

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

INSURGENT CONSERVATISM IN ROMANIA

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June 2020



Insurgent conservatism is on the rise. New conservative civil society groups and movements are trying to expand their social base and mobilise adherents as they frame their action(ism) as rebellion against, or counterculture to, the dominant cultural and political narrative of modernisation and renewal.



This paper provides an overview of the contemporary »insurgent« conservative ecosystem in Romania by portraying the nature and essence of the groups ascribing to it and by describing the strategies they employ to challenge – with surprising effectiveness – basic tenets of capitalist modernity and democratic liberalism.



By re-interpreting and re-coding reality in an anti-liberal direction, this new conservative activism is responsible for making far-right thinking and ideas acceptable in society.

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INTRODUCTION

After the fall of communism, Romanian society went through a difficult period of political, social and economic search and experimentation, in an effort to grapple with the requirements imposed by the model of liberal and capitalist democracy. The reconfiguration of the political elite, adaptation to the demands of the free market, forced privatisation of major industrial sectors, mass layoffs, rising inflation and the insecurity of daily life, especially during the first years of the post-communist period, were sources of frustration and discontent among the population. In the search for a new identity, but also strongly affected by the sacrifices that the democratic transition was constantly demanding from society, post-communist Romania offered fertile ground for the rebirth of nationalist and radical right-wing discourse. The rapid growth of popularity of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) among the population, along with the emergence of a significant number of non-governmental organisations, but also of public figures promoting an autarchic and nationalist discourse, had a decisive impact in shaping a type of local conservatism, increasingly in competition with progressive groups who wanted to move closer to the West and reduce the gap between it and Romania.

Over this period, active conservative movements were heterogeneous, encompassing different opponents, concerns and agendas. However, in some cases, it seemed possible for convergence to take place and common interests defended (for instance, during the anti-governmental protests which broke out in 2012 or during the campaign to redefine the concept of marriage in the Constitution, initiated in 2016 and finalised in 2018 with a national referendum, which was eventually invalidated by insufficient turnout). Among them, authoritarian or reactionary conservatism demanded with an autarchic and anti-democratic vision of society the defence of national and religious identity, espousing values running counter to "dangerous" progressive Western ideas.

Eluding the label of extremism, which has extremely negative connotations both in Romania and in the West, radical conservatives applaud themselves as defenders of liberal values, freedom of expression and conscience, and not as far-right groups. In fact, they have a number of characteristics in common: first, they share an authoritarian, hierarchical perspective of society, intolerant of opposition, endorsing a conservatism based on ethnic and religious identity; second, they display an aversion to the political class, an aversion which they often couch in populist terms. This is specific to these

groups, invoking the need as they do to reconfigure democracy starting with ordinary citizens (Minkenberg and Perrineau 2007: 20; Holbrook and Taylor 2013: 2-4). In recent decades, right-wing extremism has gained new momentum due to its ability to adapt to social change. Its insurgent and militant nature has in this manner allowed it to stay engaged in society through various public campaigns while reacting to controversial topics as they crop up, offering explanations for the precarious socio-economic situation in which large strata of the population subsist.

WHY »INSURGENT« CONSERVATISM?

The term »insurgent« usually has a revolutionary connotation and describes the act of rebellion against an authority. Insurgency implies a violent potential that aims to destabilise the existing order in order to create a new one. In the context of this study, insurgent conservatism denotes a type of extremist conservatism emerging as a reaction to the democratic values and practices that it is seeking to replace with an authoritarian, indigenous, vengeful view of society. In addition, I favour the term »insurgent conservatism« because it captures the active, militant nature of social movements that are not only reacting to social and political changes in Romania, but are able, by their sheer force, to in turn generate new social and political change.

This study seeks to foster an understanding of insurgent Romanian conservatism, its origins, its ideological resources, the strategies and tactics it employs, as well as the types of discourse that are specific to it. At the heart of my analysis is the Coalition for the Family (CpF) – an umbrella for civic organisations – which I consider be at the core of recent insurgent conservatism in view of the fact that it has managed not only to forge a system of effective alliances and partnerships, but also to impose in merely a few years its agenda on the Romanian public arena. The working hypothesis in this analysis is that insurgent conservatism in public space exhibits an ability to conceal its authoritarian nature, while twisting the mechanisms and values of liberal democracy, but also promoting the systematic violation of its fundamental principles, such as rule of law, human rights, and equal rights. The present study is structured in two parts: the first part describes the setting and context in which conservative civic organisations became visible and active, from the fall of communism to the present day, amid the demise of the BOR and political parties in the public eye, but also the intensification of

civil society activism; the second part homes in on the Coalition for the Family itself, attempting to shed light on its composition, but also the strategies and tactics that have contributed to its visibility and success of late.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis forwarded in these pages is a case study, in which I use mainly primary sources (the official Internet pages of the organisations presented) as well as secondary literature in the form of online articles in the Romanian press investigating the activity of certain persons or groups involved in insurgent conservative movements. The spread of far-right ideas is linked to the

emergence of new media, the advent of the Internet, the democratisation of access to information and its dissemination that facilitates social cohesion and mobilisation. The online environment mitigates social differences and offers the opportunity for each person or group to openly express their own vision of society (Mammone et al. 2013: 7-8). In this context, insurgent conservative movements not only had the capacity to mobilise and react promptly to the rapid changes taking place in Romanian society, but also managed to force new themes onto the public agenda – the best example being the citizens' initiative to change the definition of marriage in the Constitution.

CONTEXT

In the post-1989 era, political movements and right-wing extremist discourses focused largely on the theme of anti-communism, condemning the official policy of the communist regime which isolated the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR), along with other religious denominations, but also the repression of political opponents organised in political parties in previous history – the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants' Party – or belonging to the Legionnaire Movement. At the same time, the transition years witnessed a revival of nationalism and orthodoxy, amid attempts to get rid of the communist ballast. Several cultural and educational initiatives contributed in a significant way to the mentioned resurrection: a) Lucia Hossu Longin's T.V. programme, *Memorialul Durerii* (The Memorial of Suffering), broadcast since 1991 on national television, with regard to which it is worth mentioning the episode entitled »Noaptea patimilor« (Night of torments) which praises the so-called »prison saints« – former members of the Orthodox clergy, often partisans of the Legionnaire Movement, that were held as political prisoners in communist prisons; b) the appearance on the market of printed publications, but also in other mass media, of a significant amount of material praising »prison saints« (such as Anastasia publishing house, Rost magazine, etc.). The success of right-wing extremist ideas was due to a social and economic context in which Romanians understood with increasing clarity that the democratic transition implied much effort and sacrifices. The total lack of democratic experience played its part as well. In fact, until 1989, Romania's history can be described as an oscillation between enlightened despotism, authoritarianism, right-wing and left-wing extremism. By comparison, liberal democracy had been nothing more than an exotic Western political notion that could at most be read about in the pages of newspapers at the time.

With the end of communism, the BOR regained its rights. In the process, it significantly contributed to the identity reconstruction of a post-communist society tormented by the avatars of the transition. This is highlighted by the public support it enjoyed from the very beginning. The sympathy and support from which it benefitted were firstly due to the widespread opinion among the population that the BOR had been a victim of communist repression and that reshaping Romanian identity could only be done by freely and openly embracing faith. Secondly, for many Romanians whose material situation had suffered from the massive layoffs in the early years of the transition and the precariousness of life in general, faith was a strong refuge and a source of consolation. Not coincidentally, compared to other

state institutions, in 2000 the level of public confidence in the BOR was extremely high, around 86 per cent. Of course, these percentages are due not only to the fact that Romanians – an overwhelming proportion (97 per cent) of whom stated that they were religious (Romocea 2015: 5) – had the possibility to openly affirm and manifest their religious orientation, but also due to the nationalist discourse of the BOR in reaction to political and social news. Its reactionary attitude towards issues such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality, accusations of corruption among politicians, declassification of priests' files, but also the legislative initiative that allowed registration, through the health system, of organ donors is very plain and straightforward.

The active presence of the BOR in the public space grew visibly year by year, paradoxically leading to its erosion. Scandals linking church leaders to cases of sexual abuse and corrupt activities, as well as the political bias exhibited by the church – especially in electoral campaigns – damaged its credibility. Although confidence in the BOR sagged in the ensuing years to a mere 54.5 per cent – according to an INSCOP survey from 2019 (G4media 2019) – the BOR still enjoys broad support from society, especially compared to political or legal institutions. One of the reasons for public support, despite recent controversies and scandals, is its strategy in recent years of reducing the visibility of the institution as such. However, its withdrawal from the public space has been counterbalanced by the increasingly fervent presence of initiatives and non-governmental organisations affiliated to the BOR or cooperating with it – for instance, the Association of Romanian Orthodox Christian Students (ASCOR), the Association of the Romanian Orthodox Youth (ATOR), etc. – which act as ambassadors of the church and promote its agenda.

In the vicinity of the BOR, but also distinct from it, civic initiatives that opposed changes of a progressive nature in Romanian society, from recognition of the rights of sexual minorities to contraceptive policies and sex education in schools, became more and more active and visible. Their ideas and actions established the contours of a Romanian conservatism, often with strong neo-legionary, anti-Zionist, nationalist and orthodox accents. The effervescence of conservative activism was born out of a favourable situation for the emancipation of civil society, which could be witnessed in all transitional societies in Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, as the number of voluntary associations promoting liberal democratic ideas and practices

increases as a result of the direct involvement of Western non-governmental organisations (Necşulescu 2011) and often as a reaction to them, a sentiment of resistance to the values of the West, which were held to be inappropriate, inadequate, imported and, implicitly, harmful, has become more and more pronounced. Moreover, the rise of right-wing activism has been fuelled not only by the inability of Romanian society to quickly digest European values, but also by the failure of multiple attempts to build political parties that promote extremist conservative ideas and are able to convince the Romanian electorate of their viability over the long run.

PARTIES THAT HAVE PROMISED NOT TO SELL THE COUNTRY

The Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), the Party »Everything for the Country« (PTT), the Greater Romania Party (PRM), the New Generation Party (PNG), the New Right Party (PND) are the most important extremist political initiatives, and have a common core, characterised by orthodox nationalism, xenophobia and populism (Sum 2010). They proposed their own and original vision of Romanian democracy, based on the Christian spirit, nationalism, national unity, rallying under an authoritarian, heroic and charismatic leader (Panţu 2010), while calling for resistance to harmful Western influences. What they promised was an alternative to the policies of the ruling parties at the time, which they accused of forming a pact with the West by taking on the neoliberal model that meant sacrificing the welfare of the population in the name of an ideal promoting an economic policy that was destitute, but also assuming inappropriate European norms and European values – secularisation, minority rights, women's emancipation, etc. In their view, as a result of political and social decisions taken by the ruling elites at the time, Romania had moved away from what was the true Romanian spirit – ethnic homogeneity, orthodoxy, an economic model focused on national production and less on imports, etc. In this circumstance, the phrase »We are not selling our country!« came to sum up, almost consensually, the essence of the extremist right-wing political model.

Founded in the first months of 1990, the PUNR soon managed to attain political office, especially in Transylvania, where there is greater ethnic diversity. Among the most notable figures, Gheorghe Funar, mayor of Cluj until 2004, is worth mentioning, despite his expulsion from the party in 1997. The PRM was born two years later than the PUNR and celebrated considerable political success. Its leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, reached the second round of the 2000 presidential election. The party's rise in the post-communist transition years was the result of a mythologizing narrative recycling historical figures promoted in the pre-1989 period. It appealed to nationalism, exploiting widespread frustration and exclusion in society, that was still going through a difficult transition to a market economy (Verdery 1998), with high inflation and mass layoffs. Employing national symbols, but also exploiting emotional reactions to their use (Verdery 1996: 77), the PRM-type nationalism forwarded the proposition of reinventing Romanian society along the lines of religious, xenophobic, anti-Hungarian, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma policies, in a new context of competition

for limited resources, of privatisation, but also of inter-ethnic conflicts (Verdery 1993: 184-186).

The PTT was founded in 1993 by former members of the anti-communist resistance, mostly legionnaires, under the name »For the Country« Party. It posed as the successor of the inter-bellum fascist organisation, the Iron Guard, but also of its leaders, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Horia Sima. The PNG – which later became the New Generation-Christian Democratic Party – emerged six years later, with its visibility growing when George Becali took over leadership of the party, capitalising on his closeness to the BOR, but also promoting a legionnaire narrative, and engaging in discriminatory rhetoric against ethnic and sexual minorities as well as women. More recently, in 2015, the PND was founded, although the association bearing the same name had been in existence since 2007. A glance at the party platform indicates several major objectives defining its *raison d'être*: unifying Romania with the Republic of Moldova, preserving the national character of the state, the fight against Hungarian separatists and LGBT marriages in favour of a traditionalist view of the family (Noua Dreapta 2019a). Moreover, campaigns and actions mentioned on the same official website of the party – unionist marches, demonstrations against same-sex marriage and civil partnership, nationalist camps, meetings with representatives of other nationalist movements in Europe (Noua Dreapta 2019b) – reflect its extremist vision.

THE SEDUCTIVE FORCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Although none of the previously mentioned parties has any political relevance today, their legacy and toxic potential are still latent in Romanian society (Cinpoş 2012). The modest political performances turned in by these parties should not be attributed, however, to a lack of support in society for their ideas, but rather to the cannibalistic nature of the major parties on the political scene (Social Democratic Party [PSD], National Liberal Party [PNL] etc.) which abound in nationalist and traditionalist messages, regardless of their purported political identity. Thus, we witnessed what Cinpoş called the »process of incorporation of extremism« (Cinpoş 2013) at the level of mainstream parties, which led to the disappearance of the small ultra-conservative parties. Moreover, members of extremist parties have migrated in recent years to more visible political parties, where their political beliefs have not conflicted with the principles of their new host party. These parties have, in some cases, become vehicles of their ideology. To the extent that the dominant political parties have evolved toward a nationalist core, the extremist political statements and positions of some of their members have found fertile ground. Ben-Oni Ardelean (PNL), Florin Roman (PNL), Codrin Ştefănescu (PSD), Nicolae Bacalbaşa (PSD) are just a few of many examples of politicians who have publicly espoused racist, xenophobic positions, promoting an ultraconservative agenda in their public statements and actions in recent years.

Numerous cases of high-level corruption, inefficient public administration and excessive political clientelism have tarnished the image of the political class over the last decade. Taking into account the dramatic disintegration of confidence of Romanian

society in the political elite – 11.8 per cent have trust in the political parties and 9.8 per cent in the Parliament, compared to 64.1 per cent who state that they have faith in the army and 54.4 per cent in the church (G4media 2019) –, the ultraconservative agenda promoted by various groups belonging to civil society (non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foundations, initiatives, etc.) have had a greater political and social impact than any party with a similar political agenda could have had. As we have already seen, extremist political parties have not had long and flourishing trajectories, not only thanks to a relatively small number of otherwise rather noisy adherents, but also because of the decline in trust and confidence in the political class, a phenomenon that has significantly simplified the political game.

When Romania joined the Council of Europe, NATO, and the European Union, thereby accepting and assimilating European values and policies, insurgent conservatism felt more and more threatened, and this guided the search for new resources and opportunities for action. It went on the offensive in the context of the economic crisis of 2008-2009, when the government instituted austerity measures, whereby a growing sympathy of electorates for the agenda of the Right could be witnessed elsewhere in Europe. Of course, this situation should not be seen as the spark in a causal link, but rather more along the lines of a strong correlation. On the other hand, by exploiting popular discontent with the political class, the protest movements of recent years have been sucked into the extremist vortex. For example, the ideological heterogeneity of participants in protests against mining in Roşia Montană and Pungeşti that took place in 2013 and 2014 was reflected both by the presence of environmental or progressive groups, but also by nationalist and

chauvinist ones (Climescu 2013) who perceived the commencement of mining activities as a move »to sell the country«. The almost obsessive use of the national flag, Dacian symbols, references to chauvinist, xenophobic and nationalist authors on this occasion, but also subsequent waves of protests indicate that the frustration of society fuelled and amplified latent ultraconservative sentiment that then erupted with the civic activism witnessed in these years. The rise in civic activism not only contributed to formation of a civic conscience, but offered, at the same time, a possibility for groups sharing extremist views to become more visible. Against the background of a plethora of opinions regarding the fight against corruption, the poor performance of the political class and the debate over safeguarding the rights of sexual minorities, etc., the voice of these extremist groups began to wax.

With the increasing visibility and influence of civil society in the decision-making process, the impact of conservative NGOs and civic initiatives has risen significantly. In addition, their prestige and visibility has mounted with their protests of distance from the political class, with their explicit avowals of non-partisan affiliation, ranging even to their rejection of politicians' attempts to garner political capital by championing their causes. One relevant example here is the public position of the CpF, which I analyse in detail in the following pages, with the coalition denying any connection with the political class when it brought to Parliament the citizens' initiative to revise Article 48 of the Constitution concerning the definition of marriage (Mediafax 2018). Thus, what can be seen in the evolution of insurgent conservatism in the last three decades is an attempt at civic reconstruction, »from the bottom up«, on the ruins of compromised and failed political experiments.

INSURGENT CONSERVATISM ACTORS. STRUCTURES, STRATEGIES, TACTICS

In recent years, Romanian public space has witnessed a conservative civic upheaval, in which an essential role has been played by the CpF, an umbrella association void of legal status, bringing together a number of conservative non-governmental organisations, secular and religious – Orthodox, neo-Protestant and Catholic – and with an anti-LGBT, anti-abortion, anti-progressive and anti-Western agenda, espousing traditionalist and nationalist values and principles. The CpF functioned as an informal federation of associations with distinct objectives, but at the same time, attached to the conservative agenda, acting in unison in the campaign initiated in 2013 to revise Article 48 of the Romanian Constitution by replacing the word »spouses« in the definition of marriage with the phrase »man and woman«. Although the CpF owes its notoriety chiefly to this campaign, which culminated in the organisation of a national referendum in 2018, the interests and agenda of the member associations are much more complex. It is with this in mind that in the following pages I explore both the strategy and tactics of CpF as a single actor, but also those of some of its member associations, in the context of the campaign to redefine marriage, but also of other reactionary and ultraconservative activities.

The CpF, like the associations that composed it, was a grassroots social movement, conceived at the community level without political affiliation, whose collective action was aimed at producing political and cultural change. The manner in which the CpF has promoted ultra-conservative, ultra-religious and reactionary ideas in the last decade is a shining example of what M. Castells terms »insurgent politics« (Castells 2015: 304). In the case of CpF, its insurgent policy involved processes in which civil groups regarded political change – i.e. amendment of the Constitution – to constitute a stage in a larger project of cultural transformation, with the ultimate objective being to create a society resistant to the import of progressive ideas, considered harmful to Romanian and Christian spirituality. It fed on dissatisfaction and disapproval of the direction in which Romanian society has changed as of late, under constant pressure from contact with secularising, anti-patriarchal and emancipatory Western values on issues such as women or sexual minorities. Moreover, the democratisation of Romanian public space constituted, as it were, an attack both on the traditionalist notions of the family and the private sphere, but also on the organisation of the political, educational, medical spheres, etc., of society. These ideas were explicitly articulated in campaigns undertaken by the CpF member associations posing as independent civic actors, but also as integral elements of the coalition, as will be seen in the following pages.

In addition, the CpF movement was born in a turbulent national and international context, marked by deepening social cleavages, the failure of protectionist policies to the detriment of market neoliberalism, and economic crises, to which the political response was austerity and budget cuts, but also by the rise of nationalism and populism as an alternative to mainstream European politics. For Romania, a peripheral country in the European Union, the process of government, democratisation and market liberalisation over the last thirty years has meant especially a continuous struggle to catch up with the other Member States. Thus, Romania has constantly oscillated between the unenviable situation of having to shape an identity embedded in its own history, resurrecting and reintegrating its tumultuous past, a past marked by despotism and totalitarianism, and the need to assert itself as a European state that ascribes and adheres to Western norms and values. The secularisation of the state, the promotion of the image of women in the public space, the encouragement of civic activism, but also the guarantee of rights and freedoms for ethnic or sexual minorities were just some of the ideas that the Romanian society had to learn to assimilate. In response, the ultra-conservative narrative criticised the way these issues were handled in legislation, but also in attempts at institutional and cultural reform. In addition, the very name of the organisation, the Coalition for the Family, reveals the solution propagated by it for one of the great problems facing Romanian society, namely the family crisis, in a society reeling under the collective weight of austerity, emigration, disintegration of family structures and divorce.

Right-wing intellectuals have played a decisive role in generating harsh criticism of the European Union and Europe in general, held to be the main sources of harmful doctrinal imports, alienation and moral compromise. For example, in his book »Be Romanian!«, Dan Puric, one of the most prolific ultraconservative intellectuals, writes: »Today's Europe is a huge experimental clinic, where a strict program of re-education for the purpose of alienation, is being applied to an increasingly amorphous and lost population, under the deceptive pretext of liberty, democracy and human rights, skilfully exploited.« (Puric 2016: 39). The moral crisis that Romanian society is going through is, in essence, the crisis of Europe, whose flaw lies in the renunciation of God. Its political reinvention under the empire of secularism is the product of an arrogant modernity, emptied of its true essence, namely Christianity (Patapievicu 2015). Europe rid itself of Christianity, lured as it were by the mirage of egalitarianism.

Today's progressive ideas tout the illusion of equality, and are equally responsible for left-wing political extremism (Pleșu et al. 2014), but also for the removal of moral pillars and traditions that once offered stability and spiritual consistency to people's lives. Political correctness, the emancipation of women and sexual liberation – which A. Papahagi (2019) codes with the derogatory term of »sexo-marxism« – are nothing more and nothing less than the symptoms of a pathological, drifting contemporary world (Liiceanu 2015).

This gloomy picture painted by the Romanian intellectual elite of the Right has enjoyed great popularity among the Romanian public, and has been instrumental in preparing a fertile ground for the campaigns of the CpF and its allies. Therefore, if we want to understand the ideological foundations of insurgent conservatism, we need to analyse the works of these authors, even if some of them have distanced themselves from certain ultraconservative campaigns. Worth mentioning in this context, for example, is A. Pleșu, who opposed the campaign for redefining marriage and boycotted the referendum (Pleșu 2018).

THE FLESH AND BONES OF THE COALITION FOR THE FAMILY. COMPOSITION AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

When analysing the composition, but also the organisation of the CpF, it becomes readily apparent that it was set up as a forum for associations with long years of experience in the field of conservative militancy in the post-1989 era to coalesce their interests. To name just a few among many: the Association of Parents for Religion Classes (APOR), Pro-Vita, and the Alliance of Romanian Families (AFR). Joining ranks with more than thirty other non-governmental organisations while taking care to avoid interfering with each other's specific militant goals, they pooled their resources and experience to lay the foundations for a citizens' initiative to amend the Constitution. Although the CpF was not a legal entity, it nevertheless benefited from a rigorous organisation, the contours of which can also be discerned in the »Declaration of establishment of the Initiative Committee for promoting the legislative proposal of citizens regarding the revision of art. 48 paragraph (1) of the Romanian Constitution« (Coalition for the Family). The declaration was signed by eighteen public figures from the artistic, academic and clerical world, with Mihai Gheorghiu being named as president of the coalition. This alliance is regarded as an umbrella for all the efforts being made by various groups in society to preserve a conservative family model.

Before becoming chairman of the CpF and during the period he performed this office, Gheorghiu also held various political positions: member of the Chamber of Deputies on the lists of the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD) between 1996 and 2000, state secretary in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs between 2005 and 2008, and cultural manager at the Romanian Peasant Museum. He is currently deputy general manager at the very same institution. His name was also linked to a controversial case of 2013, in which the screening of an LGBT-theme film, which won awards at international festivals, was disrupted by a group of people, including some members of the AFR, shouting

homophobic, Christian and nationalist slogans and chanting religious songs, holding up crosses, icons and the country's flag (Stoica 2013). At the beginning of 2018, at the same venue, two other film screenings dealing with LGBT issues suffered a similar fate.

Among the non-governmental organisations with a connection to the CpF were the Pro-Vita Association [for born and unborn babies], the AFR, APOR, Darul Vieții (The Gift of Life), the Association of Catholic Families Vladimir Ghika, ATOR, ASCOR and others. These few examples of only some of the member associations of the CpF illustrate the complexity of the ultraconservative agenda in Romania, but also the religious diversity of the actors involved. Without claiming to be exhaustive, these few examples are intended to highlight the varied nature of the member associations, but also the cohesion of the coalition. In fact, one of the peculiarities that shaped its identity was precisely its ability to serve as a mouthpiece for Christian civic organisations, whether Orthodox, Catholic or Evangelical. For the first time in the post-1989 era, an incredible diversity of NGOs joined hands under the umbrella of the CpF in reaction to the progressive and secularising onslaught, setting aside rivalries and speaking with one voice.

ASCOR was one of the first civic associations in post-communist Romania, established in the first months of 1990, in university centres across the country, upon the initiative of Christian Orthodox students from various faculties (and not only of theology). Over time, it has become the most notorious Romanian organisation of young Christian-Orthodox, with thousands of members engaging in cultural, social and recreational activities (ASCOR 2020). It has managed not only to create a space encouraging cohesion among young people, but has also become a strong vector of civic militancy, eager to promote the religious and conservative agenda. The organisation was furthermore notable for its activities seeking to indoctrinate young people at conferences, pilgrimages, camps, etc., allowing it to successfully mediate the relationship between the Church and young people, a social group on the way to adulthood, in search of identity and, in this context, spiritual values. Similar types of activities were conducted by the Rost Association, another member of the CpF. It aims to provide young people with the Christian education needed to become active citizens in the promotion of Christian traditions, national identity and values (Rost 2019).

The AFR was founded in 2007 by Peter Costea, one of the initiators of the proposal for a constitutional revision of the definition of marriage forwarded in 2006. A lawyer by profession from the United States and a Baptist Christian, he provided legal assistance to the Bodnariu family in the action taken against Child Protection Services in Norway. In the case, Norwegian Child Protection Services temporarily removed custody of parents who were accused of having used physical violence against their children. In addition, Costea, acting together with Pro-Vita, spearheaded a campaign for registration of an *amicus curiae* at the Constitutional Court aimed at rejecting the recognition of same-sex marriage in Romania. In addition, he stood as an independent candidate in parliamentary elections in 2019, with his political objectives including protection of the heterosexual

Christian family, anti-abortion policies, non-discrimination of Romanian citizens abroad, and reaffirmation of the Christian elements of national identity (Costea-parlamentuleuropean.ro 2019).

The Pro-Vita Association was founded in 2005 under the leadership of Bogdan Stanciu in order to agitate against abortion and promote the family, with the ultimate purpose being an affirmation of procreation. Over the period 2000-2005, he was a member of the New Right association, although he claims that he was never a member of the eponymous party that was founded later (Munteanu 2017). At the same time, Stanciu is connected with coordination of the AlterMedia branch in Romania until it was outlawed for its extremist rhetoric, and with the leadership of the association *Darul sunetului* (The Gift of Sound), which represents the interests of deaf persons (darulsunetului.ro), but also with editorial activities of the conservative, anti-feminist, anti-euthanasia, anti-abortion website *Cultura Vieții* (Culture of Life) – www.culturavietii.ro. On certain Internet sites of the aforementioned publication, editors inform the Romanian public about Russian legislation banning surrogate mothers without explicitly voicing support for such a policy, on others it is asserted that legislative changes in Russia do not decriminalise domestic violence. Moreover, in 2014, the website hosted a text written by Natalia Yakunina – a member of V. Putin's inner circle – on the occasion of the forum "Large Families and the Future of Humanity" held in Moscow, praising the Russian state's efforts to support the family (Iakunina 2014). Together with the Students for Life Association and a series of local NGOs, church figures representing various religious denominations (Lungu and Văideanu 2018; Tulutan 2017), as well as representatives of the PNTCD and PPT (Pro-vita 2011), Pro-Vita has organised numerous marches to ban abortion, also known as »marches of life« or »marches for life« in the capital and other cities in the country.

In the campaign to outlaw abortion, Pro-Vita was backed by the association *Darul Vieții* (The Gift of Life). The organisation was founded in 2003 with the purpose of making a stand against the increased number of abortions occurring after 1989 as a result of its decriminalisation. Decree 770 had prohibited abortion from 1966 to 1990. Unlike Pro-Vita, which has religious ties with the Orthodox Church, the Gift of Life is a civic association, a product of both secular activism and militant Orthodox and Catholic priests (Darul Vieții 2016). The organisation has benefited from support from a similar organisation in Austria – Human Life International. Besides its involvement in organising pro-life marches, this organisation has also carried out campaigns promoting chastity as a method of contraception, encouraging families to procreate, but has also campaigned against assisted death or in vitro fertilisation.

APOR appeared on the public scene in 2015, a year after the Constitutional Court had ruled that legal provisions according to which students who do not want to attend religion classes in school have to submit a special application for exemption from such to be unconstitutional. The members of the association, led by Liana Stanciu, a well-known producer of radio shows, portrayed the Court's decision as an attack on the compulsory nature of Orthodox religion classes at schools (Nastasiu 2015).

The status of religion classes in school was probably one of the primary topics polarising Romanian society between defenders of religion in schools and opponents of it (Pantazi 2014) and preparing the ground for the heated debates surrounding the 2018 referendum. Otherwise, attempts to secularise schools began as far back as 2007, when the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) held the presence of religious symbols in schools to be inappropriate. Although the CNCD's decision was challenged and overturned in a final ruling by the courts, this opened the door to a long and tedious struggle for the secularisation of educational institutions, which the APOR sought to resist. Moreover, the association's strategy of setting up branches throughout the country and arguing that the elimination of religion classes is not an isolated issue, but on the contrary is of a national dimension, has helped not only popularise its cause and mobilise parents, but also boosted their involvement in decisions relating to the operation and organisation of pre-university schools.

Another association that claims to represent the rights of parents is the Alliance of Parents, in this case in connection with the introduction of sex education classes at schools. The organisation supported a bill referred to as the Law for Childhood Innocence, proposed by Ninel Peia, president of the Party of Romanian Kin, a political party with a nationalist, anti-immigration, xenophobic and anti-Islam political platform, in 2016 and supported by over 120 NGOs (Alianța Părinților 2020). The legislative proposal provided for prison sentences for teachers who teach sex education in schools without the prior consent of parents, an amendment that would have been in conflict with Law 272/2004, which already required the conduct of sex education programs. Additionally, the Alliance of Parents belonged to the activist groups agitating against compulsory vaccination. Along with other organisations such as the Pro Consumers' Association, the Alliance for National Dignity, the Institute for Psychosocial Research and Bioethics Foundation, the Association for the Development of Children and Families (Marinescu 2017a), the association organised protests against numerous attempts by the government to impose compulsory vaccination by law. The latest actions to publicly challenge this measure have included the staging of simultaneous protests in several cities in the country in collaboration with other associations such as the Association Pro Consumers, the Association Pro Informed Decisions and the *Neam Unit* (United Nation) group (Alianța Părinților 2020). In this context, it is worth noting that Neam Unit was one of the activist groups present at anti-government protests opposing opening of the mine at Roșia Montană in 2013. This information underscores what we posited at the outset, namely that the anti-governmental protests of the past years contributed not only to the development of civil society in a democratic way by securing citizens' rights and liberties, but also stimulated young people who profited from this experience with activist campaigns in support of ultra-conservative causes.

ON THE OFFENSIVE. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF THE COALITION FOR THE FAMILY

The notoriety of the CpF is closely linked to the campaign to revise art. 48 of the Constitution initiated in 2013, a revision which was eventually overturned by a decision of the Constitutional Court. At the time, the CpF proposal was part of a wider number of amendments to the Basic Law adopted in parliamentary procedures, but which failed in the absence of a political consensus between the ruling parties (PSD and PNL). Because the avenue of amending the Constitution through the Parliament had been closed, the CpF changed its strategy and in 2016 managed to collect three million signatures in a citizens' petition initiative. In opting for this approach, the coalition resorted to an opportunity offered by art. 2 of Law 189/1999, which provided for the exercise of the legislative initiative by citizens for revision of the Constitution. On 9 May 2017, the Chamber of Deputies approved by an overwhelming majority – 232 votes in favour and 22 against – the staging of a national referendum on this issue. After months of political procrastination, this took place on 6 and 7 October 2018. Finally, the low turnout of merely 21.1 per cent of the electorate entitled to vote, led to invalidation of the referendum.

One truly remarkable aspect of the CpF campaign during these years was its perseverance – although its first attempt turned out a failure, it continued to look for solutions and eventually chose the method of the citizens' initiative to achieve its aim. Through the citizens' initiative, the CpF avoided not only the cumbersome legislative procedure through the Parliament, but also affiliation with a political party. In addition, the coalition employed democratic means provided by law to bring about a grassroots political change, thereby underscoring that the issue was of general interest. However, the moment when the CpF launched its campaign was no accident, and the strategy of the citizens' initiative is not completely unusual in the European context. Croatia (Horvat 2013), Slovakia (Dittrich 2015) and Slovenia (Novak 2015) had witnessed similar proposals by ultra-conservative organisations, affiliated with militant global networks that included some of the CpF member organisations: thus, Bogdan Stanciu from Pro-Vita or Zeljka Markic from In the Name of the Family from Croatia, participated in meetings of the conservative network Agenda Europe (Ciobanu 2018).

The coalition tried to seize on the realities of the political and social environment to derive opportunities for action. On the one hand, from a psycho-social point of view, the values and principles of most Romanians are still strongly influenced by religious dogma, as well as by a traditionalist, patriarchal way of life (Pew Research Center 2017; Nimu 2015; Moraru 2010). On the other hand, the political environment in Romania is going through an acute phase characterised by a lack of credibility (Puşcaş 2018), a fact reflected not only in low voter turnouts, but also in the multitude of anti-government protests that have been taking place from 2012 down to the present.

The referendum provided politicians an important opportunity to whitewash their public image, which has been afflicted in general by accusations and convictions of corruption, illegal business, nepotism, false statements and / or political inaction.

Their high degree of adherence to the issue of redefining marriage was reflected both by the vote of Parliament to hold the referendum, as well as by politicians' frequent bandwagoning reactions in the media and online social forums. This topic, which was relatively exotic in Romanian society up until then, and narrowly delimited, almost exclusively to the agenda of conservative NGOs and religious cults, quickly became the flagbearer for a significant number of politicians (from all parts of the political spectrum). Exploiting the conservative and nationalist public discourse, these actors elevated this subject into an issue of national security and vital national interests – citing population growth, upholding traditional Christian values against the threats of progressivism, Islamisation, feminism, etc. (Iancu 2016). The ruling parties (the PSD and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats [ALDE]), as well as the opposition (PNL, Democratic Party [PD], etc.) rushed to declare their unconditional support for the referendum, emphasising its vital importance. The political class was obviously trying to divert public attention from systemic issues of a political and social nature for which they were largely responsible.

Although the CpF denied any affiliation and political association of the citizens' initiative with political parties, in reality it cultivated an ambivalent relationship with them. On the one hand, it shied away from aligning with the major political parties, preferring instead to keep its distance from the PSD – which, although in government, was confronted with a massive wave of public protest. On the other hand, the CpF was willing to collaborate with any possible ally, including extremist parties such as the PND, whose leader, Tudor Ionescu, took part in anti-LGBT marches, advocated the heterosexual family and, implicitly, the referendum.

In reality, the alliance between the political class and the CpF was possible because both sides, at a certain point, realised that the benefits exceeded the costs of working together. The CpF's cooperation with political parties was made overt by the CpF itself, with in March 2017 it publishing a collaboration protocol with the PSD, PNL and ALDE that had been signed in 2016 (Marinescu 2017b). The intention underlying the CpF move was less to provide transparency, and more to put pressure on the signatory parties to honour their commitment to hold the referendum by April, given that they were suggesting they might postpone the decision. In addition, when the PSD organised the referendum in an abusive manner, creating the possibility of electoral fraud by scheduling it over two days and eliminating the mechanism for identifying multiple voting, but also clearly coming out in favour of the referendum to the detriment of anti-referendum forces, as could be seen in the disproportionate space on billboards devoted to voices supporting the referendum, the CpF chose not to react. At the time, the political class was showing an inclination to take over the reins of the CpF campaign, which appeared to be an effective move for the coalition. Finally, when voter turnout turned out to be unexpectedly low, insufficient for the referendum to be deemed valid, the CpF realised how harmful it was to move the campaign into the political vortex. This is the reason why, after publication of the results, the CpF accused the PSD of boycotting the referendum (Voiculescu 2018). The coalition's initial fear of

politically contaminating the campaign's message proved to be well-founded. In fact, the failure of the referendum was also a failure on the part of the political class and not of the CpF agenda, although it must be admitted that the coalition also drew the proper conclusions from this failure and disbanded.

If the results of the referendum were an unmitigated failure, the campaign itself can be considered a success. In just three years, the CpF had managed to bring the issue of LGBT rights out of a relatively obscure area, disregarded by much of society, and onto computer screens and the front pages of print media. This was due to a combination of interconnected elements, which I summarise in the following. First of all, the CpF crafted a simple message, easy to understand by the entire population of the country, regardless of its level of education, based on the principle »just stick to what you understand«. In its essence, the message revolved around the idea that a family of one man and one woman was being threatened by LGBT couples who were seeking not only formal recognition of their relationship, but also the possibility to adopt children. In the face of the LGBT offensive, the traditional family and the future of the country and its children were said to be at stake. By going to the polls and voting »yes«, citizens would be voting for heterosexual normalcy, population growth and protection of national values (»Defend Romania's children«, »Defend the marriage between a man and woman«, »Defend the Romania of tomorrow«).

Secondly, the CpF relied heavily on the democratic foundations of its approach. Both in written material and in media appearances, it invoked the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, whose principles it claims to respect (Coalition for the Family 2018). This rhetorical tactic has been increasingly witnessed in recent years in a large part of the ultra-conservative movements in the country and especially abroad (see, for example, the official sites of ADF International, the World Youth Alliance – a global association with branches in Romania). In the opinion of these organisations, anti-abortion, anti-LGBT, anti-feminist, anti-vaccination campaigns, etc., are a manifestation of freedom of expression and an affirmation of human dignity (World Youth Alliance 2019). Of course, such rhetoric constitutes a re-coding of liberal, egalitarian notions to serve conservative purposes. For this reason, when their narrative is criticised as discriminatory and anti-democratic, ultraconservatives invoke a maximalist, abusive understanding of freedom of expression and a right to decide by voting on the fundamental rights of certain citizens – in this case, LGBT rights.

Thirdly, in its campaign against LGBT, as well as in other actions it carried out – for instance, the campaign against the celebration of Halloween in schools in 2013 (Active News 2013) – the CpF used an argument purportedly based on democratic values, namely majority rule. Thus, when constructing a line of argument, ultraconservative groups justify the legitimacy of their initiatives by citing ideas, notions, principles and views of a supported majority. The newspaper Lumina, for instance, a daily paper put out by the Romanian Patriarchy, published an article on 11 January 2018 with the caption: »Most Romanians support the traditional family«. The article invoked a survey carried out by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) on behalf

of the APOR. The results showed that 90 per cent of the respondents regarded marriage exclusively as union between a man and woman – a percentage that legitimised a constitutional review (Manolache 2018). The survey was aimed at showing that the majority of the population supported the agenda of the coalition, thereby making the survey yet another of the many tools employed by the coalition to demonstrate the legitimacy of the initiative. The same applies to its massive presence in the media, as well as the visibility of its supporters.

Inseparably related to the appeal of such arguments to the majority principle is the presence on communication and information channels (social media, television, print media) of a large number of militants embracing conservative causes, without necessarily being members of affiliated NGOs. The same applies to the CpF's allies. A diversity of individuals, ranging from intellectuals (Mihail Neamțu, Adrian Papahagi, Sorin Lavric, Teodor Baconschi, Ana Blandiana, Theodor Paleologu, etc.), to actors and directors (Dragoș Bucur, Cristi Puiu, Florin Pișcic, etc.), but also musicians (Felicia Filip, Dan Miriță, La Familia, Sofia Vicoveanca, etc.), were mobilised in the translation and transmission of conservative messages in various environments and social contexts.

Fourthly, the CpF applied a professional communication strategy in its campaigns, which exhibited a better fit and understanding of reality by insurgent conservatism. In recent years, the CpF has invested considerable resources in publicising its narrative, seeking to boost its visibility and, implicitly, reach out to a larger audience. Home publications such as În Linie Dreaptă, Familia Ortodoxă, the Creștinul Azi magazine, Rost online, Doxologia, Lumina, Prodociens, agencies and press portals such as Basilica.ro, Doxologia.ro, Noutati-ortodoxe.ro, Stircrestine.ro or the Facebook pages of the coalition, but also of member organisations, made massive efforts to promote the message of the coalition. Also, as the CpF began to achieve notoriety, its reactionary positions on various current political, social and cultural issues were taken up by press sources that have a wide national audience, from television stations such as TVR, Digi 24, Antena1, B1 TV, etc., to written publications such as Hotnews, Mediafax, G4Media and others.

In its public appearances, the coalition has demonstrated an ability to act as a unique, monolithic force in which diversity takes back seat to unity and cohesion. Its ability to coalesce a variety of organisations and individuals to communicate its messages as one voice is all the clearer in materials published online that are signed by associations and not by a specific person. The organisational culture of conservative groups becomes more visible here – perhaps more pointed in comparison to other groups with other ideological orientations. This is a culture that promotes the group to the detriment of the individual, a unified view of the community overshadowing the differences and particularities of those who compose it.

In the last ten years, the organisational culture of insurgent conservatism has improved significantly, benefiting from a massive infusion of foreign capital. It is highly likely that the campaign to redefine marriage would not have succeeded without logistical support and the transfer of know-how and

experience from abroad. In September 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center, an American think-tank specialising in human rights, published the results of an investigation into global ultra-conservative networks that support local citizens' initiatives such as the Romanian one. Thus, the Alliance Defending Freedom (a far-right Christian organisation advocating white supremacy), the Liberty Council (an anti-LGBT organisation that promotes the Christian family), the World Congress of Families (a global organisation with an anti-LGBT agenda, with headquarters and representatives in dozens of countries around the world), and the European Center for Law and Justice (an anti-LGBT and anti-abortion Christian advocacy organisation) provided legal advice, lobbying expertise and becoming actively involved in the Romanian campaign (Barthélemy 2018). Moreover, the Liberty Council made possible the October 2017 visit of Kim Davis to Romania, an individual who had become popular in conservative communities in the United States after refusing to provide official approval of same-sex marriage and being sentenced to prison for violating the law (Stack and Gillet 2017).

The CpF fell apart shortly after the referendum was invalidated. In its place, however, remained the Civic Platform Together (PCI), chaired by the same M. Gheorghiu, which in terms of its numbers is far bigger than the CpF. Founded as early as 2017, the platform represents, as stated on the official website, »the largest and deepest form of unity of civil society in Romania, composed of 506 NGOs, 130,000 supporting members, carrying out, so far, international campaigns together with over 250 NGOs from 8 countries« (Platforma Civică Împreună 2020). The large-scale mobilisation at several levels of these associations reveals an extraordinary regenerative force and capacity to regroup on the part of insurgent conservatism. Its recent campaign against gender ideology – gender equality, gender roles – in the education of children (Conte 2019) offers clear evidence of the determination of conservative civic groups, which with every battle lost appear to be getting stronger and more aggressive in seeking to achieve their goals.

ROMANIAN SOCIETY – VULNERABLE TO THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF INSURGENT CONSERVATISM?

Over the past ten years, the Romanian public space has witnessed unprecedented upheavals spearheaded by insurgent conservatism. Against the background of a compromised political class, increasingly gaping economic disparities in society and a decline in social cohesion, as well as a wave of international sympathy for the agenda of the Right – anti-secular, anti-immigration, anti-progressive – civil society activism has metamorphosed into a response by citizens to frustrations and dissatisfaction acutely felt in their daily lives. The natural need to identify those held responsible for political, social and economic instability has made them increasingly receptive to the ultra-conservative critique of society and to its own vision of rebuilding it.

This study aimed to highlight the strategies used by civic movements in Romania, emphasising the way in which the Coalition for the Family (CpF) and its member organisations joined forces and mobilised to promote topics of interest to its following. The reason for focusing on this case study is to be found in the potential it has shown, during the campaign to revise the definition of marriage in the Constitution, to turn a seemingly marginal topic (LGBT rights) into a successful topic of national debate, polarising society and changing the political agenda. Without limiting myself exclusively to the issue at the focus of this campaign, I have shown how ultra-conservative civic organisations and groups have diversified and developed their own methods and tools of activism, ranging from media and social media campaigns, marches, conferences to citizens' initiatives. Exploitation of democratic jargon – freedom of expression, human dignity, democracy by majority rule, representativeness – and participation in national and global activism networks, rejection of political affiliations and increasing media appearances are just some of the strategic innovations exhibited by local insurgent conservatism.

As already mentioned in the foregoing, the conservative groups under scrutiny have managed to elevate isolated niche topics close to the hearts of their members (a relatively closed sphere), such as the anti-LGBT agenda, anti-abortion policy, a desire for an increased role of religion in society, etc., and turn these into topics of national debate. Today we are witnessing, as it were, a resurgence in Romanian society of awareness of, and sensitivity to, insurgent conservatism. The fact that the demand to change the definition of marriage in the Constitution managed to find broad support from political parties in merely a couple of years – notwithstanding their intrinsic motivation – although the same initiative had been rejected by the Parliament just a few years before, further demonstrates the degeneration of democratic

political discourse, and the ascendancy of a dialogue with an open ear for the extremist narrative.

The Romanian phenomenon of extremism in recent years has undergone a series of changes in form, but also in content. In the first period in the immediate post-1989 era, the banner of nationalism, xenophobia, and orthodoxy was mainly borne by political parties that eventually faded away. Over the past decade, however, the authoritarian, anti-democratic narrative opposing the rights and freedoms of groups of society such as women or LGBT individuals has been taken up by a number of civil society groups that have made political non-affiliation tantamount to opposing the mainstream parties, as well as emphasising that political decisions can be taken in a way differing from the classic manner, that is, from a grassroots level, with citizens having the say. In other words, conservative groups in the sphere of civil society have displayed an increasingly marked type of insurgency, the success of which has been manifested in previously marginal issues becoming mainstream societal issues. For example, the process of »normalisation« of the anti-LGBT issue involved extending the audience from a limited, marginal conservative group in the late part of the first decade of the 2000s to a large part of Romanian society, inviting society to take part in a national debate that culminated in the referendum of 2018. The ability to adapt to changing socio-political conditions – such as distrust in the political class or disenchantment with, and precariousness of life – but also the strategic repositioning of topics of interest to the conservatives, that have become increasingly diverse, with issues ranging from the status of religion classes at schools, to anti-vaccination and anti-abortion campaigns, show that the activism of insurgent conservatism is the result of an unrelenting process of reinventing and re-coding the purported needs of society.

Although it may be premature to pass judgement on its evolution in the near or more distant future, the upward trajectory displayed by insurgent conservatism is readily discernible. It is highly likely that Romanian society will witness new campaigns, new citizens' initiatives, new forms of reactionary pressure that will pose real challenges to democracy. It remains to be seen to what extent these will take hold as part of the mainstream vision (as is already the case in Hungary) or whether they eventually fall back into obscurity. In the absence of any coherent and consistent political, socio-economic remedies to its endemic problems or viable alternatives, Romanians will always seek comfort, and indeed find it, in the easy, reductionist and perilous solutions that ultraconservative movements have to offer.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFR	Alianța Familiilor din România - Romanian Family Alliance
ALDE	Partidul Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - Party of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats
APOR	Asociația Părinți pentru Ora de Religie - Parents Association for Religion Classes
ATOR	Asociația Tineretul Ortodox Român - Romanian Orthodox Youth Association
ASCOR	Asociația Studenților Creștini Ortodocși Români - Association of Romanian Orthodox Christian Students
BOR	Biserica Ortodoxă Română - Romanian Orthodox Church
CURS	Centrul de Sociologie Urbană și Regională - Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology
CpF	Coaliția pentru Familie - Coalition for the Family
CNCD	Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării - National Council for Combating Discrimination
PD	Partidul Democrat – Democratic Party
PNL	Partidul Național Liberal – National Liberal Party
PND	Partidul Noua Dreaptă – New Right Party
PNG	Partidul Noua Generație – New Generation Party
PNȚCD	Partidului Național Țărănesc Creștin și Democrat - Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party
PRM	Partidul România Mare – Greater Romania Party
PSD	Partidul Social-Democrat – Social Democratic Party
PTT	Partidul »Totul pentru Țară« - »Everything for the Country« Party
PUNR	Partidul Unității Națiunii Române – Romanian National Unity Party

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IMPRESSUM

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INSURGENT CONSERVATISM IN ROMANIA



This paper aims to portray the way in which insurgent conservatism in Romania has managed to build efficient strategies and tactics, designed to elevate issues of a marginal nature from the ultra-conservative agenda and turn them into topics of national debate with which to polarise society, in this manner contributing to the »normalisation« of ideas and topics from the agenda of former extremist parties, to which it adds new issues as appears opportune due to the ever-changing current political and social situation.



The campaign to change the definition of marriage in the text of the Constitution, carried out between 2016-2018 by the Coalition for the Family (CpF), an umbrella organisation comprising dozens of conservative civic associations, is an iconic episode that is instructive and helps to understand the phenomenon of Romanian insurgent conservatism.



Cultivating an apparent distance and even opposition to political parties, re-coding certain notions linked to the vocabulary of liberal democracy – freedom of expression, human dignity, public consultation, civic initiative –, abusively invoking majority rule as a decisive argument for adopting political decisions, a massive presence in mainstream and online media, as well as developing an organisational culture meant to portray the member groups as a monolithic force have been key elements in the strategy to gain political and social relevance.

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