

# Liberalism and Conservatism in the Writings of Aurel C. Popovici

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**Abstract:** In our study we wanted to analyze how the Romanian political activist and ideologist Aurel C. Popovici (1863-1917) perceived liberalism and conservatism, two of the most important ideologies of the nineteenth century. For this purpose, we studied three of his main writings: *Principiul de naționalitate (The Nationality Principle)*, *Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari (The United States of Great Austria)* and *Naționalism sau democrație: o critică a civilizațiunii moderne (Nationalism or Democracy: a Critical Approach to Modern Civilization)*. We studied the way in which the renowned Banatian author perceived liberalism, but also the way he perceived several main principles of this ideology: the defense of liberty, the sovereignty of the people, representative government, the refusal of absolutism and pluralism. By analyzing these topics in Aurel C. Popovici's writings, we identified several paradoxes of his thinking, which we tried to explain by appealing to other sources, like personal letters or memoirs belonging to friends or admirers.

**Keywords:** liberalism, conservatism, Aurel C. Popovici, democracy, Austria-Hungary, nationalism

**Rezumat:** În studiul nostru am dorit să analizăm modul în care activistul politic și ideologul român Aurel C. Popovici (1863-1917) a perceput liberalismul și conservatorismul, două dintre cele mai importante ideologii ale secolului al XIX-lea. Astfel, am studiat trei dintre principalele sale scrieri: *Principiul de naționalitate*, *Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari* și *Naționalism sau democrație: o critică a civilizațiilor moderne*. Am studiat modul în care renumitul autor bănățean a perceput liberalismul, dar și modul în care a realizat mai multe principii importante ale acestei ideologii: apărarea libertății, suveranitatea poporului, guvernarea reprezentativă, refuzul absolutismului și pluralismul. Analizând aceste subiecte în scrierile lui Aurel C. Popovici, am identificat mai multe paradoxuri ale gândirii sale, pe care am încercat să le explicăm apelând la alte surse, precum scrisori personale sau memorii aparținând prietenilor sau admiratorilor.

**Cuvinte cheie:** liberalism, conservatorism, Aurel C. Popovici, democrație, Austro-Ungaria, naționalism

Aurel C. Popovici (1863-1917) was one of the most important political journalists and opinion makers of the Transylvanian Romanians in the last years of the Dual Monarchy. His work consists of several writings dedicated to Romanian affairs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a wide plan to federalize this state and an interesting polemical book about nationalism and democracy. His life and his ideas were studied by many Romanian researchers and a monograph about him was written several years ago.<sup>1</sup> In our research, we would like to bring new contributions regarding Popovici's political ideas, by studying the influence of liberalism and conservatism on his writings. Two main questions are currently guiding our study: 1) how did Popovici regard the concept of liberty and 2) how did he perceive two of the main ideologies of the nineteenth century, liberalism and conservatism?

Aurel C. Popovici was born on the 4<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> of October 1863 in Lugoj, in the family of a Romanian craftsman. He began his primary studies in his native town and completed them at the Romanian middle schools of Beiuș and Brașov. In 1885 he began to study medicine in Vienna, where he was also active in the Romanian student association *România Jună* (*Young Romania*). Three years later he moved to the University of Graz, where he continued his studies. At that time, politics already became his first concern and because of this reason he had abandoned his medical career to get involved instead in the struggle for the political emancipation of the Romanians from Austria-Hungary.<sup>2</sup> His first major political work was, in the context of the *Memorandum*, the coordination and writing of the *Cestiunea română în Transilvania și Ungaria. Replica junimii academice române din Transilvania și Ungaria la „Răspunsul” dat de junimea academică maghiară „Memoriului” studenților universitară din România* (*The Romanian Question in Transylvania and Hungary. The Reply of the Young Romanian Students from Transylvania and Hungary to the “Answer” of the Young Hungarian Students to the “Memoir” of the university students of Romania*) in 1892.<sup>3</sup> Popovici was the main author of this memoir, which became known in the Romanian historiography as *Replica* (*The Reply*). Many other young Romanians cooperated with him, for example the future political leaders Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Popovici was accused by the Hungarian authorities due to his work and received a four year prison sentence. After the trial, he fled to Italy.<sup>4</sup>

The young political activist arrived in Bucharest from Italy in 1893. There he served for twelve years as a German and Hygiene teacher at the Nifon Seminary and the War School in Bucharest. Between 1900 and 1901 he

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<sup>1</sup> Vasile Crișan, *Aurel C. Popovici (1863-1917)* (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

worked at the Romanian lyceum of Bitolia, nowadays in Macedonia. Popovici remained a sympathizer of the “Ligue for the Cultural Unity of all the Romanians” and worked intensely in the media and the editorial field. In 1899 he founded the “Minerva” Graphical Arts Institute, a modern publishing house which he led until 1910, and also the newspaper *România Jună*, which lasted only until the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1900. An important stage in his career was his directorate at the renowned periodical *Sămănătorul* (*The Sower*), between 1906 and 1908, where he wrote or coordinated the political articles.<sup>5</sup> In 1912 he moved to Vienna to be closer to the archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir of the Austrian-Hungarian throne, whom he wanted to influence with his project of “The United States of Great Austria”. After Franz Ferdinand’s assassination and the outbreak of World War I, Popovici and his close friend, Alexandru Vaida Voevod, tried to persuade the German government to intervene in favour of the Transylvanian and Hungarian Romanians in order to obtain Romania’s help in the war.<sup>6</sup> The two activists settled in Geneva and there, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1917,<sup>7</sup> Aurel C. Popovici died because of pneumonia.<sup>8</sup>

His main political ideas are presented in several books like *Principiul de naționalitate* (*The Nationality Principle*) (1894),<sup>9</sup> *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Groß-Österreich* (*The United States of Great Austria*) (1906)<sup>10</sup> and *Naționalism sau democrație: o critică a civilizațiunii moderne* (*Nationalism or Democracy: a Critical Approach to Modern Civilisation*) (1910).<sup>11</sup> Their study is very important in order to understand the ideological and political spectrum of Austria-Hungary and Romania. Popovici was one of the most informed journalists of his time about the main political ideologies and he had written the most explicit books about his beliefs. His ideas, which will be analyzed below, gained a strong influence among the young Romanian activists and intellectuals, not only at the end of the nineteenth century, but also during the interwar period. Alexandru Vaida

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-212.

<sup>6</sup> Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Putere și defăimare* [Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Power and Defamation] (București: Rao, 2010), pp. 73-94.

<sup>7</sup> Crișan, *Aurel C. Popovici*, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> Alexandru Vaida Voevod, *Memorii* [Memoirs], vol. IV, edited by Alexandru Șerban, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1998), p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> Aurel C. Popovici, *Principiul de naționalitate: conferința desvoltată la 30, I, 1894 în „Ateneul Român” din București* [The Principle of Nationality] (București: Tipografia Modernă Gregoire Louis, 1894).

<sup>10</sup> This book was originally published in German, in 1906, in Leipzig, and was translated into Romanian only in 1939, by Petre Pandrea. In our research, we used Aurel C. Popovici, *Stat și națiune: Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari* [State and Nation: The United States of Great Austria], translated by Petre Pandrea, edited by Constantin Schifirneț, (București: Albatros, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Aurel C. Popovici, *Naționalism sau democrație: o critică a civilizațiunii moderne* [Nationalism or Democracy: a Critical Approach to Modern Civilization], edited by Constantin Schifirneț (București: Albatros, 1997).

Voevod regarded him as one of his intellectual mentors, who had oriented him from socialism to nationalism.<sup>12</sup> He had such a great prestige among the general public and had been such a good debater, that even Nicolae Iorga had been afraid to criticize him publicly.<sup>13</sup> One of the most preeminent Romanian intellectuals who was influenced by the Banatian ideologist was the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, who in 1917 had written that Popovici was “for us, the only spiritual aristocrat since Eminescu”,<sup>14</sup> and several years later, in 1926, he declared that *Nationalism or Democracy* had been a fundamental book for his time.<sup>15</sup> Popovici was appreciated by other important intellectuals, such as the philosopher Ion Petrovici<sup>16</sup> or the historian Ion Dimitrie Suciu, who had regarded him as “the most enlightened figure of the Romanian people between 1892 and 1917” and had considered that his ideas were still valid after the Great Union of 1918.<sup>17</sup>

Our study aims to bring new information regarding the political ideas of the renowned Banatian ideologist, by analyzing his approach to liberalism and conservatism. Other research dedicated to his writings focused on how he theorized the concept of the nation<sup>18</sup> and on his plans to federalize the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Vaida Voevod, *Memorii*, vol. IV, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Corespondență (A-F)* [Letters (A-F)], edited by Mircea Cenușă (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1989), p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Ceasornicul de nisip* [The Sand Clock], edited by Mircea Popa (Cluj: Dacia, 1973), p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> Ion Petrovici, *Figuri dispărute* [Lost figures] (București: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, 1937), pp. 18-26.

<sup>17</sup> Ion Dimitrie Suciu, *Literatura bănățeană de la început până la unire (1582-1918)* [Banatian Literature from the beginning to the Union] (Timișoara: Editura Regionalei Bănățene „Astra”, 1940), p. 210.

<sup>18</sup> Nicolae Bocșan, *Ideea de națiune la românii din Transilvania și Banat (secolul al XIX-lea)* [The idea of Nation among the Romanians of Transylvania and Banat (the 19<sup>th</sup> Century)] (Cluj-Napoca, Reșița: Presa Universitară Clujeană, Banatica, 1997), pp. 169-192, 197-209; Gelu Sabău, ‘Democracy against Nationalism: the A. C. Popovici Case’ in *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, I/1(2013): 111-128; Gabriela Tănăsescu, ‘Naționalismul doctrinar - Aurel C. Popovici’ [The Doctrinal Nationalism - Aurel C. Popovici] in *Revista de filosofie*, 64/4 (2017): 438-459.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Neumann, ‘Federalism și naționalism. O perspectivă comparată asupra teoriilor politice din Austro-Ungaria la 1900’ [Federalism and Nationalism. A Comparative Perspective on the Political Theories of Austria-Hungary in 1900] in Victor Neumann, *Ideologie și fantasmagorie. Perspective comparative asupra istoriei gândirii politice în Europa Est-Centrală* [Ideology and Phantasmagoria. Comparative Perspectives on the History of the Political Thought in East-Central Europe] (Iași: Polirom, 2001), pp. 69-92; Marius Turda, Aurel C. Popovici și federalismul românesc din Transilvania (1890-1906) [Aurel C. Popovici and the Romanian Federalism in Transylvania (1890-1906)] in <http://altera.adatbank.transindex.ro/pdf/7/011.pdf> (accessed in 31.03.2018).

Aurel C. Popovici made, in his writings, several considerations concerning liberalism. It is therefore important to see what he understood by this concept, but, unfortunately, we couldn't identify in his works a complete definition. Only in his 1910 book, *Nationalism or Democracy*, we can see an attempt to analyze the significance of liberalism and to compare it with egalitarianism and democracy. Popovici considered that liberalism was born from the fight against slavery. He thought that "liberalism is the most categorical negation of an equality deduced from abstractions, theories and fantasies. The true liberalism, as was, for example, the English one, came not out of dreams, but out of the practical side of life itself".<sup>20</sup> A liberal man always struggles to guarantee, whatever the costs, the liberty to develop and the liberty of the national culture.<sup>21</sup> Popovici understood liberalism as an ideology which had been against slavery, a guarantee for liberty, though also a very pragmatic one, opposed to theories and fantasies. He also used the concept of "national liberalism" to speak about the liberalism that was adapted to the specific conditions of a certain country. This form of liberalism is seen not only as necessary, but also as very compatible with conservatism, the monarchy or the aristocratic principle.<sup>22</sup>

Liberal ideology was, according to the Banatian thinker, very close to conservatism. Popovici considered that both liberal and conservative ideas are "indispensable for the national existence and normal development of a people".<sup>23</sup> The author unconditionally accepts the existence of a conservative movement (although we didn't find any definition of conservatism in his writings), but he stated that liberalism can be only moderate,<sup>24</sup> because, in his words, "only through moderation liberalism becomes national."<sup>25</sup> In the absence of moderation, liberalism can legitimize democracy and this tendency was disputed in his entire 1910 book.<sup>26</sup>

The ideal government, according to Popovici, would have to contain both conservatives and liberals: "only the harmony between the leaders of a nation can make serious politics. And these leaders can be only liberals and conservatives".<sup>27</sup> We can see that he has a very interesting vision about these two types of political figures because he is also convinced that "a time will

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<sup>20</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 359.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> About Popovici's views on democracy see Sabău, 'Democracy', pp. 116-119, Tănăsescu, 'Naționalismul', p. 454, and Boșcan, *Ideea*, p. 199.

<sup>27</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 135.

come when all the liberal and conservative elements will have to unite in a single great party against the cosmopolitan radicalism".<sup>28</sup> The two ideologies should be connected, according to Popovici, through nationalism, and the most important criteria in judging the politicians is patriotism.<sup>29</sup> The Banatian thinker adopted an idea of the Swiss jurist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881) who, correlating the political doctrines with the biological ages, considered that the democrats would be children, the liberals would be highly motivated young men and the conservatives would be the mature men.<sup>30</sup> This comparison explains his adversity towards democracy as well as the interesting approach he saw between liberalism and conservatism.

We will now analyze the way in which the Banatian ideologist perceived the main principles of political liberalism: the defense of liberty, the sovereignty of the people, representative government, the refusal of absolutism and pluralism.<sup>31</sup>

The most important trait of the liberal ideology is the idea that liberty and the autonomy of man are fundamental conditions for building a right and harmonious society.<sup>32</sup> Aurel C. Popovici's vision on liberty is very interesting and through it we can also understand his ideological views. We can see from his writings that he recognized two forms of liberty: 1) liberty to develop "organically" and 2) the national liberty.

In order to develop it, a people required "historical continuity and freedom to develop organically".<sup>33</sup> That meant stopping all cultural and institutional imports from abroad. This idea was borrowed from Titu Maiorescu, who had theorized the "forms without content". We can find this idea in his early writing, such as *The Principle of Nationality*, where the author admitted that cultural influences from more developed nations were necessary, but he had stated that a nation should always adapt these influences to its specific conditions. Popovici considered that, in this way, imports are "nationalized".<sup>34</sup>

Freedom of organic development meant that the state should respect the particular "spirit" of every people.<sup>35</sup> The state must not interfere not even in law making, because, according to Popovici, the best laws are the ones which are made freely by a people, according to its needs.<sup>36</sup> He was very

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>31</sup> Olivier Nay, *Istoria ideilor politice* [The History of Political Ideas] (Iași: Polirom, 2008), p. 247

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>33</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> Popovici, *The Principle*, p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 156. See also Tănăsescu, 'Naționalismul', pp. 453-454.

<sup>36</sup> Aurel C. Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 157.

aware of the fact that liberty was needed for the development of institutions and we could see that through his criticism of the educational policies. The Banatian ideologist considered that the state was too involved in educational affairs and this damaged the teaching activity: "instruction and education can have good results only when the teachers are capable and free in their activity".<sup>37</sup> He promoted the idea of the minimal state ("the state must not be overzealous, especially in the fields where it doesn't have to intervene"<sup>38</sup>), which shouldn't try to find jobs for young men, because finding a job is the duty of every individual and of his family.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to see that he placed this idea in the peasant mentality, considering the peasant to be aware of the fact that "not the state but *work is the mother of the poor and fortune doesn't create the man, but the man creates the fortune*" [we marked with Italic characters several proverbs quoted by Popovici].<sup>40</sup> The Romanian peasant is perceived not only as an adversary of the paternalist state, but also as an "authentic liberal", who appreciates competition, meritocracy and despises demagoguery.<sup>41</sup> Of course, we should regard these statements as impressions and not as evidence-based facts. During the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century we can also find many accounts that depict the Romanian peasant as lazy.<sup>42</sup> We believe that, by invoking the peasants, Popovici only wanted to add more authority to his ideas.

The second, and probably the most important form of liberty which A. C. Popovici acknowledged, was the national liberty, through which he had understood the liberty given to peoples and nationalities to develop their language and culture. His opinions on national liberty were fundamentally influenced by his role in the Romanian national movement in Austria-Hungary. He didn't make a clear distinction between liberty and national liberty and that suggested that he had considered the two concepts mainly

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 311-317.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>42</sup> The accounts regarding the laziness of the Romanian peasants in the first half of the nineteenth century were analyzed in Sorin Mitu, *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni* [The Genesis of the National Identity among the Transylvanian Romanians] (București: Humanitas, 1997), pp. 190-201. One of Aurel C. Popovici's contemporaries, Dumitru Drăghicescu wrote, in his renowned book, *Din psihologia poporului român (introducere) / On the Psychology of the Romanian People (an introduction)* (1907), that the Romanians from the beginning of the twentieth century are careless, lazy and they are lacking initiative. He attributed these negative traits to the Turkish tyranny and the oriental influence. See Dumitru Drăghicescu, *Din psihologia poporului român: introducere* [On the Psychology of the Romanian People (an introduction)] (București: Albatros, 2003), pp. 364-365.

identical, although in his 1910 book he had stated that “only in a freedom regime” a people could become a nationality, by developing its particular traits.<sup>43</sup> In his opinion, the nationalities problem is caused by the decision of several governments, which didn’t grant the nationalities the freedom to develop according to their particular character.<sup>44</sup> It is very interesting to see how, out of this conception derives Popovici’s entire criticism regarding democracy. According to his belief, this interventionism was stimulated by exaggerated democracy, had been promoted by several “small or big tyrants” who had been seduced by “the ideal of equality and uniformity”.<sup>45</sup> As an interesting paradox concerning his ideas, we must reveal that, despite underlining the precious role of liberty in the formation of nationalities, he also mentioned that all liberties were relative and could be legitimately granted only “for maintaining or developing the national character of the people, or the national characters of a polyglot state, not for its dissolution, not for its replacement”.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, it becomes very clear that, for Popovici, there can be no form of liberty that may affect one’s nationality of other nationalities. He expressed this conviction in his 1906 project for the federalization of Austria-Hungary, when he stated that no nationality of this multi-national state should aspire to damage other nationality’s liberty, because there is enough room in the empire for all the nationalities to live in peace.<sup>47</sup> In Popovici’s view, there was a powerful evolutionary connection between nationality and the liberal principles, as he had defined “the nationality principle” as “a further phase in the evolution of the practical application of the liberal and egalitarian principles”.<sup>48</sup> This is not an original idea, because it was promoted by other political writers in the nineteenth century, like Eötvös József<sup>49</sup> and Alexandru Mocioni.<sup>50</sup> Popovici’s attachment to the concept of “nation” is different from

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<sup>43</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 363.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13; Sabău, ‘Democracy’, p. 116.

<sup>46</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 140.

<sup>47</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 278.

<sup>48</sup> Popovici, *Principiul*, p. 6. This link was defined in similar terms in the 1906 book. See Popovici, *Stat*, p. 200.

<sup>49</sup> József Eötvös, *Chestiunea de naționalitate* [The Nationality Issue] (Arad: Tipografia George Nichin, 1906), pp. 16-24.

<sup>50</sup> This Banatian leader said, in a speech in the Pest Diet, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1868: “The justification of the nationality idea lies in the simultaneous possibility of both individual liberty and the development of the human spirit. The national idea, as I had the honour to remind, is caused by the democratic direction of constitutionalism”. See Teodor V. Păcățian, *Cartea de Aur sau luptele politice-naționale ale românilor de sub Coroana Ungară* [The Golden Book or the Political and National Struggles of the Romanians within the Hungarian Crown], vol. IV (Sibiu: Tipografia Henric Meltzer, 1906) p. 475.



that of its predecessors, because it has other theoretical basis. The historian Marius Turda proved that Aurel C. Popovici had theorized a Romanian version of Darwinist nationalism, inspired by authors like Robert Knox, Arthur de Gobineau, Ludwig Gumplowicz, Rudolf von Jhering, Vacher de Lapouge, Houston Steward Chamberlain, Paul Broca sau Ludwig Woltmann. The Banatian ideologist saw the conflicts between the nations as conflicts between the races (taking over the concept of "Rassenkampf" from Gumplowicz) and linking together the concepts of "race" and "nation",<sup>51</sup> according to several pseudo-scientific ideas which had been highly appreciated in his time.

Another interesting feature of Popovici's ideas is the subordination of all the institutions and ways of manifestation of civil society in a liberal regime. Even in his first political work dedicated to the nationality problem, Popovici stated that the development of the national conscience was determined by schools, the media, associations, public reunions and national literature.<sup>52</sup> The assimilation of a certain nationality can take place, according to his opinions, only through "tyrannical government principles", like limiting the right to have representatives, the freedom of the press, the right of organizing reunions or of using the native minority languages in schools and in the administration.<sup>53</sup> The author reaffirmed these ideas in 1906, by stating that the Magyarization process was supported by "imposing the Hungarian language, colonization, persecution of the nationalities' leaders, the suppression of the freedom of the press and of the right to organize reunions etc."<sup>54</sup> In 1910, he wrote that the granting and correct application of the public liberties was a necessary condition for the normal development of nationalities.<sup>55</sup> By approaching these measures strictly from the perspective of their utility in the formation and maintenance of the national conscience, we can affirm that Popovici's thinking significantly differs from that of several Romanian leaders of the nineteenth century, who appreciated these liberal measures for their capacity of improving every man's life. The freedom of the press had been discussed in the Transylvanian Romanian journals since the first half of the nineteenth century and George Barițiu had presented it strictly connected with the right that every man had to express his opinions. He even made a connection between the freedom of the press and the improvement of

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<sup>51</sup> Marius Turda, *Ideea de superioritate națională în Imperiul Austro-Ungar (1880-1918)* [The Idea of National Superiority in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1880-1918)] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2016), pp. 142-151.

<sup>52</sup> Popovici, *Principiul*, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 21.

public morality.<sup>56</sup> Another important Romanian leader, Antoniu of Mocioni, linked, in 1869, the citizens' right to organize reunions with the constitutional regime of Austria-Hungary.<sup>57</sup> In contrast to these two Romanian leaders, Aurel C. Popovici didn't perceive these measures from a classical liberal perspective, but from a nationalist point of view, which doesn't emphasize the individual, but the nation.

We will now analyze how another important principle of political liberalism, the sovereignty of the people's rule, is reflected in Popovici's work. The term "nation" was associated with the term "people" at the end of the eighteenth century and *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1789 established, in its third article (written on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August), the principle that the nation was the depository of sovereignty.<sup>58</sup> The concept of nation was the main intellectual frame in which the sovereignty of the people's rule had been conceived and led to the birth of a new transcendent relationship between individuals, who became members of a nation.<sup>59</sup> The Banatian ideologist was familiar with this fundamental political principle, but he had different approaches to it, depending on the context. Popovici expressed very positive considerations about popular sovereignty in his writings dedicated to the national problem, when this principle had served the cause he had been defending. In 1906, he wrote that a people's assimilation had been possible only when there wouldn't have been any ideas about the sovereignty of the people's rule, which could defend its interests.<sup>60</sup> In his writings, Popovici also explained the context of all the Romanian efforts to obtain their nation's emancipation and he had always underlined that these efforts had been based on the spirit of his time. In this context, we can also find the affirmation of popular sovereignty: "For over a century, we live in an age when we speak daily about popular sovereignty, about democracy and decentralization of the constitutional powers, about universal suffrage. We tend to accomplish all these principles because every right emanates from the people".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Andrei Sabin Faur, 'Presa, publicul și jurnaliștii în viziunea lui George Barițiu și a corespondenților săi' [The Press, the Public and the Journalists in the view of George Barițiu and his Correspondents] in *Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studențești: Arheologie - Istorie - Muzeologie*, nr. 22, an XXII (2016), pp. 161-164.

<sup>57</sup> Teodor V. Păcățian, *Cartea de Aur sau luptele politice-naționale ale românilor de sub Coroana Ungară* [The Golden Book or the Political and National Struggles of the Romanians within the Hungarian Crown], vol. V (Sibiu: Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1909), p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Stéphane Rials, *Declarația drepturilor omului și cetățeanului* [The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen] (Iași: Polirom, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>59</sup> Nay, *Istoria*, pp. 349-350.

<sup>60</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

This idea has an interesting metamorphosis in Popovici's 1910 book, dedicated to the criticism of democracy in the name of the national idea. In *Nationalism or Democracy*, he stated that popular sovereignty is just a fiction<sup>62</sup> and, with the risk of being considered a reactionary, he suggested that this principle should be erased from the Romanian Constitution, in order to end demagogy.<sup>63</sup> This fundamental change is very interesting and reveals to us a very interesting paradox in Popovici's thought: he attributed a positive influence to the popular sovereignty when this principle served his cause (the emancipation of the Romanian nation), in his writings dedicated to a foreign public, as was the case with his federalization project, which was published in German. In his works dedicated to the Romanian public, Popovici ignored this principle, or even tried to repel it.

Other researchers who have studied his work saw this paradox from a different perspective, as a conflict between nationalism and democracy.<sup>64</sup> The historian Nicolae Bocșan suggested a potential explanation for this paradox, suggesting Popovici had simply adhered to the program of *The Sower*.<sup>65</sup> In our opinion, in the time when Aurel C. Popovici wrote his books, nationalism and liberalism had not been identified with democracy so a political leader could have promoted a nationalist narrative without agreeing with the mass participation at the elections. To better understand his attitude, it is important to see what his opinion was about the role of the masses in political life. In 1910, referring to the problem of liberty, Popovici wrote: "The masses are not capable to appreciate liberty. Their ideal is equality".<sup>66</sup> The relationship between liberty and equality was analyzed by many authors during the nineteenth century; one of the most preeminent was Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>67</sup> (who was also cited by Popovici, but in another context).<sup>68</sup> The Romanian ideologist refused to believe that ordinary people could appreciate liberty and considered that they were more preoccupied

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<sup>62</sup> Popovici has a negative view regarding the entire *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which is considered the product of an abstract rationality. In his opinion, this declaration has the purpose of equalizing the societies and ignores completely their actual developing stage. See Sabău, 'Democracy', p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 136.

<sup>64</sup> See Damian Hurezeanu, 'Aurel C. Popovici' in Dumitru Ghișe, Nicolae Gogoneață (ed.), *Istoria filosofiei românești* [The History of Romanian Philosophy], vol. II (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1980), pp. 52-53 and Bocșan, *Ideea*, pp. 198-203.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198

<sup>66</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Despre democrație în America* [On Democracy in America], second edition, vol. II (București: Humanitas, 2005), pp. 103-106.

<sup>68</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 274.

with equality, as to being equal between themselves.<sup>69</sup> Here we can identify another paradox, because, as we have shown before, Popovici attributed to the Romanian peasant a natural tendency toward working freely and uncontrolled by any authority. It is very important to underline that, in his opinion, only the elites of a society, the great men, are capable of leading a people. He even considers this opinion to be scientifically based: “the scientific truth is that our entire civilization can be reduced to the ideas and initiatives of a small minority of great men. We, the great masses, are simply collaborators”.<sup>70</sup>

A people cannot exist without a state and the state itself must be led by a small minority.<sup>71</sup> The Banatian militant had been preoccupied with the problem of aristocracy since the first years of his political activism. Alexandru Vaida Voevod remembered what Popovici used to say to the other contributors of the *Reply*: “Our aristocracy is alienated. You have to replace it. The more talented, active and well trained men we have, the bigger our national progress will be”.<sup>72</sup> His faith in the importance of leaders for the emancipation of a people can be seen in a letter to Valeriu Braniște, in which he tried to persuade him to condemn the actions of Octavian Goga and his friends: “the people are always on the side of those that can gain their respect through energy”.<sup>73</sup> Through his ideas, Aurel C. Popovici abandoned the ideological heritage of Romanticism and the 1848 Revolution<sup>74</sup>, which placed the people in the center of political life and granted him an unmistakable judgement. His conservative ideas determined him to ignore the masses and consider that only the elites are important in a society. All utility or uselessness of a measure is judged by the benefits it brings for the nationality. Popovici seems to have developed an extreme conservatism, as he repels, without proposing anything better, several main ideas of the progressives of his time:

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<sup>69</sup> Aurel C. Popovici’s idea is today confirmed by contemporary psychological studies which show that the Romanians have a collectivist culture, in which individual behavior is strongly influenced by one’s position in the family group or in any other group. This culture doesn’t emphasize individual rights and achievements, where liberty plays an important role. See Daniel David, *Psihologia poporului român: profilul psihologic al românilor într-o monografie cognitiv-experimentală* [The Psychology of the Romanians people: the Psychological Profile of the Romanians in a Cognitive-Experimental Monograph] (Iași: Polirom, 2015), pp. 99-100 and 308-311.

<sup>70</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>72</sup> Alexandru Vaida Voevod, *Memorii* [Memoirs], vol. I, edited by Alexandru Șerban, (Cluj-Napoca:Dacia, 1994), p. 68.

<sup>73</sup> Valeriu Braniște, *Corespondență* [Letters], vol. III (1902-1910), edited by Gheorghe Iancu and Valeria Căliman (București: Minerva, 1989), p. 296.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, the repudiation of Simion Bărnuțiu’s ideological heritage in Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 2.

“Can you find anything more anti-national than the theories about popular sovereignty, social equality, sharing the estates or universal suffrage”.<sup>75</sup> This is how we can explain his attitude in 1910 regarding popular sovereignty.

The writings of the Banatian militant don't contain many references to the representative government, but we can deduct several of his opinions regarding this topic. In his book about the federalization of Austria Hungary, Popovici planned that each of the fifteen “nation states” would have their own parliament, government and judiciary system. The government would have to be led by a governor, who was appointed by the emperor.<sup>76</sup> We should mention that two important principles are missing from this program: the principle of separation of powers and the principle concerning the responsibility of the government before the parliament. His project did not present what are the ideal connections between the parliaments and the governments of the new states. Four years later, in *Nationalism or Democracy*, the issue of the parliament was linked with the criticism of democracy and of popular sovereignty. In this book, Popovici questioned the claim that parliament represents popular sovereignty because, in his opinion, this claim causes demagogy. He doesn't affirm that parliament was useless, but insisted that it should return to its “true role” as an institution which controls the government, without pretending to represent any sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> The refusal of this claim can be connected with another important idea of the Banatian political writer: a people must be led according to its “temper”, and this temper must be known by the politicians. The elections can't always reveal it so, according to his elitist conceptions, Popovici stated that the political elites mustn't pay attention to the votes: “the will of the votes is not important, but the people's temper, its hidden will, these have to be respected”.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, in his view, governing mustn't be representative, because the elites have to decide what is good for the people, without representing its will.

Popovici's position regarding political absolutism can be understood from his tendency towards the minimal state, but also from the critics of the political regime of Austria-Hungary and of the Hungarian liberals. In 1906 he wrote that Hungary was a “hybrid, anarchic and police state”,<sup>79</sup> which uses liberal principles only to deceive other nations and to more easily magyarize the nationalities from within.<sup>80</sup> The magyarization process used several methods that he had considered abusive, like imposing the Hungarian

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>76</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>77</sup> Popovici, *Nationalism*, p. 84.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>79</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 21.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

language, colonizing different lands with Hungarians, persecution of the nationalities' leaders (himself included).<sup>81</sup> He said that electoral law had been "a mockery of constitutional and representative government", and also he had stated that Hungarian bureaucracy had been "more tyrannical than the Russian one" and had denied the freedom of the press for the nationalities.<sup>82</sup>

The Romanian political writer was one of the most important promoters of administrative decentralization, and this feature must also be interpreted as a refusal of political absolutism. Popovici had spoken about decentralization and autonomy since 1894, considering that the centralization was dis-functional.<sup>83</sup> This topic was also analyzed in *The United States of Great Austria*, where he had tried to prove that the federal state was simply a decentralized one, and "it can prove to be more solid and unitary than a centralized state".<sup>84</sup>

Popovici's view on pluralism is interesting and, like other of his ideas, slightly contradictory. The Romanian ideologist has admitted the necessity for liberals and conservatives in the political field, but, as we saw earlier, he insisted that the liberals should be moderate. We can assume that he was inspired by the English political system, where there were the two major political parties, the Whigs and the Tories. In England there have been major differences between the two parties but Popovici didn't discuss any difference between the Romanian liberals and conservatives, arguing that they will sometimes unite, on nationalist bases, against cosmopolitanism. The limits of his tolerance have been connected to several themes, that no one has the right to challenge: the reason of the state, the existence of God, of religion, morality and social classes.<sup>85</sup> We can thus see that the author thinks about limiting several liberties, like the freedom of speech or even the liberty of conscience.

Aurel C. Popovici's thinking has been marked by the conservative ideology, which has several features like the faith in a transcendent order (which governs society), the refusal of a fully equal society (which makes the conservatives refuse a society without orders or social classes), the importance of private property for stability, the opposition to utopian thinking and the focus on the necessity of an equilibrium between innovation and continuity.<sup>86</sup> He was a sympathizer of the Romanian Conservative Party and a great

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>83</sup> Popovici, *Principiul*, p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 240.

<sup>85</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 369.

<sup>86</sup> A presentation of the main features of conservatism can be found in Ioan Stanomir, *Spiritul conservator: de la Barbu Catargiu la Nicolae Iorga* [The Conservative Spirit: from Barbu Catargiu to Nicolae Iorga] (București: Curtea Veche, 2008), p. 37.

admirer of the conservative leader Petre P. Carp.<sup>87</sup> From an intellectual point of view, he has been deeply influenced by the Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu, whose political ideas were several times evoked, and of the Romanian critic and philosopher Titu Maiorescu. The English conservative philosopher Edmund Burke had also a fundamental influence on his works.

There are several paradoxes in the thinking of the Banatian ideologue, which we will try to explain here. We already mentioned a first paradox, with his variable opinion about popular sovereignty. The second paradox is his project to federalize Austria-Hungary by dividing it into several nation-states. In our opinion, these paradoxes can be explained if we take into consideration an important trait of conservatism: political pragmatism. The conservatives don't believe in the existence of established solutions (algorithm solutions, social models or political recipes) and believe that all problems must be solved differently, according to their particular traits.<sup>88</sup> This belief can be also identified in Popovici's thinking, as he wrote that "doctrines are absurd, blinding and disastrous".<sup>89</sup>

We can certainly affirm that Aurel C. Popovici is a pragmatic intellectual, capable, as Virgil Nemoianu stated,<sup>90</sup> to gather different arguments from different sources, especially if those arguments were useful to his cause. His pragmatism is proven by his attitude toward the continuity problem, which played an important role in the formation of the Romanian national identity.<sup>91</sup> Even when he was a young militant, in 1891, he confessed to Valeriu Braniște that he hadn't believed in the Roman continuity, but this argument should still be used in the writings about the Romanian problem dedicated to the public of Western Europe.<sup>92</sup> In our opinion, though we don't know for certain, this might be also the case regarding the contradictory valences given to popular sovereignty. Some evidence for this might be the fact that this principle is not at all mentioned in his brochure in 1894, *The Nationality Principle*, which practically reproduces a conference which took place at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest. Popovici did not argue in

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<sup>87</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 83.

<sup>88</sup> Adrian Paul Iliescu, 'Conservatorismul' [Conservatism] in Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (ed.), *Doctrine politice: concepte universale și realități românești* [Political Doctrines: Universal Concepts and Romanian Realities], (Iași: Polirom - Societatea Academică din România, 1998), pp. 76-77.

<sup>89</sup> Popovici, *Naționalism*, p. 200.

<sup>90</sup> Virgil Nemoianu, 'Un neoconservator jeffersonian în Viena sfârșitului de secol: Aurel C. Popovici' [A Jeffersonian Neo-Conservative in Vienna at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Aurel C. Popovici] in Virgil Nemoianu, *România și liberalismele ei* [Romania and its Liberalism] (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> Mitu, *Geneza*, pp. 26-32.

<sup>92</sup> Valeriu Braniște, *Correspondență (1879-1895)* [Letters (1879-1895)], vol. I, edited by Valeria Căliman and Gheorghe Iancu (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1985), p. 60.

favour of popular sovereignty in his federalization project because this work had been intended for a foreigner public, most particularly German, Austrian and Hungarian, and a conviction of that principle resembling to the one made four years later, would have compromised him in front of the liberal readers. We consider that the lack of a concrete role of Parliament in the nation states which would evolve from the federalization, or his relation with the Government indicated that for Popovici this institution was not too important. The disregard of the legislature can indicate that the author does not give too much credit either to the electoral process or to popular sovereignty, as would happen four years later.

In connection with Aurel C. Popovici's federation project, a legitimate question that can be asked is why it was developed in the context in which the idea of the national state had already been adopted by many intellectuals and politicians.<sup>93</sup> Popovici himself considered in 1894 that any nation aware of its nationality had the right to form an independent state or to join another state, although it had not been clearly stated that the Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire should do this thing.

Some researchers, such as Marius Turda and Gabriela Tănăsescu<sup>94</sup> linked Popovici's approach to the traditional dynastic loyalism of the Romanians and their attachment to constitutionalism. However, the Banatian ideologist was an exception among the Romanian militants in the Austro-Hungarian Empire precisely by abandoning the loyalist tradition of the Habsburg family and the attachment to legal solutions. An example of this is found in May 1893, when Popovici advocated the radicalization of the Romanian National Party and even the transposition of the national struggle on a revolutionary ground in order to promote not the unification of all the Romanians in a single state but the federalization of the empire. Nor is his attachment to constitutionalism too great, because even in his federalization project he said that, in the absence of parliamentary consent, an "impartial judge" (a phrase in which he saw the Emperor, probably in the person of Franz Ferdinand) has the duty to "give a coup d'état to all peoples" and to implement the measures he has theorized.<sup>95</sup>

Several testimonies from the epoch may indicate some of the reasons underpinning Popovici's ideas on the federalization of the empire. A close friend, the well-known political man Alexandru Vaida Voevod, said that this project was written due to the author's conviction that politicking will destroy Romania and the future of the Romanian people will depend on the power

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<sup>93</sup> This question was also asked by the historian Victor Neumann. See Victor Neumann, 'Federalism', p. 72.

<sup>94</sup> Turda, 'Aurel C. Popovici'; Tănăsescu, 'Naționalismul', pp. 459-460.

<sup>95</sup> Popovici, *Stat*, p. 298.



and stability of the Danubian Monarchy. The memoirist even noted some indecent words against Emperor Franz Josef, which would have been said by Popovici "old bastard, this selfish fool", blaming it on the sovereign that due to dualism, the Habsburg Empire would collapse. Vaida Voevod's memories show that the Banatian ideologist saw this empire as necessary so that the battles for supremacy between the Slavs and the Germans would not begin. If this conflict began, the Romanians would have woken up between the two forces, such as between two grinding stones.<sup>96</sup> The well-known leader of the Transylvanian Romanians was very close to Popovici, which is why his memories are a trustworthy source for the reconstruction of the latter's life.

Another source for the origin of this project is the memories on his author, of philosopher and university professor Ion Petrovici. He met Aurel C. Popovici during his German studies at the time of the elaboration of the *United States of Great Austria*. We can find through him that the Banatian militant relied on Archduke Franz Ferdinand for the implementation of this project and had an interesting desideratum regarding the possible accession of Romania to the Federation of Great Austria. In this case, very desirable in Popovici's opinion, the Romanians would have become the largest ethnic group in the empire and could have had claims in Bessarabia. Petrovici adds that the latter still wanted an independent Romania, but at that time federalization seemed to be the best solution.<sup>97</sup> To better interpret this source, one must remember that his author wrote these memoirs more than three decades after the actual event, nor was he a close friend of the well-known ideologist. Through it, we find that Popovici was the follower of Romania's integration into the Habsburg Empire. This idea was not entirely new in the political projects of the Romanians, as it was pronounced by Alexander G. Golescu during the 1848 Revolution,<sup>98</sup> but also by Ioan Slavici, in a letter sent to Vasile Mangra in 1876.<sup>99</sup>

The two sources, despite the differences, give us the image of a very pragmatic Aurel C. Popovici, a lucid observer who tried to do everything possible for the emancipation of his nation. Nationalism was certainly the main ideology that guided not only his ideas but also his actions. However,

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<sup>96</sup> Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Vaida Voevod între Belvedere și Versailles (însemnări, memorii, scrisori* [Alexandru Vaida Voevod between Belvedere and Versailles (Notes, Memoirs, Letters)], (Cluj-Napoca: Sincron, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>97</sup> Petrovici, *Figuri*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>98</sup> Cornelia Bodea, *Lupta românilor pentru unitatea națională (1834-1849)* [The Struggle of the Romanians for National Unity (1834-1849)] (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1967), pp. 162-166.

<sup>99</sup> Vasile Mangra, *Corespondență* [Letters], vol. II, edited by Marius Eppel, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), p. 280.

the aim of this study was to analyze the Banatian ideologist's perception of liberalism and conservatism. Determining whether Popovici was a liberal or conservative is quite difficult, first of all because he didn't always express his ideas quite clearly, had often shown verbal aggressiveness and his philosophy had not been always coherent.<sup>100</sup> His Romanian translator, the well-known essayist and journalist Petre Pandrea, considered him an anti-liberal conservative doctrinaire<sup>101</sup> and the political scientist Ioan Stanomir placed Aurel C. Popovici among the reactionary conservatives.<sup>102</sup>

Undoubtedly, the acknowledged sympathies of the well-known ideologist for the important figures of Romanian and European conservatism demonstrate his attachment to conservative ideology. However, we cannot accept anti-liberal and reactionary labels, which other scholars of his work attributed to Aurel C. Popovici. A first difficulty that arises in the study of his work, especially in the volume of *Nationalism and Democracy*, is that the author mixes his own political or ideological positions with a fierce controversy over the opponents' ideas. The polemical part of his writings can prevent a good understanding of his political views. The fact that he praised "national boyars" and pleaded for their preservation<sup>103</sup> or the very harsh criticisms he brought to democracy and its promoters does not automatically mean the global rejection of the ideological inheritance of the French Revolution. As we have shown in this study, the Banatian publicist considered that moderate liberals have a positive role in society, and freedom is one of the important factors of national culture. All the fundamental rights of a liberal society, such as the right to freedom of expression (embodied in press freedom), freedom of association and reunions, have been subordinated to the citizenship building project. He has also thought that the state's intervention is often harmful and that it must allow the individual to remain as free as he can, in order to work and develop himself (although, as we have already shown, this liberty was conditioned by the development of the nationality and could not have gone in other direction). For these reasons, we agree with the researcher Gelu Sabău, who affirmed that, in Aurel C. Popovici's thinking, English liberal conservatism is mixed with ethnic nationalism.<sup>104</sup> The former is the frame in which every other political idea is situated. Both individual liberty and

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<sup>100</sup> Neumann, 'Federalism', p. 78.

<sup>101</sup> Aurel C. Popovici, *Stat și națiune: Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari* [State and Nation: The United States of Great Austria] (București: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, 1939), p. VII.

<sup>102</sup> Stanomir, *Spiritul*, pp. 207-215.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>104</sup> Sabău, 'Democracy', p. 127.

individual autonomy, two main principles of liberal conservatism,<sup>105</sup> are operationalized by Popovici as parts of nation building.

Although it didn't have a vast dimension and its author didn't occupy a good institutional or social position in Romania, as he wasn't an academic or a politician, the work of the renowned Banatian writer had an important echo in Romanian culture, many years after the death of its author. The study of Aurel C. Popovici's political and philosophical ideas is important not only for understanding the intellectual atmosphere at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, but also to understand Romanian culture in the Interwar period, when many of his disciples and peers played important roles in Romanian political and cultural life.

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<sup>105</sup> Stanomir, *Spiritul*, p. 32.

