that was new, and started, among other things, to learn French, German and English, which he was finally able to speak quite good (91). Still, he did not give up the traditional peasant’s clothing, not even in official occasions, like the Polish agrarian leader, Wincenty Witos; Al. Stamboliiski, without excelling in elegance, preferred the modern Western suit, including a tie.

In 1924, the Romanian Peasants made a clear choice. They finally responded negatively in March to a communist proposal of setting up a “Workers’ and Peasants’ Block”, when Comintern was preparing an extensive destabilizing action throughout Southeastern Europe (92). The Romanian leaders claimed they did not want an internal revolution, nor did they desire a war with the capitalist Great Powers (93) and turned their attention toward the former government partners in 1919-1920, namely PNR, with which they reached an agreement in June on the basis of a ten points joint program: constitutional monarchy, a national solidarity centered around peasantry, national sovereignty, a foreign policy of friendship with former allies and peace with

its neighbors, a constitutional regime, fair elections, administrative decentralization, “a special concern for the army”. The economic policy would be based on: the promotion of cooperatives, the strengthening of industries complementary to agriculture, opening to foreign capital and developing labor laws (94). Based on this compromise, in October 1926, the two parties would merge, forming the PNȚ, with Iuliu Maniu as president. The compromise was disliked by some right-wing members from PNR, Stelian Popescu, Nicolae Iorga and Constantin Argetoianu leaving the party when the merger was imminent. The more radical elements from The Peasants’ Party also did not agree with the compromise, the most notorious case being that of Dr. Nicolae Lupu, who in 1927 formed a distinct Peasants’ Leftist party.

The Great Depression of 1929-1933 affected the Romanian and Bulgarian peasantry, because of the rapid collapse of crop prices and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of animal-based products. In these unfavorable international economic conditions, both in Romania and in Bulgaria, the Peasants, and the Agrarian faction *Vrabča1*, were part of government coalitions within heterogeneous entities, namely PNȚ and the “Popular Block”, which reached power when people’s expectations were high. Thus, PNȚ, where a certain fault line persisted between former nationals and peasants, with additional rivalries between Maniu and Vaida, rose to government in November 1928 and won the elections held next month with an overwhelming score of 77%, impossible to explain just by the fact that the party organized the elections (95). In Bulgaria, the “People’s Block”, a coalition of democrats, radicals, the liberal group Petrov, and *Vrabča1* won the parliamentary elections of June 18<sup>th</sup> 1931, defeating the ruling party, which organized them (96). Instead, at the elections held in Romania in July 1932 by the government Vaida-Voevod after the Argetoianu-Iorga government (April 1931-May 1932), PNȚ only won 40.3% of the votes, almost not reaching the 40 percent threshold needed to get the “majority bonus” prescribed by the electoral law of March 1926 (97).

If we analyze the composition of various national-peasants’ governments that were in power during November 1928-April 1931, it appears that the Peasants came second, despite having an equal number of portfolios as the nationals, but never holding the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, a position entrusted to I. Maniu, Al. Vaida Voevod and G. Mironescu, nor the Foreign Affairs Ministry (98). In Bulgaria, although *Vrabča* was the most important force in the “People’s Block”, gaining 69 seats in *Săbranje* (the Democrats had 43, the National Liberals 32 and the Radicals 8 out of 272), the Democratic Party had the main government role. It acted as the head of government, and Al. Malinov, then Nikola Mušanov were P.M.’s and they also had key ministries (Internal, Foreign Affairs, and Finance) and the Public Health ministry.

The agrarians got only three ministries: Agriculture with Gičev, Education with Muraviev and Public Domains with G. Jordanov (99).

Interestingly, during November 1928-April 1931, the National Peasants' governments did not even declaratively adopt a law on the conversion of agricultural debts (100), a first regulatory law in this regard being issued by the Iorga-Argetoianu government, followed by the Vaida government in 1933, and then by the Gh. Tătărescu government in 1934 (101). In Bulgaria too, "The People's Block" government issued such a law (102). In March 28<sup>th</sup> 1929 the cooperative law was issued, which reorganized the Chamber of Agriculture, the Rural House and other institutions (103), and on August 20<sup>th</sup>, the so-called "Mihalache law" on the selling of lands facilitated land transactions; an effect of this law was that between 1930 and 1941, the percentage of households with an area between 10 and 100 hectares fell from 7.6% to 6.4%, but their proportion from the total area increased significantly from 14 to 24% (104).

In the educational field, the P.N.Ț. government only managed to transform the Herăstrău and Cluj-Napoca Higher Schools of Agriculture into Academies for Advanced Economic Studies (105), so its performance was far from Stamboliiski's.

In the context of the economic crisis, both agrarian governments faced challenges from the monarchy and the communists.

The return of Charles II (b. 1894 -d. 1953) in the country, the cancellation of the January 4<sup>th</sup> 1926 decision concerning his removal from dynastic succession, and, finally, his proclamation as king by dethroning his under-aged son, Michael I (b. 1921) were conducted with the help of many personalities and groups, hostile to PNL, especially among PNȚ. However, one can identify a difference in attitude since Mihalache clearly expressed his view for a "restoration", while Maniu was rather elusive, trying to keep the impression of legality, but without opposing the coup d'état in any way (106). Meanwhile, the monarch manifested his authoritarian and hedonist nature and the attitudes towards him and his plans would lead the divisions, dissident groups within political parties, including in the PNȚ, where the Maniu - Vaida rivalry was speculated. Although N. Lupu, C. Stere and Grigore Iunian were all Leftist Peasants', they did not form a compact group, but, in February 1933, Stere's Democratic Peasants' Party, emerged from the PNȚ in 1930, merged with The Radical Peasants' Party, emerged from PNȚ in 1931, forming The Radical Peasants' Party under the leadership of Iunian, with pro-Charles II views, while N. Lupu, vehemently anti-Charles II, returned to PNȚ in March 1934 (107). The December 1933 elections revealed, on one hand, the "classic" fraud of the government party organizing the elections (PNL) and, on the other, the fragmentation of Romanian agrarianism. Thus, P.N.Ț. obtained 14% of votes and 29 mandates, PȚ - Lupu, 5.11 % and 11 mandates,

and PRT, 2.78 % and 6 mandates; in the Assembly of Deputies there were also two agrarian parties, at least in name, but with right wing programs, both created in 1932: The National Agrarian Party, led by Octavian Goga, with 4.1% and 9 mandates, and the Agrarian Union, led by Constantin Argetoianu with 2.46% and 5 mandates (108).

In order to halt the communists' rise in the years 1931-1932, the Bulgarian government resorted to acts of authority, such as invalidating 15 of the 29 deputies from Bulgarian Workers' Party, or the dissolution of the Sofia Municipal Council, where the party won the majority of mandates (109).

In Romania, the communist threat only meant the fact that the "Workers' and Peasants' Block" achieved the 2% threshold in the 1931 elections, organized by the Iorga- Argetoianu government, but the governing National Peasants' used the Bolshevik threat to justify the repression of strikes from Lupeni (August 1929) and Grivița (15 to 16 February 1933).

In Stamboliiski's Bulgaria, public manifestations of opposition forces were often thwarted by The Orange Guard, made up of peasants armed with clubs, but in Romania, Ion Mihalache had the initiative of forming self-defense groups of the PNT, "the hefty ones", consisting of young inhabitants of the villages, in the late 1920s, but they would not become a symbol of violence, which was more and more present in Romanian politics. The "Iuliu Maniu" guards, established around 1934, would gain quite a reputation in the fall of 1944.

A key feature of Stamboliiski's government, also noticeable in The Romanian National Peasants' party, was the lack of specialized and experienced individuals and this was solved by appointment in leadership positions of less qualified people, but considered loyal, often selected on the basis of family ("nepotism" or "intercessors") (110).

Al. Vaida Voivod government's resignation in November 1933, requested by King Charles II (1930-1940) and the coup d'état from Bulgaria on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1934, marked the entry into opposition of the National Peasants' Party, and of the *Vrabča 1* group. Since the bloody (counter) coup d'état of January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1935, King Boris became dominant in the Bulgarian political life in the second half of the 1930s, and both the Romanian Peasants and the Bulgarian Agrarians would be in opposition to royal authoritarian governments that benefited, at least until 1938-1939, from a favorable economic context.

Within PNT, the main fault line was no longer between nationals and Peasants, but between the supporters and opponents of the sovereign. As the president of the party between November 1933 and November 1937, Ion Mihalache proved to be an element of balance both within it and in the relationship with the king, more and more disliked by Maniu and admired by Vaida, who left PNT in 1935 and created The

Romanian Front, a nationalist party (111). After the institution of the authoritarian regime and the creation of The National Renaissance Front, as a single party, in February and March, and respectively, December 16<sup>th</sup> 1938, some of PNT's leaders, including former Peasants, joined this organization, the best known example being Armand Călinescu, head of the government

In Bulgaria there was not a unique royal party, but in the local elections from between March and September 1939 (112). January 1937 and the parliamentary elections of March 1938 and December 1939 candidates had to go to the polls in a uninominal system, not representing a specific party, although the reality was different, and *Săbranje* only had an advisory role (113). Thus, in March 1938, among the 160 elected deputies, there were 32 agrarians, 8 Social Democrats and 5 communist, but the mandates of the communists, as some of the agrarians', were not validated (114). In the following elections, the opposition could not muster more than one eighth of the mandates (20 of 160) (115).

Like their Bulgarian counterparts, before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Romanian communists sought to approach the Peasants, under the policy of a "popular front", imposed by the Comintern. Thus, at the parliamentary elections of 1936 (116), as in the general elections, at the end of next year, observing the line imposed by Moscow, the Communist Party of Romania (illegal) supported PNT's candidates, even if the latter, again led by Maniu, signed a non-aggression pact with the party "Everything for the Country", the political wing of the Legionary Movement, an extremist right-wing group (116).

The dramatic events in the period September 1940-April 1941 when both Romania, territorially reduced and threatened the USSR, and Boris III's Bulgaria, territorially enlarged and courted by the same USSR, entered Nazi Germany's alliance system, have changed the political actions of agrarian groups in the two states.

In 1941, Ion Mihalache had a more positive attitude than Maniu to general (from August 21<sup>st</sup> 1941 a Marshal) Ion Antonescu's (b.1882-d.1946, "leader of the Romanian state" between September 5<sup>th</sup> 1940 and August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944) decision to join Hitler's Germany in the anti-Soviet war effort (117). He even enlisted in the army as a volunteer, at almost 60 years old, an initiative, which, after the establishment of the pro-communist Petru Groza government in March 1945, would result in the confiscation of his farm from Dobrești-Muscel. Moreover, on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1936, Mihalache made a memorable statement in the Parliament, namely that Romania, in a possible new general war, should join the group that would better safeguard its borders (118).

Agrarians in both countries did not agree, generally, with the pro-German governments, in particular with declaring the state of war with Great Britain and the

United States at the end of 1941, but this opposition was expressed differently, in Romania through letters and memos addressed to Antonescu, and in Bulgaria, including by organizing resistance movements. Thus, in 1941, at the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, in which Bulgaria did not take part, Leftist agrarians, *Pladne*, joined the communists, Social Democrats and the organization *Zveno* ("The Link"), forming "The Fatherland Front", a more and more active and credible movement as the Red Army approached the state borders. They rose to power on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944, after the leader of the other agrarian party, K. Muraviev, appointed P.M. on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1944, had failed to conclude a truce with the U.S. and UK and avoid the entry of Soviet troops in the country (119).

In Romania, where the communists were very weak, and the leaders of the "historical" parties (primarily Maniu) were hesitant, the removal of Antonescu was achieved on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944 by King Michael I and a group of loyal officers. This act meant, at least chronologically, the start of the seizure of political power by the communists, carried slower than in Bulgaria, where they were stronger.

Considering that the modern, Western structures, institutions and attitudes (bourgeois liberal) were weak, the agrarian/peasants' current proved, in both countries, the most powerful obstacle to the total communization, as expressing the aspirations and the individualist or communitarian mentality of a large part of the population, which were, on a short or long term, in conflict with the standardizing and depersonalized plans of the communists. The tactics used by the communist parties was that of *divide et imp era*, political fragmentation of the agrarians, followed by the liquidation or subordination of the various wings.

Among the first Bulgarian Agrarians to be marginalized, from September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944, were members of the Muraviev-Gičev group. Then, differences emerged within the agrarian group that that was part of the "Fatherland Front". G.M. Dimitrov, back from London, and Nikola Petkov (brother of Petko Petkov) opposed the trends and Communization and Sovietization of the country, but not the plans to abolish the monarchy. After the mysterious and untimely death of Boris III in 1943, the position of king returned his minor son, Simeon, born on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1937; on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1946, after a referendum, Bulgaria was proclaimed a People's Republic. Subsequently, "Gemeto" again took refuge in the West, which Maniu and Mihalache would fail to do, and N. Petkov remained in the country, where he founded BZNS-N. Petkov, as the official title of BZNS was reserved for the pro-communist faction, led in May 1945 by Al. Obbov. Despite all the prohibitions, Petkov's faction won 1.2 million votes at the elections of October 27<sup>th</sup> 1946 and 99 mandates in Parliament, compared to the 354 of the "Fatherland Front" (277 Communists, 69 leftist Agrarians, 9 Social Democrats, 8 *Zveno* and one for the Radicals) (120). Arrested in June 1947, right in the *Săbranje*, N.

Petkov was sentenced to death and hanged in September. He was even denied the right to a last communion (he was one of the few Bulgarian politicians with strong religious beliefs) (120).

In Romania, the communists tried to approach the Peasants especially through “The Plowmen’s Front”, a small party created in January 1933 and led by Petru Groza, a large landowner in Transylvania, who had been a member of PNR, and after 1920 he joined General Averescu, but this did not stop him from becoming the first head of a Romanian communist-controlled government on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1945. Only two factions were drawn from P.N.Ț., one led by Anton Alexandrescu, and the other by N. Lupu, but only first joined the communists and the core of the party, led by Maniu and Ion Mihalache was, in all likelihood, the true winner of the November 19<sup>th</sup> 1946 elections grossly falsified in favor of the communists and their allies at the time (121). After the dissolution of the PNT and the sentencing of its leaders to many years in prison, in July-November 1947, the forced abdication of King Michael I followed, on December 30<sup>th</sup> 1947, and the Romanian People’s Republic was proclaimed (122), without any ad-hoc referendum. In January 1948, the Alexandrescu faction was swallowed up in “The Plowmen’s Front”, which disbanded in February 1953. Through a twist of fate, in the same year Iuliu Maniu died in the Sighet prison; Ion Mihalache also died in prison, namely in Râmnicu-Sărat, in March 1963 (123).

Unlike Romania, in Bulgaria, the faction BZNS, which collaborated with the communists, was allowed to operate formally, as a satellite of the BCP. Thus, of the 400 mandates in Parliament (institution with a decorative role), a quarter (99 or 100) were reserved to the agrarian party, and the rest to BCP, “the leading force of the society”. Between 1964 and 1971, the Agrarians held the presidency of the Assembly, in theory, that of the state, represented by Georgi Traikov. In fact, Bulgaria was the first Eastern European socialist state that introduced pensions and social security for cooperative peasants in 1957.

Gičev D. and K. Muraviev were finally released from prison in 1959 and in 1961 (124) and Al. Stamboliiski would increasingly be eulogized as a progressive and democratic leader, a precursor of egalitarian and collectivist socialism in rural areas.

During the national and nationalist stage of Romanian communism after 1964 there were some historiographical reevaluations of historical figures. Maniu and Mihalache’s actions, victims of communist terror, were valued as socially and nationally progressive, especially until 1918, or 1924. However, their activities during 1944-1947 were criticized, which was inevitable, and so were their attitudes toward the issue of industrialization, which was at least partially justified in the light of the actual economic developments worldwide (125).

The techno-scientific revolution and the energy crisis was a blow to the Leninist model of economic development based on heavy industry, energy consumption, and a hyper-centralized decision mechanism, but it did not represent a historical validation of agrarianism. Technologically and economically advanced countries headed towards the post-industrial age, they did not return to the agrarian economy. Several of these (U.S., Canada, UK, Australia, and New Zealand etc.) are major exporters of food and agriculture products, but with only a few percents of the workforce being involved in this economic sector, because of modernization and mechanization.

After the events of November and December 1989, both in Bulgaria and Romania there have been attempts to resuscitate agrarian parties, given the return to political pluralism and a persistent cleavage communism-anticommunism. In both countries, in the early 1990s, there were both anti-communist agrarians and “left” agrarians with a more nuanced attitude toward the old regime. The anti-communist agrarian groups have claimed affinities with Christian democracy, an ideology born in the Catholic Western European area, which resembled interwar agrarianism if we consider their purpose of representing a middle way between the individualist liberalism and the collectivist socialism, cultivating the idea of balance between competition and solidarity and functional autonomy of small communities (subsidiarity). In Romania, this affiliation, achieved clandestinely by Corneliu Coposu (b.1914-d.1995) in 1987, was based on the favorable attitude towards the Orthodox Church, both in PȚ and then in PNȚ, but especially on the fact that a significant part of Transylvanian Romanians were part of the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek-Catholic), outlawed in 1948.

The political development of the The National Peasants’ Christian and Democratic Party from Romania was more spectacular and dramatic than that of Bulgarian anti-communist Agrarians, who, in 1989, had re-established BZNS-Nikola Petkov, as part of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the name “BZNS” being used by the party which survived during communism. Thus, in the 1990 elections it won only 2.4% of the votes, but on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1992 PNȚCD became the most important party in The Democratic Convention of Romania (alliance created on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1991, from which PNL had retired on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992), and after the parliamentary elections of September 27<sup>th</sup> 1992, it was the strongest opposition parliamentary party. Following the elections of November 1996, it rose to be the leading government party in a heterogeneous coalition, but a rapid collapse in the polls followed and it failed to obtain mandates in the Parliament in the November 2000 elections. After this, the party was in a scission process (126). The name “Peasants” was perhaps the least fit for the party since it got most of its votes from the Transylvanian towns and was very poorly represented in rural areas, south and east of the Carpathians.

Through its level of popularity (basically a few percents), the secondary role in the UDF and the ambiguous, sinuous, relationship that generated internal divisions, with the coalition and its successor, BZNS-Nikola Petkov and the anti-communist agrarian formations are very similar, during the entire period since 1989, with the Romanian liberals during 1992-1996. Anastasia Moser, "Gemeto" Dimitrov's daughter, born in 1937 and returned home in 1992, played an important role in the unification and split of the post-1989 Bulgarian agrarian formations, especially for the right-wing ones (127).

After the identity crisis and electoral failures in the early 1990s, "leftist" Bulgarian Agrarians regrouped in 1993, forming BZNS-AI. Stambiliiski, a satellite formation of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, a status that ensured a minimal representation in *Săbranje*. În Romania, "leftist" agrarianism was represented by The Democratic Agrarian Party, created on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1990, with Nicolae Ștefan (128) as honorary president, a former communist official. It won 1.8% of votes in 1990 and 3% in 1992 (129), but was dismantled in the mid-1990s, after it declared its opposition towards the N. Văcăroiu government.

It's interesting to note, from a terminological perspective, that in pre-communist Romania the term 'agrarians' had been used by Right-winged political forces (Argetoianu's, Goga's parties etc.) (130), whilst the word 'peasants' was adopted by political forces situated further to the Left political spectrum (The National Peasants' Party and Leftist groups within or independent from this party); after almost 50 years of communist rule (131), the situation had changed, PNȚCD became a Right-winged party and PDAR a Leftist party!

### 3. Conclusions

Looking from a historical perspective, we can say that during this period, beyond some general and easy to notice similarities between Bulgarian agrarians and Romanian peasants, there were also some differences that had already been shaped at the turn of the century, in terms of doctrine, organization and political action. Thus, the Bulgarian agrarians laid a greater emphasis on Leftist values (egalitarianism, collectivism, hostile attitude towards the monarchy, skepticism towards the Church etc.) and displayed a radical attitude when dealing with political opponents. Thus, the Stamboliiski regime was more of a populist dictatorship than a rural democracy. On the other hand, the Romanian peasants' adapted to the politics and mentalities of their country, and were respectful towards the monarchy and the Church. They gradually renounced some radical ideas and finally accepted, with the exception of some marginal groups, to merge with The National Party (1924-1926). The climax of

these differences in attitude towards the monarchy and the far Leftist forces was reached in the periods 1923-1924 and 1945-1947.

In terms of political/elections and governmental success, the Bulgarian agrarians' huge advantage when compared with Romanian peasants is due, largely, to the different statuses of Romania and Bulgaria at the end of the First World War.

Once again, the results of our investigation reveal the importance of the political, institutional, socio-economic, and imagological context for the concrete forms of agrarian political phenomenon. Also, they can be used as a starting point for further analyses on agrarianism/peasants, but mostly for studies focused on the early stages of Bulgarian agrarianism and Romanian peasants during 1878-1918 and their concrete and historiographical evolutions after 1947 and (why not?) the attempts to revitalize them after 1989.

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