

History as a Warning: Electoral Propaganda in the 1946 Târgu Mureş Parliamentary Campaign

Istoria ca avertisment: Propaganda electorală în campania parlamentară din 1946 de la Târgu Mureş

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Abstract: This study explores the mechanisms of electoral propaganda employed during the 1946 parliamentary campaign in Târgu Mureş, Romania. Focusing on the actions of the Romanian Communist Party and its political allies (Bloc of the Democratic Parties), the research analyses archival sources and contemporary press to uncover strategies of manipulation, media control, and political coercion. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of post-war political dynamics in Eastern Europe and the role of propaganda in undermining democratic electoral processes.

Keywords: 1946 Romanian elections, Târgu Mureş political history, electoral propaganda Romania, post-war Eastern Europe politics, communist election tactics.

Political context

After 23 August 1944, the political, social, and economic context created a favourable environment for the rise of communists in the Romanian government. Under the guise of promoting workers' rights, they pursued Moscow's interests. Consequently, the Soviet Union supported and directed the establishment of a communist regime in Romania. Andrei Vyshinsky, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, played a crucial role in this process, actively supporting the campaign to bring the Romanian Communist Party (PCR¹)

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¹ For greater fluency, I will use the shortened version in the Romanian language, PCR.

to power. Initially, communists had limited control over certain sectors of Romanian society, but they gradually attracted and incorporated many smaller Parties while eliminating the long-standing ones. This process reached its peak with the fraudulent manipulation of the 1946 election results, marking a crucial moment in the Communist takeover. Subsequently, the PCR absorbed the allied Parties, eliminated the political elites of the old Parties, and initiated the process of integrating Romania into communist ideology. The strategy of founding the Democratic Parties Bloc² (BPD), a political alliance of the pro-communist Parties, aimed to eliminate political competitors and created an authoritative campaign to manipulate public opinion. Despite considerable financial and human efforts, the Bloc obtained the majority of the mandates following the 1946 elections by falsifying the results, including in Mureș County. Although the PCR did not enjoy broad popular support, the Ploughmen's Front, led by Petru Groza, was the main instrument of the Bloc³ in the electoral campaign.

In Mureș County, in addition to the candidates of the traditional Parties (National Liberal Party and National Peasants' Party), another significant political force was the Hungarian People's Union (UPM⁴), which represented the interests of the Hungarian minority. Although PCR reports⁵ from Mureș indicated that the UPM adhered to the values promoted by the communists, the field propagandists of the Bloc encountered difficulties in localities with a Hungarian majority population. Therefore, separate candidatures were launched, allowing the Democratic Parties Bloc⁶ to obtain four mandates and the UPM three mandates in Mureș County.

² For greater fluency, I will use the shortened version in the Romanian language, BPD or Bloc. In Mureș County, the BPD was composed of the Romanian Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the National Popular Party, the National Liberal Party–Tătărescu faction, and the Ploughmen's Front. The initial headquarters were established in a building at 52 Stalin Square (now Roses Square). Subsequently, the headquarters location was transferred to the *Reformed College* building, and later, to the *Secondary School of Agriculture* (now "Traian Savulescu" Agricultural High School), see *Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Mureș* (S.J.A.N.M.), *Fond Blocul Partidelor Democratice (F.B.P.D.)*, dosar 1/1946, f. 13 and 2/1946, f. 18.

³ The statistics of Mureș County Committee of the Romanian Communist Party showed that at the end of 1945, the communists had 2832 members, while the Ploughmen's Front had 21,953, the Hungarian People's Union had 25,000, and the Patriotic Defence, 15,000, see more S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR* (I), (F.C.J.M. al PCR) dosar 5/1945, f. 31.

⁴ For greater fluency, I will use the shortened version in the Romanian language, UPM.

⁵ S.J.A.N.M., *F.C.J.M. al PCR* (I), dosar 1/1944, f. 2.

⁶ The members of the County Committee of the Democratic Parties Bloc were Bot Silviu, secretary, and president Man Eugen. The County Committee was composed of the following members: from the Ploughmen's Front – Man Eugen and Victor Groza; from the National Popular Party – Pop Remus; from the National Liberal Party – Cicioveanu Augustin; from the Social Democratic Party – Bot Silviu; from the Romanian Communist Party – Budai Alexandru; and from the Democracy Front – Vasiliu Letiția. The Electoral Section was led by Pop Remus,

On the other hand, the report⁷ of the Popular National Party (PNP) from Mureş County regarding the contribution of its members to the 1946 elections was accusatory towards the electoral process and the BPD leadership. For instance, the Party leadership expressed discontent regarding the perceived disrespect and drawbacks experienced by its members compared to those of the Hungarian People's Union. This inequality resulted in a deficit of trust within Romanian communities. Furthermore, the Party leadership stated in the report that «the official result is not the real one, and that the opposition obtained a remarkable number of votes that should have been attributed to the BPD, not taken by the UPM»⁸. They also expressed dissatisfaction that numerous BPD members of Hungarian origin voted for Hungarian People's Union candidates and that the PCR and Social Democratic Party (PSD) accepted both Hungarian and Jewish members. When corroborated with other scholarly research and archival sources, the more serious accusations were primarily directed at the Romanian Communist Party, which supported the Hungarian People's Union, despite its formal affiliation with the Bloc of Democratic Parties (BPD) in Mureş County⁹. Despite this, it is noted that at the after-election parade on November 20, 1946, organised by the Hungarian People's Union, in the centre of Târgu Mureş, where two coffins were used (one labelled «Romanian reaction» and the other «Hungarian reaction»), to symbolise the burial of the opposition, only PSD members participated, without the PCR or PNP.

In his work, *The History of Stalinism in Romania*¹⁰, Victor Frunză provided significant data on how the PCR acted during the 1946 elections. Accordingly, the PCR mobilised impressive human and material resources, including 200,000 individuals trained in special Party schools and 6,000 specialised propagandists. A total of 3,600 Voters' Houses were set up, along with 4.2 million brochures, 6.7 million posters, 8.6 million caricatures, and countless other propaganda materials. This massive mobilisation demonstrated the extent of the efforts

the Propaganda Section was coordinated by Budai Alexandru, the Administrative Section was under the leadership of Man Eugen, the Financial Section was managed by Vasiliu Letiția, and the Economic Section was coordinated by Cicioveanu Augustin. The Democratic Youth Commission was led by Gabor Iosif. See the full list in *Ardealul Nou*, „Members of the County Committee of the Bloc of Democratic Parties”, 10 August 1946, p. 2.

⁷ S.J.A.N.M., *Popular National Party Report between 20 October-20 November 1946*, F.B.P.D., dosar 2/1946, f. 14–15.

⁸ The report does not clarify whether it refers to the election result as being unrealistic concerning the opposition against the National Liberal Party and the National Peasant Party or the Hungarian People's Union, considering that the BPD would have received more votes if some had not gone to the latter.

⁹ See an exemple Eusebiu Narai, „Aspecte din activitatea MADOSZ-ului (Uniunea Populară Maghiară) în județul Caraș (1944–1948)”, in *Banatica*, Reșița, 19, 2009, pp. 343–349.

¹⁰ Victor Frunză, *Istoria stalinismului în România*, Humanitas, București, 1990, pp. 287–292.

made by the PCR to achieve victory in the elections and consolidate the power of the communist regime in Romania.

We also note a distinct mobilisation in the case of Mureș County. The PCR Mureș report¹¹ highlighted the members' activity during the month preceding the electoral campaign, providing detailed information about the human resources involved. Thus, we find that 624 mentors were organised into 160 teams, of which 618 collaborated with the Hungarian People's Union in preparing the elections, and only 6 teamed up with the Democratic Parties Bloc. Likewise, teams of agitators and propagandists engaged directly with the population, visiting homes and promoting the Party's ideology by selling books. Other PCR Mureș activists participated in meetings organised at the Voters' House, during which lucrative discussions took place on the political platform of the Bloc, as well as on the achievements of the Groza Government. In total, 171 electoral meetings were organised, in which approximately 34,000 people participated.

On election day, activists visited the homes of citizens who had not turned up to the polls and urged them to vote. Appeals were also launched to stimulate voter turnout, involving influential community figures such as priests, notaries, and teachers. In the same context, they participated in exposing the activities of political adversaries and distributed 35 types of posters and manifestos, totalling 260,000 copies. In contrast, political opponents distributed only four types of posters.

Improvements were also made to the visual appearance of the localities on the day or evening before elections. Regarding human resources, the report highlighted that the Romanian Communist Party in Mureș assigned 30 cultural teams, 30 orchestras and 20 choirs to promote the political platform from village to village; each team also had a political speaker. On election day, 16–17 orchestras were assigned to animate the voters. The only negative mention in the report refers to the low sales of political books, attributed to the population's low interest.

To acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the political campaign's truths, Dinu Giurescu, in his work, comparatively analysed the promises of the Groza Government and the reality in Romania during the pre-election period¹². Thus, official promises were made regarding the amendment of electoral law and revision of the voter lists. In practice, these measures led to the elimination of the government's political opponents. Although electoral discrimination was allegedly cancelled, it was applied exclusively to the opposition's disadvantage, which was extremely downgraded in all aspects. Regarding press freedom, the Government promised fair access to all political Parties; in reality, only the

¹¹ S.J.A.N.M., *Romanian Communist Party activity report, F.B.P.D.*, 2/1946, f. 201.

¹² Dinu C. Giurescu, *Falsificatorii. „Alegerile” din 1946*, Editura Rao, București, 2007, pp. 30–31.

government Bloc had access to broadcasting. The opposition Parties' newspapers were systematically censored, and the distribution of their publications was prevented. Even though an electoral campaign free from candidates' denigration was promised, opposition candidates were not only defamed but also threatened and physically assaulted. The headquarters of liberal Parties were repeatedly destroyed, and examples of the government's failure to fulfil promises continued.

Given that the 1946 elections were the first electoral exercise for many inhabitants, the newspaper *Ardealul Nou* published an article detailing the voting process, accompanied by excerpts from electoral law. Voters were instructed on how to vote, with the sign that had to be applied being specified: "The voting stamp will be applied to the middle of the square in the upper left corner, which bears the number 1 and the symbol of the sun. The stamp will only be placed on a specific square, the one with the number 1. List number 1 means peace, freedom and well-being¹³". The article highlighted a worrying issue: the misuse of education by the government and local authorities, the latter being more concerned with leveraging on electoral capital than with forming educated and aware citizens. This illustrates how the Petru Groza regime tried to manipulate public opinion.

Purpose

This study examines the manipulation and propaganda strategies used by the Democratic Parties Bloc during the Parliamentary election campaign of 19 November 1946. This scientific approach aims to reconstruct a crucial moment in Romanian history with a primary concern for the settlements within the Mureş County region.

To achieve this objective, I used relevant archival funds from the National Archives of Romania. The Democratic Parties Bloc Fund of Mures County was the main source of information, offering a direct perspective on campaign mechanisms and tactics. Additionally, I consulted, to a lesser extent, the archives of the Social Democratic Party, the Romanian Communist Party, the Ploughmen's Front and other related archival funds to obtain a complete and nuanced picture of the political and social context of the timeframe.

An important aspect of the documentation process was the Romanian-language local press of the time, which played a key role in shaping the historical record. It is essential to note that, during that period, the press was under the direct influence of the Bloc, therefore reflecting its vision and interests. Archival and press materials allowed us to identify the main strategic directions of the BPD electoral campaign. Emphasis was placed on marginalising opposition

¹³ *Ardealul Nou*, 19 November 1946, p. 1 and p. 4.

leaders at the local level by discrediting them in the public space. In parallel, intense promotion of Bloc candidates was pursued, many of whom lacked significant administrative or political experience and had no real popular support. A noteworthy aspect identified in this research is the utilisation of the press as a tool to discredit the opposition. Information about propaganda activities and electoral campaigns was often found in archival reports, providing insights into the methods and techniques used.

Our study aims to contribute to understanding the mechanisms of political manipulation and propaganda in the post-war period, providing a rigorous and detailed analysis of the 1946 electoral campaign.

Literature

The transition from a pluralist society to a single-party communist state in postwar Romania has been the subject of significant scholarly inquiry, generating a substantial body of specialised literature. This research examines the mechanisms by which the Romanian Communist Party consolidated its authority, including propaganda, electoral fraud, political repression, and ideological control, while also situating these developments within the broader geopolitical context of Soviet expansion and the early Cold War.

Among the most relevant contributions to the study of Romanian communism is Vladimir Tismăneanu's *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (Polirom, Iași, 2005), a foundational work that provides a detailed political and ideological history of Romanian communism from its origins to the fall of the regime in 1989. Adrian Cioroianu in *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* (Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2005) offers a clear synthesis, addressing both doctrinal aspects and the everyday realities of life under communist rule. Dinu C. Giurescu's *Falsificatorii: "Alegerile" din 1946*. (RAO, București, 2007) explored the mechanisms through which one of the most significant instances of electoral fraud in Romanian history became possible. Nonetheless, Therry Wolton's *O istorie mondială a comunismului: Încercare de investigare istorică* (Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2018) also contributes to this field with broader comparative insights on totalitarian regimes and their ideological apparatuses, particularly in the context of Soviet-aligned states. For the specific case of Transylvania, Stefano Bottoni's *Transilvania roșie: Comunismul român și problema națională: 1944–1965* (Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale & Kriterion, Cluj-Napoca, 2010) focuses on the intersection of communist policies and national minority issues, particularly the role of the Hungarian community within the framework of a centralised Romanian state.

Marcela Sălăgean provides a regional and chronological focus in *Administrația sovietică în nordul Transilvaniei (noiembrie 1944 – martie 1945)* (Fundăția Culturală Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2002), analysing the direct influence of Soviet military administration in the aftermath of the Second World War. Her later volume, *Transilvania în jocul de interese al Marilor Puteri (1940–1947)* (Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2013), takes a broader view by exploring Transylvania's geopolitical position during and after the war, focusing on international negotiations, territorial disputes, and the strategic interests of the major world powers.

Together, these publications form a robust historiographical foundation for understanding both the national and regional processes that led to the communist takeover in Romania and the lasting implications for its political culture, identity, and historical memory.

“The Sun sign stands for peace, freedom and well-being”

The official Bloc candidates' list submission¹⁴ to the Mureş Tribunal took place in a festive setting, marked by the attendance of several supporters, as described in the local press. The event combined the features of a political rally with those of a cultural event, reflecting a symbiosis between elements of political promotion and the celebration of local traditions. On this occasion, an artistic program was organised that included the performances of folk songs and traditional dances. The event was accompanied by chants and slogans supporting the Bloc and criticism of the former government. Representatives of the Bloc delivered speeches, presented the organisation's political programme, and engaged with the crowd. The followers responded enthusiastically, applauding and singing folk songs. Journalists conducted interviews with participants who expressed their support for the Bloc, clarifying their motivations for attending the event. They emphasised the need for political change and criticised the previous government's policies. Meanwhile, BPD members seized this opportunity to stage an electoral spectacle—not only to project an image of

¹⁴ The list of candidates for the Bloc: Ichim Iacob (Ploughmen's Front), Maior Victor (National Liberal Party-Tătărescu), Mitrea Ion (Popular National Party), Dumbravă Ioviță (Ploughmen's Front), Dăscălescu Romeo (Romanian Communist Party), Moșoiu Angela (National Liberal Party-Tătărescu), Bot Silviu (Social Democratic Party). The first four on the list were elected as deputies from Mureş, see more in *Ardealul nou*, 19 November 1946, p.3. According to the lists published in the Hungarian press, the UPM candidates who secured a seat in Parliament were: Dr. János Nánási – judge, József Kiss – farmer, Ferenc Kacsó – teacher. The final published lists include the names of 121 Hungarian candidates running independently in 17 counties, while in some areas they supported the Democratic Party Bloc (BPD), see more in „A Magyar Népi Szövetség képviselőjelöltjeinek teljes névsora”, *Szabad Szó*, 01 November 1946, p.1.

widespread popular support but also to encourage hostility and discredit the previous government¹⁵.

The submission of candidate lists occurred approximately one month before the elections, a period during which the electoral campaign intensified significantly. Although in most political events, organisers created the impression of a spontaneous gathering of the population, archival documents revealed multiple attempts, often failed, to form large groups of people. Transporting people between localities and the attendance of agitators in places frequented by people or during local holidays were just some of the strategies used to mobilise groups. Last but not least, the media campaign promoted a political discourse of the Bloc based on strong opposition to the old political class, which was accused of corruption and detachment from the real problems of society.

On the other hand, the members of the Bloc were presented as honest, hardworking, and devoted to the national cause. In public statements, the Bloc representatives often emphasised their modest social origins and close ties with local communities. This self-representation contrasted with the image of their political opponents, who were described as members of a corrupt elite. In this context, the Bloc built a political identity based on traditional values, defending the interests of the working class and a strong connection to local communities¹⁶.

The electoral campaign in Mureș County was marked by a sharp political polarisation, manifested by personal attacks directed at representatives of traditional Parties. The former prefect, Ion Bozdog¹⁷, associated with the values of the peasant movement (PNT), and the former mayor, Emil Dandea¹⁸, representative of the liberals (PNL), were targeted by a systematic campaign of denigration meant to dishonour and distance them from the electoral mass. These actions took place within a broader political struggle, where opponents used aggressive rhetoric and disinformation to advance their agendas.

In 1946, the national mass media were noticeably controlled and censored, leaving little room for optimism about the prospects of a fair political campaign. Some dailies, such as *Universul* and *Adevărul*, were still printed under severe supervision. As for the opposition press, the Groza Government identified numerous ways to prevent the emergence of independent newspapers, allowing only the publication of *Dreptatea* (of the Peasants) and *Liberalul* (of the Liberals) newspapers. Although new newspapers were issued, and other publications

¹⁵, „Depunerea listei candidaților”, *Ardealul nou*, 19 October 1946, p.1.

¹⁶ V. Dima, „Alte timpuri, alți oameni”, *Ardealul nou*, 17 November 1946, p.1.

¹⁷ Ilie Șandru, „Destinul unui personaj din memoriile lui Vasile Netea: Dr. Ion Bozdog”, Sangidava (5), Editura Nico, Târgu Mureș, 2017, pp. 297–300; Ioan Ciorca, *In Memoriam Ion Bozdog – românul din Urca și „Statul politist”. Recurs la istorie*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2017; Ana Todea, *Portrete mureșene*, Editura Biblioteca Județeană Mureș, Târgu Mureș, 2013, p. 78.

¹⁸ Virgil Pană, *Emil A. Dandea: Un moș primar la Târgu-Mureș*, Editura Ardealul, Târgu-Mureș, 2012.

increased their circulation, they were always affiliated with the left. Even in the case of the two previously mentioned newspapers, they did not escape censorship and control, with countless intrusions in the printing houses and distribution throughout the country¹⁹.

In the case of the city of Târgu Mureş, the fate of the local media was favourable to the Democratic Bloc, with the local Romanian-language newspapers under the leadership of the Communist Party. Consequently, the first Romanian-language publications issued after 1945, *Înfrățirea* and *Ardealul Nou*²⁰, were closely linked to left-wing political organisations, supporting the Ploughmen's Front objectives and promoting the Bloc electoral campaign. In this context, the local newspaper launched an aggressive campaign against opposing candidates, seizing various opportunities to back its political stance. The process of denigration was directed especially against prominent political figures such as Iuliu Maniu, Ion IC Brătianu and Titel Petrescu. At the local level, the attacks targeted two of the representatives of the Liberal and Peasants' Parties: Emil Dandea and Ion Bozdog.

Illustrating this offensive campaign helps offer a clearer, more nuanced picture of the propaganda strategies used by the Bloc. For example, in one of the articles published in the newspaper *Ardealul Nou*, the reputation of Emil Dandea, a member of the National Liberal Party, was systematically damaged. Moreover, articles accused Dandea of hypocrisy, claiming that the mask of a fervent defender of Romanian and Christian values was a sheer facade. The newspaper ironically criticised the themes addressed by Emil Dandea in the electoral campaign on Northern Transylvania, stating that, in reality, his only objective was personal enrichment. In contrast to Dandea's speech, the articles attributed the unification of this region exclusively to the Groza government, which was boasted as a defender of the citizens' needs, unlike the representatives of the liberal governments, among whom was Emil Dandea.

At the same time, Emil Dandea's²¹ actions as mayor were presented in contrast to those of the new mayor, Iosif Soos, a self-declared democrat and partisan of the communist movement. On one hand, he was criticised for poor management of the city's heritage, exemplified by a brick factory left in ruins, especially compared to how quickly the new democratic mayor mobilised volunteers to rebuild it. Additionally, the claim that Dandea opposed the interests of the local community, especially through his resistance to certain peasant groups' efforts to build churches, often surfaced in public discussions²².

¹⁹ D. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–47.

²⁰ S.J.A.N.M., *F.C.J.M. al PCR* (I), dosar 6/1945, f. 21.

²¹ Radu Ștefan, „Domnul Dandea la Toplița”, *Ardealul nou*, 13 August 1946, p.1 and p.3.

²² „Din ruine se naște o fabrică”, *Ardealul Nou*, 3 September 1946, p. 1 and p.4.

The image of the former prefect, Ion Bozdog, was also subjected to fierce criticism in the public sphere. The accusations focused mainly on his alleged involvement in major political events during the interwar period. It was alleged that, during his and Maniu's mandate, he was an accomplice in the mass deportations of the population of Transylvania. Also, despite claims to be a defender of peasants' interests, Bozdog was accused of not supporting initiatives to improve their living conditions and recreational events in areas such as Băile Sovata, which was inaccessible to peasants and workers.

Another series of charges portrayed Bozdog as an opponent of Groza's political regime, involved in subversive activities. It was alleged that he had sabotaged government projects, incited riots, and spread anti-government propaganda. Despite his considerable wealth, he was accused of illicit enrichment and refused to help the population experiencing hardships²³.

The image of Bozdog and Emil Dandea was constructed in public discourse as being associated with controversial figures, targeted by accusations of abuse of power, corruption and opposition to state policy. These accusations were frequently used as tools in the political conflicts of the respective period, significantly contributing to the polarisation of public opinion.

Press, usually aimed at showcasing the contrasting lifestyle of former political local authorities, including opulent residences, luxurious clothes, and considerable reserves of food and valuables. The same accusations of hypocrisy and indifference toward the community were also made against the Dandea family. Thus, the campaign reinforced the negative public perception of the local economic elite and generated heated debates regarding the social responsibility of those in privileged positions²⁴.

Regarding the biography of the Bloc candidates in the 1946 elections, most information is available about the candidates of the Ploughmen's Front, Ichim Iacob and Iovița Dumbravă. The image of Ichim Iacob, often known by the nicknames "badea" or "moș"²⁵, was that of a stubborn fighter, loved by the peasants of the county. In 1946, Ichim Iacob also held the position of president of the Ploughmen's Front and was recognised as "the most beloved and valued ploughman". The press built a mythical image of him, saying that when a peasant thanked him for the land, he replied: "Not to me, but to the Government". He was also known for his restraint in speech, honesty of the soul, the wisdom

²³ V. Rusu, „Prof. Bozdog, dubla măsură”, *Ardealul nou*, 17 August 1946, p.1 and p.3. and Domnul Bozdog calomniază”, *Ardealul nou*, 12 October 1946, p.1 and p.4.

²⁴ „Când Bozdog dă pentru insecetați”, *Ardealul nou*, 9 November 1946, p.4.

²⁵ Nicknames are often used respectfully or affectionately, particularly in rural areas, signifying old man, senior, elder etc. In this case, the nickname reflects not necessarily age but experience and the community's familiarity with the candidate.

characteristic of a Romanian peasant, and a connoisseur of everyday life. These traits were considered to define the characteristics of a decent candidate²⁶.

The other candidate on the joint lists from the Ploughmen's Front, Ioviță Dumbravă, was presented as a man disillusioned with the old political Parties and joining the Front out of a desire to escape the deceptions of the historical Parties. He was also a victim of the legionnaires and was known for his speeches and advice to peasants before 1944²⁷.

Another significant candidate on the list was Angela Moșoiu²⁸, the only female candidate and one of the few intellectuals. With studies in Iași, the Sorbonne and England, Angela Moșoiu was a member of the Ilfov Bar Association and president of the PNL-Tătărescu organisation in Sector 2, Bucharest and Bihor. From the Romanian Communist Party, candidate Romeo Dăscălescu²⁹ was the youngest on the list and the youngest director of a school in Reșița, where he was also a teacher. Dăscălescu was known for organising demonstrations against workers' traitors and for his affinity for workers and education. He was also involved in numerous socio-cultural and propaganda events prearranged by the Bloc. Another candidate of the bloc, Silviu Bot, a teacher and county school inspector, was secretary of the Bloc and a figure present at local festivities, especially those of a cultural and political nature, with themes such as the importance of friendship with the Soviet Union or the achievements of the Petru Groza government. Silviu Bot advocated propaganda in schools and represented the Socialist Party in Mureș County. Nevertheless, a report³⁰ from the Ploughman's Front highlighted concerns regarding his demeanour. In early 1947, he allegedly engaged in acts of intimidation against the teaching staff, abusing his position as a General School Inspector to coerce them into joining the Social Democratic Party. The same report indicates that all parties in the county demonstrate effective collaboration, except the Social Democratic Party, a situation directly attributed to Silviu Bot's leadership.

The available information regarding the other two candidates, Maior Victor and Mitrea Ion, is minimal. The newspaper *Ardealul Nou* provided few details about them, and the archives of the National Popular Party and the PNL Tătărescu did not contain significant data about their careers.

Promoting the achievements of the Government and, in some cases, exaggerating them, was an essential method of propaganda in the 1946 electoral

²⁶ *Ardealul nou*, 22 November 1946, p.1, p.4; 29 October 1946, p.1.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 5 November 1946, p.1,4.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 19 November 1946, p.1.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 12 November 1946, p.1, 4.

³⁰ S.J.A.N.M., *Comitetul Regional Mures Frontul Plugarilor, Meeting 23 February – 2 March 1947, Fond Frontul Plugarilor*, dosar 2/1947, f. 52.

campaign. Alongside these practices, there were also tactics of denigrating political opponents and overemphasising the candidates of the Bloc. These strategies aimed to consolidate the government's and candidates' positive image. In this context, I will present some examples of overestimating the achievements of the Groza Government to provide a stronger overview of how this propaganda was carried out.

For example, a press article mentioned that the government led by Petru Groza managed to grant land ownership to approximately 11,000 ploughmen, both Romanian and Hungarian, in Mureș County. Thus, according to this account, the peasant would have become the "master of his land". The same article highlighted that the Groza Government succeeded in winning the Romanian people's friendship toward the Soviet Union. It emphasised that Romania thereby avoided hunger and war, and that Transylvania was returned to the country. In this context, one could read the words: "Long live the Romanian-Soviet friendship", a phrase that illustrated, in fact, the strong bond between Romania and the USSR. The articles also included the schedule of cinemas showing Soviet films, a film review, and articles about cultural and artistic life in the Soviet Union, scientific discoveries, and other similar achievements³¹.

These examples clearly show that the achievements of the Groza Government were generally portrayed as being closely tied to Soviet life, whether in culture, literature, politics, or other areas. In this narrative, the main idea emphasised that the success of the Romanian government was inextricably linked to the support and influence of the Soviet Union. A deliberate effort was also made to cultivate a sense of indebtedness among the Romanian people toward the Soviet Union by tying the return of Northern Transylvania to Stalin and framing it as part of the USSR's broader achievements. This discourse reiterated the idea that the population of Transylvania had been saved from famine and war thanks to the intervention of the Soviet Union. Thus, it can be perceived that the connection between the Bloc, its candidates and the Soviet Union was obvious.

Electoral propaganda emphasised not only the government's achievements concerning citizens' daily lives but also associated these achievements with Soviet support, presenting Stalin and the Soviet Union as the saviours of the Romanians. In this way, both the government and the candidates of the Ploughmen's Front and other Parties in the Democratic Bloc built their image through a close connection with the Soviet Union. This type of propaganda aided in legitimising them in front of the electorate.

³¹ *Ardealul nou*, 22 October 1946, pp.1, 2.

Uncertain Outcomes and Political Tensions

Reports from the field propagandists³² emphasised special attention to how the population perceived the electoral campaign. Significant importance was given to identifying influential people in the community, such as priests, teachers, doctors, and notaries. Propagandists also monitored the locals' state of mind, believing that higher levels of satisfaction could enhance the appeal of their organisations. Reports noted strong support from officials and intellectuals for the Bloc in certain areas, while in others, there was high hostility. In predominantly Hungarian localities, a significant portion of the population tended to favour the Hungarian People's Union. Therefore, while some reports indicated a favourable situation for propaganda, others reflected a completely different reality, with localities where the Bloc policies seemed permanently undermined. For example, the Voters' House was of no interest to many residents, who fully avoided the mass organisations' meetings.

In some localities, cases were reported in which propaganda posters, those with the symbol of the Sun, were either not displayed or disappeared during the night. Some intellectuals, including priests, were suspected of supporting the opposition, which undermined the effectiveness of propaganda efforts. In other instances, those tasked with political education, such as tutors or officials, failed to carry out their responsibilities, with some neglecting to attend political activities at the Voters' Houses, and party secretaries showing little interest in promoting propaganda. According to the reports, the limited reach of propaganda was often attributed to the influence of key community figures, like priests or teachers, who were believed to support opposition parties. Issues related to public well-being, such as poverty, lack of education, or health concerns, were only vaguely mentioned in the reports. Any grievances expressed by the population were typically blamed on the former leadership and the traditional political parties. Besides the political posters disappearing overnight and being replaced with those of the National Peasants Party, the rapporteurs also reported facing opposition from the Gendarmerie, who were supposed to protect them, especially since in some villages they were booed, threatened, or even physically attacked.

The field propagandists' reports provide a complex picture of Mureş County from an economic, social and political perspective. From an economic point of view, financial difficulties were noticeable, with a poor population, a lack of various foods, desolation and post-war disillusionment. From a social

³² In order not to unnecessarily upload the text of the article, the reports detailing the work of propagandists in villages, communes and cities can be consulted in their entirety at the S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar, file 1/1946, pp. 70–110 and dosar 2/1946, pp. 114–117.

perspective, in some cases, the two ethnic groups, Romanian and Hungarian, were dissatisfied with their status and the land division³³. Despite undergoing a purification process, the intellectual and influential individuals, including priests, doctors, teachers, and notaries, were predominantly aligned with the opposition, undermining the BPD campaign. Additionally, there was a noticeable lack of interest among the population in the presence of propagandists in villages and communes, with many residents refusing to engage in political activities. Politically, it was clear that the BPD's electoral campaign lacked strong support. Nevertheless, some field propagandists complained that, despite the aggressive campaign, the inhabitants continue to support Iuliu Maniu's Party. These reports offered a valuable perspective on the state of mind and electoral campaigns in Mureș County. They highlight economic difficulties, social tensions and frail support for the BPD electoral campaign.

Regarding the BPD's attempt to create favourable conditions for the process, the archives document the existence of lists of people proposed for purge, to be replaced with pro-Bloc supporters and militants. Thus, during a meeting held on 7 August 1946³⁴, the Administrative Section of the Bloc proposed excluding several officials from various communes in Mureș County and revoking operating licenses for small business owners, including innkeepers, merchants, restaurant owners, and others. An analysis of these lists revealed that all localities were targeted, with the purge concentrating particularly on individuals who held influence within their local communities. The projects to replace mayors and remove other officials continued in subsequent meetings of the Administrative Section³⁵. Thus, it was established that, in certain communes,

³³ More in Marcela Sălăgean, *Administrația sovietică în Nordul Transilvaniei – noiembrie 1944 – martie 1945*, Fundația Culturală Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

³⁴ S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 1/ 1946, ff. 10–12. In Toplița, changes were arranged involving the replacement of the mayor, the gymnasium director, and a statistical officer. In Bilbor, the notary, the foreman, and the head of the train station were purged, and five traders had their operating licenses revoked. In Stânceni, the notary was purged. In Subcetate, both the notary and the innkeeper were purged, and in Ungheni, changes were made to the station master and a teacher. In Band, it was proposed to investigate the financial controller. In Mădăraș, the operating license of a pub was revoked. In Vătava, the notary was purged. In Câmpia Bradului, the notary was removed, and in Urisiu de Sus, a teacher was purged. In Morăreni and Șeulia, innkeepers had their operating licenses revoked. In Reghin, two teachers, an engineer, were purged. In Păsăreni, the school inspector was purged. In the commune of Miercurea Nirajul, measures were taken to replace the postmaster. In Idecu de Sus, Hodac, Orșova, and Solovăstru, the mayors were replaced. In the city of Târgu Mureș, it was proposed to investigate the director of the Girls' High School, certain officials from the prosecutor's office, the head of the state hospital, a fiscal agent, a lieutenant, and a colonel.

³⁵ S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 1/1946, f. 10–12. In Bereni, the mayor was replaced. In Magherani, it was proposed that the Reformed priest and a teacher be removed, as they were considered

the mayors would remain in office since they supported the candidates, while people from the Government would replace others. The same measures were applied to notaries. For instance, in the commune of Miercurea Niraj, it was proposed that the notary, as well as the Roman Catholic and Reformed priests, be removed from their positions. Proposed changes also targeted the Mureş Court, recommending the replacement of the judge, clerks, officials, secretary, collector, and other staff members.

These two reports contain approximately 100 names, illustrating the extent of this phenomenon. However, it is difficult to establish to what extent these proposals were implemented, given that, during the campaign, field propagandists reported numerous incidents in which officials or influential people within rural communities had a hostile attitude towards them, being considered reactionaries. A significant example is the *Girls' High School case*, in which the principal's name, Maria Georgescu, appeared on the list proposed for purge in August. However, an address dated in December reveals that the institution was still under the influence of a «reactionary clique». Thus, it is inferred that the principal remained in office even after the parliamentary elections, and together with the unit's deputy principal, she showed sympathy for Maniu, Brătianu and Titel, claiming that the communists had betrayed the country³⁶. In contrast, at the *Al. Papiu Ilarian High School* Director Grigore Ciortea formally expressed his unequivocal support for the initiatives and candidates endorsed by the Bloc, as documented in an official statement.³⁷ The Ploughmen's Front also compiled lists of individuals suspected of acting against the regime. The majority of those identified, including priests, teachers, and notaries, were labelled as legionnaires or supporters of Maniu³⁸.

Another concern of the Bloc was establishing a specialised human resource school within the premises of the *Al. Papiu Ilarian High School* to eliminate deficiencies in the electoral campaign caused by the lack of trained propagandists. As previously noted, the high school's administration was aligned with the new local government. This new educational institution was to be led by a teaching

undesirable. In Miercurea Nirajul, the removal of three non-commissioned officers was proposed. In Hodoş, purification measures were implemented. In Sovata, both Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic priests were purged, and pub owners had their operating licenses revoked. A schoolmaster and other local authorities were also removed from office. Similar actions continued in Reghin, where the Greek Catholic dean, the head of the telephone office and his staff, as well as the Reformed priest, were replaced.

³⁶ The document appears to be an informational note retained within the archival materials of the Bloc of Democratic Parties (BPD). Furthermore, the identity of its issuer remains unspecified, with only the date, 9 December 1946, being indicated. S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 2/1946.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Judetean al Organizației Frontul Flugarilor*, dosar 1/1946, f. 18.

staff consisting of Silviu Bot (secretary of the Bloc), Man Aurel (president of the Bloc) and Romeo Dăscălescu³⁹.

To reach a wider audience, Bloc propagandists followed guidelines to attend all local events, such as fair days. Consequently, they used vehicles from the Mureș branch of the Romanian Communist Party, which were equipped with megaphones. These were used to broadcast speeches and slogans, amplifying the reach and impact of their propaganda on the population. In this regard, propagandists were tasked with drawing up a detailed program of the gatherings and places frequented by the population.

In terms of visual agitation, it was decided to print banners and invitations to register on the electoral lists, the Bloc truck was decorated with the symbol of the Sun and the slogans "Vote for the Bloc of Democratic Parties, Long live the King and the Government of Petru Groza, long live the Bloc of Democratic Parties", as well as "Speculators, vote for Maniu and Brătianu". Furthermore, it was proposed that experienced propagandists—such as teachers, educators, lawyers, and doctors—be deployed to regions identified as pro-reactionary. The aim was to shape public opinion and persuade the local population to align themselves with and support the ruling regime. These professional groups were perceived as trustworthy and authoritative figures within their communities. As such, their presence in these regions was expected to play a significant role in shifting public attitudes and promoting a new ideological framework. Additionally, it was considered essential for these individuals to contribute to the education and formation of a new collective consciousness aligned with the regime's objectives.

Finally, the members of the propaganda department⁴⁰ voted unanimously to commission 100 paintings of the king and 100 paintings of Stalin, as part of a broader strategy to strengthen the cult of personality and promote the image of the leaders. These paintings were likely intended for display in public institutions and other places frequented by citizens to reinforce the visual presence of the two leaders and establish a strong symbolic connection between the state leadership and the people. Such measures aimed not only to control the public image but also to shape and standardise perceptions of authority.

Despite the considerable efforts made in preparing the propaganda campaign and mobilising a significant number of people with communication and persuasion skills, the Bloc leaders were aware that, in many localities, the messages transmitted were not received with enthusiasm. A report dated 23 August revealed that in the locality of Miercurea Nirajului, the Bloc's propaganda was undermined by the actions of local authorities considered reactionary, both Hungarians supported by the Hungarian People's Union,

³⁹ *Ibidem*, F.B.P.D., dosar 2/1946, f. 23

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

and Romanians. To the organisers' disappointment, only 20 locals and 200 inhabitants of neighbouring villages, as well as a small number of officials, participated in the event. This event reflected the difficulties encountered in implementing the propaganda campaign and the resistance encountered by some segments of the population and local authorities⁴¹.

Mobilising the Masses: Propaganda and Agitation Techniques

A report⁴² by the Bloc disclosed some of the activities carried out during the electoral campaign as well as the instructions given to the propagandists. The document revealed the significant mobilisation of human resources. For instance, it planned to hire 100 paid propagandists to encourage the electorate to vote. Electoral propaganda also relied on personal engagement tactics; agitators were encouraged to interact with citizens on the street, at their homes, during celebrations, and even on Sundays. Moreover, the recommendation stated that field propagandists should dedicate at least four days to each area to consolidate their presence and gain the community's trust. In their propaganda discourse, agitators were instructed to emphasise economic difficulties, especially in areas affected by drought, and to highlight situations of extreme poverty, such as deaths caused by hunger among children and the elderly. To amplify the visual impact of the campaign, 6,000 electoral posters of various sizes were printed for display in high-traffic public places, including on high poles, to prevent deterioration.

The exploited local and national social events for ideological propaganda, and some events also had a strong political significance, like the celebration of 23 August⁴³. The report mentions that one of the favourite tactics of communist propaganda was to identify cultural events and popular holidays, including those with historical resonance, to infiltrate and hijack them to promote the regime's ideology. This strategy aimed to confer legitimacy and popularity on a totalitarian regime by associating it with events and traditions with profound significance for national identity. The ultimate goal was to induce a sense of belonging and support a repressive political system in shared consciousness.

More agitation practices were found in a report by the Population Education Section⁴⁴. Disguised as benevolent actions, these efforts sought to persuade the population to support the Bloc candidates through cultural, artistic, and social events. Consequently, the electoral campaign to educate voters, which had begun a month earlier, continued even on election day, focusing on convincing

⁴¹ Report, S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 1/1946, f. 12.

⁴² S.J.A.N.M., *Electoral activity report*, *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 2/1946, f. 139.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 1/1946, f. 13

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, *Popular education report*, *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 2/1946, f. 158–160

the electorate to cast their votes for the BPD. Special attention was given to the door-to-door agitation campaign, conducted with the involvement of representatives from the Hungarian community, the Women's Federation, and the Jewish Committee.

In the lead-up to the elections, including the day or even the night before, those responsible took steps to "beautify" the locality and the polling stations. This process required displaying posters, banners, and slogans near polling stations and along access roads. On 17 November, six conferences were organised in which candidates participated. On election day, the polling stations were adorned with large paintings (2 m) of Petru Groza and a local candidate, Ichim Iacob. Priority was given to the display of drawings, slogans, and posters highlighting the achievements of the Groza Government in the vicinity of the polling stations on election day. The cultural program featured six artistic groups and agitators who spread books and newspapers with political content, even on election day. The Population Education Report underscores the intensity and complexity of the electoral campaign, characterised by a range of activities aimed at influencing voters' decisions. The emphasis on electoral agitation, the preparation of polling stations, electoral events, materials, and the cultural programme exemplifies the extensive efforts made to mobilise the electorate and secure favourable outcomes for the BPD. Another BPD report⁴⁵, although lacking a specific date, appears to have been drafted approximately one or two months before the elections, supported the extent of the visual propaganda campaign described in other reports. The topics addressed issues of general interest, including political economy, society, and health, while also highlighting the achievements of the Government and the Bloc of Democratic Parties' program. Additionally, there was a consistent presence of negatively framed content aimed at discrediting the opposition.

The visual propaganda materials served two primary purposes: to draw the population toward the Bloc of Democratic Parties and to undermine trust in the opposition. Another important goal was to legitimise the Groza Government and promote the image of the Bloc candidates as well-intentioned. Thus, the electoral campaign was based on complex visual propaganda with multiple objectives and wide-ranging themes, from general issues to attacks on political opponents⁴⁶. During the electoral campaign, a significant volume of propaganda

⁴⁵ S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 2/1946, f. 229–232.

⁴⁶ Some official slogans of the Bloc: "Romanians, vote for the Sun, the sign of Romanian democracy!" "Not a single vote for reaction, all votes for the bloc of democratic parties!"; "All workers vote for the Sun, the sign of the democratic parties!"; "Intellectuals, by voting for the Sun, dispel the fog of obscurantism!"; "Women for the first time in front of the ballot boxes, vote for the Sun!"; "Patriots, ensure the sovereignty of the democratic Romanian State by decisively

material was distributed to the public, including approximately 35,000 brochures and placards. A notable aspect of this distribution is the considerable share of materials focused on denigrating political opponents. Approximately 17,000 brochures and placards, representing almost half of the total, were dedicated to this purpose. To illustrate this trend more clearly, we will present several examples: *Care for the Victims* 1,000 pieces, from *The Confession of Iuliu Maniu* 4,000 pieces; *Maniu and his Grandchildren Caricature* 8,000 pieces, while *USSR towards Romanians* 5,000 pieces. Other brochures included *the Program Platform, Slogans, The Earth is ours, The Story of Nastratin from Bădăcin, Funny Words, The People's Assembly, Between us, the ploughmen*, etc.

Although documentation regarding the activities of ARLUS Mureş in 1946 is scarce within the archival collections of Mureş County, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge and analyse the organisation's participation in the electoral process of that year. This involvement, albeit not extensively recorded, constitutes a critical element in understanding the political and cultural role of ARLUS during the immediate post-war period. The organisation's engagement in the elections reflects its alignment with broader ideological currents and initiatives characteristic of the early stages of Romania's transition to a communist regime. Consequently, ARLUS was involved in the reception of Petru Groza in Târgu Mureş on 20 October 1946⁴⁷ and played a major role in the adornment of the city and surrounding towns by exhibiting posters, slogans, and materials specific to the organisation, thereby enhancing the appearance of factories and public institutions. On the morning of the Prime Minister's arrival at the train station, he was greeted by Victor Groza, the president of ARLUS and brother of Petru Groza, along with Gustav Abafay, the organisation's general secretary. The ARLUS members were easily identifiable during the official parade, as they carried a large ARLUS emblem, 2 meters high. Both the president and secretary general of ARLUS attended the banquet organised by the Bloc in honour of the officials.

According to the ARLUS report, the organisation helped decorate the Palace of Culture Hall for a reception honouring high-ranking officials, styled after the ARLUS events in Bucharest. It also ensured that the event would be attended by intellectuals from Târgu Mureş and the entire county, without

voting for the bloc of democratic parties!"; "By voting for the Sun, you vote for peace!"; Maniu and Dinu Brătianu mean disorder, famine, war!"; "Citizens, vote for the Sun for your happiness and well-being!"; "Women for the future of your children, for the happiness of your family, vote for the Sun!"; "Freedom of speech and writing is ensured by the bloc of democratic parties!"; "By voting for the Sun, you ensure peace and tranquillity for the country!"; "Through the victory of the Bloc, you strengthen friendship with neighbouring peoples!". S.J.A.N.M., *F.B.P.D.*, dosar 2/1946, f. 229–232.

⁴⁷ S.J.A.N.M., *Fond ARLUS Târgu Mureş branch*, file 1/1946, f. 16.

religious discrimination, and that members of the teaching staff, including representatives of the Hungarian University, were also among the guests. The festival began with a welcoming teachers' choir concert, which performed the royal anthem and the anthem of the Soviet Union, followed by the workers' choir singing revolutionary songs. In subsequent speeches, Petru Groza emphasised the importance of Romanian-Soviet friendship, addressing the audience in both Romanian and Hungarian. His speech was received with applause from the audience.

Conclusions

The 1946 elections in Romania marked a turning point in the country's political history, paving the way for the Communist Party's rise through widespread electoral manipulation and political repression. Although portrayed as a democratic process, numerous irregularities raised questions about the legitimacy of the results. The situation in Mureș County reflects these broader patterns, highlighting the coercive tactics used to secure a Communist victory. In Mureș, as in many other regions, intimidation tactics were widespread, with opposition figures facing threats and harassment. Additionally, Communist supporters staged public demonstrations to create the illusion of mass support, a strategy designed both to legitimise their rule and to discredit the opposition.

The Communists promised social and economic reforms to gain trust while simultaneously employing propaganda to convince them that a victory for opposition forces would lead to instability or persecution. This dual strategy—offering incentives while fostering fear—proved ineffective in securing votes. Beyond electoral fraud, the aftermath of the elections saw a wave of political purges, targeting opposition members in local administrations and intellectual circles.

These elections were not merely an isolated case of electoral malpractice but part of a wider Soviet-backed strategy to impose Communist rule across Eastern Europe. The Romanian experience, particularly in counties like Mureș, provides a clear example of how authoritarian regimes utilised a fusion of coercion, propaganda, and strategic alliances to consolidate power. Understanding these historical events is crucial in assessing the long-term impact of political manipulation and the erosion of democratic institutions in the region.

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