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The Fourth State Power – Case Study: Pamfil Şeicaru

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Abstract: The first years of the interwar period brought a major change within the role that the press played in the Romanian society. The politicians could not ignore the journalists' opinions any longer. For many Romanians, to be a newspaper editor meant to defend the interests of the poor and of the defendless people. The heads of the most important political parties were forced to allow the press representatives in the Parliament and in the ministerial cabinets. Thus the journalist turned into a prototypical dictator, and the whole press took its "fourth power" role seriously. Pamfil Şeicaru is one of those journalists who had the great merit of having turned the press into a fierce institution, the fourth state power, alongside with the executive, judicial and legislative powers.

Keywords: journalism; politics; press history; rhetorics

The interwar period brought important changes in Romanians' lives. The First World War provoked deep transformations not only in the economic, socio-political life, but also in the citizens' spirits. The Romanian political life was profoundly marked by the universal vote, the electoral reform providing the necessary conditions for the appearance of new political actors.

The system of political parties underwent through a significant evolution characterized by: the dissolution of the conservative parties, the consolidation of the National Liberal Party, the emergence and the active role of new parties in the Romanian political life, the integration within the Romanian state of those parties which led the fight for the unification of the historical provinces with the mother-country, the emergence of the National Peasants' Party, the appearance and the affirmation of the parties of national minorities, the imposition of some extremist organizations in the political life. (Scurtu, 2010, pp. 106-107)

During this period, the role played by the journalists within the community life suffered significant changes as well. The greater the prestige of the printed word was, the more the journalists' influence upon the readers' political convictions increased. The journalists became soon aware of the new reality and their endeavor of gaining a place on the political stage was successful, one of the reasons being the voters' belief that the politicians at that time had one purpose, namely to cultivate "the gullibility of the masses overwhelmed by discontent". (Şeicaru, 1924, p. 1)

As Pamfil Şeicaru outlined in an article dedicated to the journalist-deputies Const. Gongopol, A.A. Bardescu and N. Georgescu, the first years of the interwar period brought the *journalist's dictatorship*: "The revolution that the war caused, changed the tradition. The today's journalist is a dictator in miniature. (...) The oligarchies fall apart in order to make room to new ones. (...) The new tyranny is setting in, the myth of the print is spreading around." (Şeicaru, 1920, p. 4)

The new situation of the journalist is also pinpointed by Ion Vinea in an article published in 1922: "For 50 years, the journalist has been thinking, writing and working for his exploiter, in exchange for his pathetic wage or for his well-calculated reward once the master became powerful. But for ten years the makers of so many clay caricatures offered themselves to perform a sport of demolition through some flips. The bankers and the bank parties might own the newspapers, but the journalists realized that they could well be the masters of the public opinion". (Vinea, 1984, pp. 34-35)

During the years between the two world wars, there were many cases of famous journalists who played an active role in the political life. In the Take Ionescu government (December 1921 – January 1922), Stelian Popescu, the owner of the newspaper *Universul*, was the head of the Ministry of Justice. In 1926, due to his journalistic activity in the editorial board of the newspaper of *Cuvântul*, Nichifor Crainic was invited to be a member of the government Alexandru Averescu.

Although he claimed that he was not a supporter of the General's politics, Crainic accepted to be in charge of the General Secretariat of Cults and Arts. (Crainic, 1991, p. 203) In Dan Ciachir's opinion, Nicolae Iorga "gained his position on the ministerial bench not only due to his learned man, but also due to his activity as a journalist. The same thing could be also said about Octavian Goga." (Ciachir, 2008, p. 50)

Șeicaru's joining the political life was a natural thing. Journalism offered Șeicaru the opportunity of having relations with the personalities of the international and national political life. The director of *Curentul* was an independent deputy between 1929 and 1935. His access to the Parliament was mediated by Iuliu Maniu, the president of the National Peasants' Party, who facilitated the entrance of some "glory fabricants" into the legislative forum. Șeicaru was never a member of a political party. He had taken the decision of being independent since 1918, inspired by a discussion with Spiru Hasnaș, who advised him to refuse I.G.Duca's proposal of becoming a member of the Liberal Party. (apud Șeicaru, 2002, p. 256)

It must be added that the journalist's decision to join the active political life upset Nicolae Iorga, one of the persons who played a significant role in Șeicaru's journalistic career. According to the historian, the director of *Curentul* sold himself. (*Curentul*, 1929, p. 5)

Șeicaru was a supporter of the peasant movement. There was a special bond between him and Ion Mihalache, a bond which started in the trenches, during the First World War (Șeicaru, 2002, pp. 282-283). Due to this friendship born on the battlefield, Șeicaru accepted Mihalache's proposal to organize and lead, together with Eugen Crăciun, *Țara Nouă*, the gazette of the Peasants' Party. The newspaper presented to the public of peasants' ideology. In the editorial board of this publication, the journalist truly understood the great force of the Press: "One day a telegram from Arad arrived at the editorial board of the newspaper *Țara Nouă*. A group of peasants asked that an editor should run on behalf of the Peasants' Party. (...) Nobody wanted to accept this proposal (...) Not to upset the peasants from Arad, we decided to name Ion Florea as a candidate. At that time he was on duty at the editorial board (...) After three weeks the result totally bewildered us: this unknown candidate, with no quality whatsoever to stir the voters' attention, without being sustained by an organized party, had twice the votes obtained by the candidate from the National Party." (Șeicaru, 2002, p. 304)

The journalist was a declared enemy of Parliamentarism. In his opinion, "universal vote was like a flood which is pouring over and bringing to light all the rottenness out of the forgotten bumps. The most stupid and unconscious had won, because stupidity and unconsciousness use demagoguery." (Șeicaru, 1921, p. 11). Due to this reason, Șeicaru felt obliged to explain his decision of running for a seat on the Chamber: "For a journalist – even then when he has a slight esteem for the Parliamentary

system – the tribune of the Chamber might serve as an active annex of the newspaper, a precious addition, an extra constraint for those who bear the responsibility of governing. A minister does not feel obliged to answer to a newspaper article, but to an interpellation, yes.” (Şeicaru, 1928, p. 1)

Pamfil Şeicaru gave a special attention to the problems of the new territories both in his newspaper and in the Parliament.

In the first issue of *Curentul*, the journalist published an editorial on *Ardealul Economic* (the Economic Ardealul) which lacked the support from the administration in Bucharest. One year later, in his first discourse in the Chamber, Şeicaru mentioned the following situation: “Gentlemen, I do not blame anybody, but I can say that the Romanian political class was not ready for the national unity. (...) This was the source of this political regionalism, which is actually the protest of the country which demands a large, real and administrative decentralization!” (*Curentul*, 1929, p. 5)

Another sensitive issues highlighted by Şeicaru in the Chamber and within the editorials of *Curentul* was the *agricultural debts*: “In 1931, the situation of (small, medium and large) agriculturers’ situation was dramatic: all of them were in debt. The system of maximum prices applied to agricultural products in contrast with the excessive protectionism of industry, the absence of credits for agriculture pushed the agriculturers towards usury.

It was accepted a standard interest of 12% which actually, through different surpluses, reached a 16%. Agriculture produces only 4-5%. Now we can understand why the agriculturers did not succeed in covering the interests, and the debts accumulated had turned almost the whole country into a quasi-property of banks. (...) Two years later, the same liberal party and national peasants’ party which had fought against the project of conversion, labeling it as anarchic, considered themselves as the initiators of this idea. Since 1930, I have daily denounced the dramatic situation of agriculturers within the *Curentul* columns. As a deputy of the Chamber Commission, I was one of the backers of the conversion law project.” (Şeicaru, 2002, pp. 128-129)

The journalist was a supporter of monarchy. In November 1925, in an article published in *Curentul*, the journalist explained his position claiming that “monarchy is the only form through which a nation finds its own concentrated rhythm, the movement line, its spiritual axis.” (Şeicaru, 1925, p. 1) According to his own confessions, Şeicaru had Antoine de Rivarol as his raw model, a French journalist who backed the French monarchy during the Revolutionary era.

In one of the portraits entitled *Scieri din exil (Writings from Exile)*, the founder of *Curentul* mentions: “Reading, I cannot remember exactly which volume from *Promenades littéraires* – if I am not wrong the 2nd volume – Remy de Gourmont introduced me to Rivarol whom I have been grateful ever since.” (Şeicaru, 2002, p. 354) Pamfil Şeicaru was an adept of Charles Maurras’s political ideas, which he had discovered in 1915, when he was a student, while reading *Enquête sur la monarchie*. For the French poet, monarchy meant *order, calm and discipline* (Şeicaru, 1931, p. 218).

The relation between Pamfil Şeicaru and the Royal House was a special one during the reign of Carol II. The journalist enjoyed the king’s appreciation, as Liviu Rebreanu underlined in his *journal*. (Rebreanu, 1984, p. 140) Şeicaru confesses that in 1933, engineer N. Malaxa, as a representative of king Carol II and the liberal I.G. Duca met at his farm in Ciorogârla, in order to negotiate the establishment of a new government. (Şeicaru, 2002, p. 271) According to some authors, Şeicaru played an important part within the king’s company. Thus, in the autumn of the year 1934, the director of the newspaper *Curentul*, king Carol II, Elena Lupescu, Gh. Tătărescu had tried to command the death of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. (Heinen, 2006, p. 240)

Despite these facts, Șeicaru tries to withdraw from the king's company and Elena Lupescu seems to have been the main reason. "The king's concubine", as the journalist used to name her, had the ability of controlling the king, thus becoming responsible of many wrong political decisions taken by the king. The director of *Curentul* ends up hating Carol II. Martha Bibescu mentioned that Pamfil Șeicaru "wants a radical solution at all costs – to chase away the dog [Carol II], the bitch [Elena Lupescu] and the dog [the Great Voievode Mihai]". (apud Scurtu, 2004, p. 318) This hatred will last for many years, the journalist explained his reasons in a letter addressed to Radu Valentin: "Cursed was the 7th of June, the day when there came back this man, who prepared the decline of the Country, and his son to finish his father's work. Monarch was abolished on August, 21, 1944, through an act of capitulation with no conditions." (Șeicaru, 1992, p. 121)

At the end of the interwar period, Pamfil Șeicaru had no public position. Even so, the journalist played a significant role on the political stage. After Carol II's abdication, Pamfil Șeicaru became a close friend of Marshal Ion Antonescu. In July 1941, after Romania had joined the war and after the release of Basarabia, at the Marshal's request, Șeicaru made a long official tour with a propagandistic purpose. He was received at Vichy by Marshal Petain, at Madrid by Franco (the king of Spain), at Lisbon by Carmona (the president of Portugal) and by Oliveira Salazar (the real leader). This tour was mentioned by Mircea Eliade in his memorie. (Eliade, 1997, p. 379)

This close relation between Șeicaru and Antonescu brought him the fame of a defender of antisemitic policies promoted by the Government. In this respect, I.C. Butnaru made the following comment: "He fully supported Marshal Antonescu's policy against the Jews." (Butnaru, 1993, p. 209)

According to the *Final Report* of the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, the journalist had supported, through his publications, the Romanian politicians' antisemitic actions since 1938. The data made public by this commission show that Pamfil Șeicaru was guilty of supporting the government run by Octavian Goga, who initiated normative acts with a powerful antisemitic character, among which the law of citizenship revision. (apud Ioanid, Friling și Ionescu, 2005, p. 96)

Șeicaru's attitude was explained by N. Caradino, who mentions in his memories that "*Universul*, *Dimineata* and *Curentul*, their economic, literary, political supplements, were large enterprises which, through their nature, had to follow the conditions imposed by the regime." (Caradino, 1992, p. 192) On the other hand, General Gheorghe Ion shows that Pamfil Șeicaru promoted during the war "a politics which supported the German line, but he acted in an indirect way, I might dare say, in a camouflaged manner. His political attitude was obviously anticommunist, that is why especially during the German-Romanian alliance, he promoted a pro-German attitude, but he has never hidden his inclination for the West." (Gheorghe, 1996, p. 99)

Pamfil Șeicaru continued to be interested in the political interests of the country even when he was in exile. Around year 1948, Pamfil Șeicaru joins the Association of Romanian Combatants (which will become the Association of the Former Romanian Combatants) and makes efforts of organizing a team of volunteers who might run a guerilla war on the Romanian territory. (Frunză, 2001, pp. 70-74)

Starting with 1953, through the magazine *Liberty and Justice*, issued in Spain, the journalist brought to the Western political leaders' attention the problem of the European regional federalization. He proposed the organization of "The United States of the Central and Eastern Europe" or of "the United States of Central Europe and Balkans". This federalization was supposed to have the following result: "The political evolution imposes the creation of a federation of states.

Thus one could imagine a federation including Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, eventually Greece and Turkey as well.” (apud Frunză, p. 148) Şeicaru’s belief was that Europe had to produce an economic, political and administrative unification in order not to be the victims of the errors committed by the leaders of the global superpowers. In order to be world-wide known, the journalist took the necessary steps in organizing the *Congress of the Nations Beyond the “Iron Curtin”*, which was to be held in Madrid. In February 1954, the Spanish Government approved the idea of this congress and established that the big event should take place in the autumn of the same year. At this congress, there were expected to participate delegations from Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Poland, Hungary, Germany, Finland, Slovakia, The Baltic Country, Ukraine, Georgia, China, Korea, etc. The congress papers, which were supposed to take place under the presidency of the American deputy, Michael Feighan, were no longer held: “Since January 1955 we have no more news about the congress. If it had been held, we would have found out, one way or another, from letters or from what Şeicaru wrote or published later.” (Frunză, p. 152)

During the interwar period, Şeicaru had the reputation of supporting “each government which came to run”. (Crainic, 1991, p. 235) The journalist could not get rid of this fame even when being in exile. He was said to have been a collaborator of the Ceausescu regime and to have represented the interests of the communists from Bucharest in the West. Poverty, the health problems, solitude, and the desire to visit his country before his death were apparently the elements which led to this situation.

In a study published in 2009, Sorin Gabriel Ioniţă shows that Pamfil Şeicaru was a collaborator of the Secret Services, and his code name was “Vlad”. The beginning of the journalist’s collaboration with the Secret Services could be traced back to year 1966, as the author of the paper *Publicaţiile Curentul, Carpații și Stindardul în arhivele Securității (1975 – 1989)/ Publications Curentul, the Carpathians and Stindardul in the archives of the Secret Services (1975 – 1989)* mentioned, when he was released by Nicolae Ceauşescu through a secretly held decree.

At that time, the journalist was 72. Ioniţă highlights that the founder of *Curentul* never assumed his support of the Ceausescu regime openly: “P. Şeicaru preserved this relative freedom of thought throughout his collaboration with the Secret Services. This makes us think who manipulated who.” (Ioniţă, 2009, nr. 14, p. 71) Due to this collaboration, it seems that, during August, 22-30, 1975, Pamfil Şeicaru made a visit in the Socialist Republic of Romania. Şeicaru’s purpose was that of meeting Nicolae Ceauşescu. As the latter was in Neptun at that time, this meeting never took place.

The efforts made by the journalist on the political stage and in the journalistic domain as well were not appreciated by all those who knew him or read his articles. Leontin Jean Constantinescu claimed that Şeicaru does not have “a political vision” (Constantinescu, 1998, p. 29), and René Al. De Flers shows that, in an interview published by Liviu Vălenaş in a volume *Cartea neagră a ceauşismului/ The Black Book of the Ceausescu regime*, Pamfil Şeicaru “has never had a clear political view” (Vălenaş, 2004, p. 245), the reason being his lack of interest in politics.

Despite this kind of opinions, General Gheorghe Ion believed that Pamfil Şeicaru “had, as every cynic man, a remarkable political sense” (Gheorghe Ion, 1996, p. 99), and Mircea Coloşenco mentioned that the opponents of the fearful journalist were guilty of a sin that could not be forgiven: they did not acknowledge his merit of having transformed the press into a fearful institution – the fourth state power. (Coloşenco, 2002, p. XIII)

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