

“THE FREE AND INDEPENDENT FACTION” FROM IASI. SOME IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the main aspects of the Free and Independent Faction from Iasi ideology, to analyze the impact of their anti-Semite ideas on the situation of the Jewish population in Romanian territory and relate them to the person of Charles I and the foreign policy promoted by him. The study will also analyze the impact that Simion Barnutiu’s thinking had over them and illustrate some of the most important ideas that were promoted by the Nicolae Ionescu, the group leader, after his mentor’s death. The factionists have supported the idea that Charles I was not a loyal ruler for its people and that for Romania a republic or an indigenous prince would be more suitable. We also debated their interest in keeping Moldavia and Wallachia united against any separatist attempts. In the end, an explanation as to why their anti-Semitic beliefs were so popular was given.

Keywords: Nicolae Ionescu, political group, anti-dynastic, unionism, anti-Semitism

1. Introduction

The nineteenth century Romanian society was going through a vast modernization process. Political life was no exception. It was in this context that numerous political parties made their appearance on the public stage, although the majority had only a temporary existence. There are, of course, two parties that drew the general coordinates of Romanian politics in the era: the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. In addition, many other groups offered innovative solutions on the problems that the Romanians faced.

The political group named “The free and independent faction” is an interesting addition on the public stage. It had several interesting features. Its members were convinced anti-Semites and they played an important role in the existence of the “Jewish question” in Romania. Anti-dynastic, had it been in their powers, they would have banished Prince Carol I of Romania. Their dream was to see a “Romanian ruler on a Romanian throne”. Liberals, but not less radicals, they proposed a series of reforms too advanced for the stage of development in which the Romanian society was at that time. Their importance lies in the overwhelming influence they had in Moldova, a Romanian province. They played a decisive role in Parliament, because their votes brought the power in the hands of the Liberals or the Conservatives.

Although the “factionist group” has not left a political program or an actual declaration of the political principles which governed their activities, we can still search for clues in the first issue of one of their “home” papers *Miscarea Nationala* which points to a self-definition of what they saw as important: “We see old and new political groups that manifest themselves every day. We however have not changed anything, not our beliefs, not our political attitude, because we are sure that we do the right thing in remaining constant in defending our ideas - we do not need new or redesigned programs”¹.

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Although apparently the quote does not offer much information about the factionalist ideology, two issues remain relevant for us: factionists were aware of their existence as a political group; although the word “ideology” is not even mentioned in the text. The “beliefs” and the “programs” remind us of the existence of specific ideas and values that the group tries to translate from theory into practice.

2. *Simion Barnuțiu's influence*

A very important moment in the completion of what later would become the factionist group was the arrival in Iasi in 1854 as professor of logic at Academia Mihăileană of Simion Bărnăuțiu. He was considered at the time the “father” of the factionists and the mentor of Nicolae Ionescu, the group leader, and by default the source from which the latter took the ideas that guided his subsequent political activity.

It is difficult to approximate in percentages how much of the factionalist ideology has as a starting point Bărnăuțiu's thinking, and how much was the contribution of each group member. The fact is that Bărnăuțiu had a massive influence on his followers, in terms of the main directions, namely the anti-dynastic ideas, the anti-Semitism and the radicalism. Hence, an analysis of Simion Bărnăuțiu's philosophy and thus one of his affect towards the factionist group is required.

George Panu, his student at the Academia Mihăileană, describes in his memoirs the influence that Bărnăuțiu Simion was able to exert on those around him: “Simon Bărnăuțiu had such an irresistible influence on students and pupils that he hypnotized them, had instilled his fanatic ideas in their heads; They spoke like him, dressed like him, walked like him, no doubt that they thought like him”².

Influenced by the writings of Wilhelm Traugott Krug, Bărnăuțiu argued that freedom and equality are the first and oldest human conditions. Any differences between people, on the political or social scale, any privilege are subsequent creations, some imposed by violence others consented by mutual agreement between people. Bărnăuțiu supported the theory of historical law in opposition to the theory of natural law. The theory of history law says that society's institutions were not created through the deliberate liberal consensus of the people, but were formed in a natural way, as a living organism develops. Therefore, it is not the man that creates and shapes in an aware state these institutions, but they are the ones that face the subject with their structures and traditions, forcing him to adapt. We do not create voluntarily our nationality and our language: we are born with them and we must conform to their patterns³.

Although it plays an important role in his philosophy, the return to the Roman traditions is not the central axis of Bărnăuțiu's thinking but the need to define the law. In its conception, the law can be divided into three categories: the natural law, the law of gens and

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¹ *Mișcarea Națională*, Iasi, year I, no. 1, March 1, 1880, p. 1.

² George Panu, *Amintiri de la „Junimea” din Iași*, edition by Z. Ornea, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2013, p. 45.

³ Camil Mureșanu, „Simion Bărnăuțiu-Gânditor politic” in *Viața românească*, București, year XCVIII, January-February, no. 1-2, 2003, pp. 23-24.

the civil law⁴. The natural law has two meanings: a law that all animals have learned from nature this being nothing but the instinct that humans have in common with them and that determines their behavior in various ways and the law that is born from reason and natural necessity. The law of gens is something acquired by all nations through natural reason and it is one of the positive rights that all nations possess until the general union. The civil law is the particularly positive law of a state to its citizens⁵.

As to the laws of the country, Bărnuțiu is campaigning for preserving its existing legislative traditions. His motivation refers to the past: as long as the laws of the ancestors are in place, the people prove its vitality; any imitation of the codes belonging to foreign nations only illustrates its decay⁶.

Regarding the foreign prince, the controversy on which the factionalist ideology was based, Bărnuțiu claimed that “the choice of a Romanian prince is governed by natural law and not by public law and therefore, it is enough for just one Romanian to be against the foreign prince so that he may not lay on the throne”⁷. Specifically, he claims in his paper *Dreptul public al românilor* the following: “The republican form is the best for the Romanians, because it is the most accommodated by their nature and their humanity”⁸; “The rulers of the Romanians were and it ought to be again what consuls or praetors were for the Romans, judges in peacetime and emperors in wartime”⁹; “The Romanians have always hated the idea of heredity”¹⁰. “All the Romanian communities are still free and republican because they are able to choose for themselves their magistrates”¹¹; “The republican element rejects the hereditary domination; where it lies, it is there the duty of the politicians to lift it, it is the duty of every single Romanian”¹².

Simion Bărnuțiu’s thinking remains an open field for research. The prior assertion of its key milestones is not an attempt to analyze the sources of Bărnuțiu’s ideas or to problematize the existence of an own philosophical system, but rather an overview of ideas which influenced or could have influenced the factionist thinking¹³.

3. The anti-dynastic ideas

An important component of the factionist ideology is the anti-dynastic ideas of its members. The main sources used in our analysis were the group’s publications such *Tribuna Română*, *Dreptatea*, *Uniunea Liberală* și *Mișcarea Națională* in which the factionists presented their antimonarchic arguments. It will be noted on this occasion the lack of a uniform thinking among them regarding the benefits and disadvantages that a foreign prince could bring to the Romanians.

⁴ Simion Bărnuțiu, *Dreptul public al românilor*, Iassi, Tipariul Tribunei Române, p. 4.

⁵ Petre Pandrea, *Filosofia politico-juridică a lui Simion Bărnuțiu*, București, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, 1935, pp. 82-83.

⁶ Simion Bărnuțiu, p. 1.

⁷ George Panu, p. 45.

⁸ Simion Bărnuțiu, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.141.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 171.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 183.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 83.

¹³ See also Andreea Georgiana Dragomir, „Filosofia lui Simion Bărnuțiu”, in *Revista de filosofie*, București, volume LVIII, no. 3-4, 2011, pp. 339-357.

The factionist speech is not linear, it is frequently oscillating between the need to institute a republic to ensure the happiness of all Romanians, and the need of an indigenous prince to govern based on traditions. In addition, in what regards Nicolae Ionescu he will change his attitude later in life towards Charles I.

The factionists are not to be found in the rhetoric of the time when it comes to advocate for bringing a foreign prince on the throne of the country in order to preserve the union between Moldova and Wallachia. Nicolae Ionescu believed that strengthening the union under a foreign prince was not and could not be as valuable as the collective guarantee of the great powers or the good relations with the Turks that lasted for centuries, Turks who have always respected Romanians territorial integrity¹⁴.

The Free and Independent Faction believed that the monarchy only by “a stable reign is far from achieving Romanian happiness”. The very foundation of the monarchy, the Constitution was inefficient and corrupt, because it favored “the laughingstock of those at the helm of thieves which have multiplied after February 11”¹⁵.

An even more trenchant article regarding the events on February 11, 1866 can be found in the factionalist publication *Mișcarea Națională*: “Cuza’s dethroning felt awkward in his country and a large dose of patriotism¹⁶ full of selflessness from the sincere liberals was needed in order to succeed in not letting the pain translate into violence”¹⁷.

A. D Holban, another member of the factionist group is explaining his country’s downfall using as an argument the monarchical institution’s very foundations. He did not see the opportunity to progress as long as “the countries first magistrate embodies the principle of hereditary feudal dynasty”. But the in the same time, Holban was offering a “solution” to the prince who “should be very circumspect and very balanced in his habits, in order not to rouse the national feeling of the people, because this could be the only chance for his origins to be overlooked”¹⁸.

Although he began his political career as a convinced anti-dynastic, Ionescu ended appreciating Charles I. In a work from 1888 that treated among others the recent events in Bulgaria¹⁹, Ionescu was pitting our neighbors from south of the Danube, when comparing them to us: “Why should we care about anything when we have an independent state, a wise diplomatic body, a wise king and a gentle people who can be governed in the highest degree”²⁰.

¹⁴ *Monitorul Oficial*, București, no. 98, May, 5/171866, p. 434.

¹⁵ February 11 was the date in which Alexandru Ioan Cuza was forced to abdicate; *Dreptatea*, Iași, year II, no.126, April 6, 1869.

¹⁶ About the connotation of this word in the 19th century see Klaus Bochmann, „Conceptul de patriotism în cultura română” in *Istoria României prin concepte*, edited by Victor Neumann, Armin Heinen, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2010, pp. 103-127.

¹⁷ *Mișcarea Națională*, Iași, year I, no. 57, May 9, 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Dreptatea*, Iași, year III, no. 201, March 15, 1870.

¹⁹ The Berlin treaty has ensured the autonomy of East Rumelia from the Ottoman Empire. But in 1885, Rumelia went under the ruling of the Bulgarians after a bloody rebellion. The annexation of East Rumelia did not last for long, the province was officially returned to the Ottomans on April 17, 1886. However, Rumelia remained under Bulgarian control and on March 24, 1886, the sultan admitted the status of “general governor” for the Bulgarian prince.

²⁰ Nicolae Ionescu, *Despre împărăția româno-bulgară*, București, I. G. Haimam, 1888, p. 11.

4. The unionism

Although they opposed the idea of a foreign dynasty, the factionist did not indulge at any time the separatist ideas that were widespread in Iasi²¹. Even if the union between Moldova and Wallachia did not necessarily lead to the desired outcome, specifically an indigenous prince or implicitly the establishment of the republic, the factionist decided that the territorial unity outweighed their personal beliefs concerning the person who was the head of state²².

Even if he condemned the separatist movement, Nicolae Ionescu was updated throughout the month of March 1866, with the intention of those who were unwilling to preserve the union. In a letter he addressed to Petru Poni, close friend and relative, Ionescu notifies him that he took part in a meeting in his house of Vasile Pogor, where Nunuță Roznovanu read a separatist manifesto. Ionescu exposed his intention of giving the latter an answer and even more at the next meeting he wanted “all our teachers to be present, especially those of us who are unionists, decentralization supporters and anti-absolutism”²³.

A. D. Holban agrees with Nicolae Ionescu regarding the need to preserve the union. In its paper *Poporulu* the separatist problem is a widely debated issue. For him the union was the only way to “form a strong and vivacious nation that is the most ardent aspiration of our hearts”. Holban intention was to contribute to “the extirpation of that fierce spirit of provincialism, which still maintains unjust glory among brothers”. This difficulty would be overcome by the measures the factionists wanted to support and which “will require a systematic and effective decentralization [...] by which the good life shall be able to spread equally in all corners of the country”²⁴.

Alecu M. Șendrea, also a factionist, attended a lecture organized by the other influential group from Iasi, Junimea, at the University, in order to debate the separatist ideas circulating in Iasi. Iacob Negruzzi, member of Junimea, remembers that Șendrea “although in favour of the union, is from another party than us”²⁵.

Tribuna Română, Nicolae Ionescu’s paper gave an ample space to the unionist ideas promoted by Ion Ghica, ideas that Ionescu considered to be “serious and truthful [...] here we transcribe them so we may all remember them”. Ghica was fighting for unity, because only a united nation could be a powerful nation. The union was the manner in which the Romanian people survived the secular struggles against invasion, fighting through which they were able to keep their nationality. Giving up the union between Moldova and Wallachia would be

²¹ We are referring to the separatist ideas from the period February 1866-April 1866. Some Moldovans wanted a separation of the two provinces and therefore were supporting Nunuta Roznovanu in his attempt to become the new ruler of Moldova.

²² We note, however, the position of the historian Zigu Ornea who in the preface of the book George Panu, *Amintiri de la Junimea din Iași...*, states the following related to the time of the abdication of Cuza: “The former anti-union circles took this opportunity in order to plan for a resurgence of separatist tendencies, public separatist meetings (former anti unionists and those who were by then organized in the so-called “free and independent faction”) and anti-separatist (Junimea). His statement is totally wrong, as proven by direct testimony and the group actions from the period.

²³ Nicolae Ionescu to Petru Poni, March 1866, in Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale Iași, *Fond Familial „Poni”*, Documente Petru Poni, doc. no. 462.

²⁴ *Poporulu*, Iasi, year I, no. 9, September, 18/30, 1866. See also the article „Centralisarea și decentralisarea” in *Poporulu*, Iasi, year I, no. 2, August 16/28, 1866, p. 7.

²⁵ Iacob Negruzzi, *Amintiri din Junimea*, edition by Ioana Pârvulescu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2011, p. 68.

synonymous with an abdication as a nation, but preserving it would be a fulfillment of the divine will²⁶.

Towards the end of 1880, the claims of the Free and Independent Faction to the “brothers from Wallachia” worsened: “we are all Romanian and we joined together, Moldavians and Wallachians, to no longer be divided into two families as we are the same people”; but we did not envision that this union would become an instrument of exploitation, and that one of the brothers was about to seize all the advantages of the united family, only for his personal profit [...], we have not thought that in order to be Romanian, for the Moldavians it will mean ever since the overthrow of Cuza only giving and never receiving anything in return”²⁷.

The solution proposed by the factionists in order to resolve the situation of Moldova was to create a unionist party with the purpose to protect their interests: “For the Moldovans unionists, for true patriots beyond the Milcov it is a pressing duty to serve and to affirm [...] to be a regulator of Moldovan society and a protector for its harmed interests [...] this can only be achieved by the establishment of a national party”²⁸. We may only assume that this party was about to be lead and controlled by the factionist group.

5. *The anti-Semitism*

One of the major problems of Romanian society in the second half of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly the Hebrew problem. We can identify three key moments in its development: the year of 1866 when the Constitution of principalities was discussed, discussion which included the possibility of giving rights to those of Jewish rite; the spring of 1868 when Moldova was confronted with the some local movements against the Jews; and the years 1878-1879 when the discussion of Article 7 of the Constitution was in motion. We will consider, in the following the exposure of certain anti-Semitic arguments of the Free and Independent Faction from Iasi, as well as the political and social motivation behind these arguments²⁹.

Also relevant are the actions of A. D. Holban who in 1863 initiated a media campaign through the newspaper he controlled, *Viitorul*, against those of Jewish rite; he is the most vehement factionist at a discursive level. He is ready to give up the very independence of the country, if its acquisition is conditional upon the recognition of rights for the Hebrew: “to be asked today to allow Jewish emancipation would be the greatest irony that the enlightened Europe were to throw at us after the blood and money sacrifices we did”³⁰.

He is not the only one to think this way. Alexandru Gheorghiu repeatedly stated its desire to see the “Hebrew element” permanently excluded from the economic life of Iasi. He was using all of his relations in order to make this goal achievable: “I talked to the Forests

²⁶ *Tribuna Română*, Iasi, year VIII, no. 259, August, 25, 1866.

²⁷ *Miscarea Nationala*, Bucuresti, no. 235, December, 17, 1880, p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid*, no. 237, December 19, 1880, p.1.

²⁹ See also Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919) De la excludere la emancipare*, București, Editura Hasefer, 2006, p. 133.

³⁰ According to Anastase Hâciu, *Evreii în Țările Românești*, București, Tiparul „Cartea Românească”, 1943, p. 243.

Minister Dimitrie Ghica and he told me that the auction will be held in Iasi, but he gave orders not to accept any bid coming from a Jew³¹.

It was said about Nicolae Ionescu that he had an extraordinary talent when it came to debate the Hebrew issue his passion for the topic was surprising everyone, even his most bitter opponents³². Ionescu's speech presented a number of constants that were repeated over the years: the foreign invasion of the city, the need to regain Romanism, the improvement of material life by purifying commercial activities, and not least, the existence of exclusive Romanian administration³³.

Through the factionists publications the image of a besieged city, a city without the means to get out of the morass in which it struggles, is created. The streets where someday in the past people were speaking Romanian, the Sunday, the food offered by a Romanian to a Romanian, the morals, the family worship, the religion³⁴, they are all are invoked to support the need for a new beginning. Jews are regarded by the factionist, as guests in Moldova who in order to become Romanian citizens must undergo a process of assimilation, "a patriotic internship to learn how to live like us" then, and only then discussions on the possibility of granting them political rights are to follow³⁵.

How can the factionist attitude towards the Jewish element be explained? A simplistic answer would focus singularly on the economic aspect. However, there are advisory opinions like that of anthropologist Vintila Mihailescu who considers that this sentiment can be translated through the Romanian's need to build their national identity. The lack of pre-modern identity construction among others is replaced by "the ideological weapon" of hating the "intruder", the foreign element in its attempt to preserve the cohesion of the native population. Things are even more acute in rural areas. If the city allows an uprooted individual, Romanian village retains the need for the "old man" and of the linear descent. In this landscape, there are the Jews who tend to play the role of the "ancient people" by intruding into the economic sphere³⁶.

The "foreign exploiter" element is even more acute on a micro level. With the political empowerment of the rural population, the human mass that political demagogy could have called increased. And in times of crisis, neither left nor right, make any exception in bringing to light xenophobic sentiments which are subsequently perverted in arguments for noble purposes³⁷.

6. Conclusions

The Free and independent faction from Iasi or the "group of teachers" as it was called at the time was a unique presence on the stage of Romanian politics. This was partly due to

³¹ Alexandru Gheorghiu to Petru Poni, January 17, 1868; in DJANI, *Fond Familial „Poni”*, Documente „Petru Poni”, doc. no. 467.

³² Alexandru Gheorghiu to Petru Poni, May 9, 1868, doc. no. 470.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Dreptatea*, Iași, year I, no. 19, July 6, 1867.

³⁵ *Tribuna Română*, Iași, year VIII, no. 255, August 11, 1866.

³⁶ Vintilă Mihailescu, *Nationalite et nationalism en Roumanie*, in „Terrain 17-revue d'études ethnologique”, Paris, October 1991, pp. 79-82. The quoted article does not refer specifically to the factionist group but to the Romania anti-Semitism of the era as a whole.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.

the ideology promoted by them. Anti-dynastic and anti-Semites, but at the same time unionists, the factionists always affirmed their individuality.

In the absence of memoirs from our main actors, our analysis was based on a series of factionist papers that appeared over time. *Tribuna Română*”, „Dreptatea”, „Uniunea Liberală” or „Mișcarea Națională” helps us enter their ideological universe.

Justifying or affirming it, the factionists did not hide behind some kind paper articles. They want to be accepted, noticed, they wanted to accede and to maintain power. Their own ideology is one of their strongest weapons, a weapon they did not hesitate to use.

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