



Phoenix Populism

Radical Right Parties' Mobilization in Romania after 2015

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This paper is the first exploratory analysis of the ideological features of extra-parliamentary radical-right populist parties in Romania, which, despite lacking parliamentary power, confirm the latent fertility of Romanian politics for populism. Using qualitative content analysis of programs and statutes, we identify a decreased relevance of ethnicity-based mobilization and an increased emphasis on cultural, religious, and/or gender-based criteria. All of the analyzed parties converge on the need for increased discipline and major anti-corruption measures, a smooth continuity with previous forms of populism. The extra-parliamentary group of Romanian radical populists resembles a phoenix, regularly rising from its ashes, although only partially renewed.

Populism has regularly featured in the study of post-communist party politics. At its core, post-communist populism has been an expression of a politics of general contestation built on a lack of congruence between the general will and the political agenda, together with vocal exhortations for the exclusion of domestic minorities (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009). Post-communist populist mobilization revolves around the exclusion of “other” groups, such as sexual minorities or, more recently, Middle Eastern and North African immigrants. Accordingly, the literature has assessed populism in post-communist countries as predominantly right-wing, with an ethnically based and exclusivist identity (Gherghina et al. 2017); to wit, the bearers of post-communist populist appeals have been associated with attributes such as radical, radical-right, and national/nationalist/ethnic populism.

Within this context, the literature has documented the extreme permeability of the Romanian political arena to populism since the early 1990s (Cinpoş 2013, 2015; Norocel 2010; Shafir 1999, 2008, 2012). At the turn of the twenty-first century, this once quite diversified and electorally solid political family seemed to have faced a deadlock, although, as illustrated in the introduction to this special issue, the scepter of populism continues to be contested by various (mainstream) parties. The mainstreaming of populism in the Romanian arena

equates to the diffusion of the communication repertoires of the radical-right populist parties into mainstream political fare (Cinpoş 2015; Gherghina et al. 2017) and the media in general (ActiveWatch 2016). Two apparently contradictory consequences can be identified. Intuitively, the diffused use of the language and policies of populism among mainstream politicians implicitly hampers the possibilities for the successful entry of populist political entrepreneurs. However, the limited available political space is counterbalanced by the wide diffusion and supportive consonance of radical-right populist themes in both political discourses and media. In connection with the primary objective of this special issue, we consider that this particular opportunity structure significantly shapes both the extension of political radicalization and the patterns of radical-right populist mobilization in Romania. In line with the assumptions of the discursive opportunity structure theory, we acknowledge that “political opportunity structures affect movement action only when they are perceived as such by (potential) movement activists” (Koopmans and Olzak 2004, 199), and, consequently, we assume that Romanian political entrepreneurs make use of favorable political opportunities and try to resonate with existing repertoires.

In the aftermath of the 2016 Romanian general election, this article is the first exploratory attempt to analyze the ideological features of a particularly extensive extra-parliamentary group of radical-right populist parties. The article suggests that Romania may not be an exception in an era of increasingly populist-dominated

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post-communist party politics (Gherghina et al. 2017). The phoenix metaphor used in our title reflects the state of populism in Romania. Consumed by internal disputes and corruption scandals, the main populist parties of the 2000s (the Greater Romania Party and the People's Party–Dan Diaconescu) reached a political deadlock and faded away. According to standard indicators of political relevance (e.g., power in seats, potential for coalition or blackmail) (Sartori 1976), there are indeed no representations of inclusive or exclusive populism in the current Parliament. However, there is a high level of supportive resonance with radical-right populism in the public arena, which increases both the visibility and the legitimacy of their statements (e.g., forms of nativism combining ethnic nationalism with anti-ziganism, anti-Semitism, and most recently Islamophobia, the celebration of order and authority and the cult of authoritarian figures of the past, and constant references to a vaguely defined antagonism between the Romanians' pure community and the corrupt *élites*). From the pile of ashes of previous populist parties, we argue that, outside of the Parliament, a new populist phoenix has arisen from the ashes of its predecessors in terms of both ideas and personnel.

While other countries in the region have developed stronger radical-right political parties, Romania seems to have followed a different path. As discussed later in the paper, in Romania the main political parties did not shy away from adopting populist stances. Coupled with high barriers at the entrance to the political arena, the result has been that most political parties have been characterized by some degree of populism, their populist appeals keeping the more extreme parties close to the middle, acting as a barrier to their radicalization.

This context, however, changed in 2015 in two key elements: the barriers placed at the entrance to the political arena were lowered exactly at the moment when the populist niche (for reasons we will discuss) was empty. This new political opportunity structure was quickly recognized and used, with a significant number of new political parties being formed over a very short period of time, resulting in increased competition for members and voters.

The analysis focuses on thirteen political parties legally registered after June 2015. This specific focus is directly connected to the most recent amendment of the Romanian party law (Legea partidelor politice 2003). The literature has assessed Romania as having adopted one of the most restrictive models of party laws in the European Union (EU), in particular with regard to criteria for registration, reinforced by deterring norms pertaining to the dissolution of political parties (Casal Bértoa and van Biezen 2014; Popescu and Soare 2017). In June 2015, a significant revision of the legal requirements for the registration of a party took place.¹ Consequently, only three members are currently required for the registration of a political party, instead of the

previous threshold of 25,000 members. The 2015 amendment of the law brought on a proliferation of new parties: 65 new parties were registered in the year and a half after the requirements were changed. Of these parties, fourteen can be considered bearers of radical-right populist appeals, since their repertoires include a combination of different forms of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007). Because one of these parties merged with a pre-2015 party, our final sample includes thirteen parties (see Annex 1 for the complete list).²

Beyond the legal aspects briefly detailed above, in order to increase the homogeneity of our sample, we have further restricted our cases by focusing on the core criteria of the populist radical right (Mudde 2007). We have selected those parties whose political message echoes the definition of radical-right populism applied in the present special issue. Hence, we refer to those parties whose community of reference is defined in relation to a strong ethnic dimension, in opposition to the ruling political class and its dominant values and alliances, and whose advocacy of morality, hierarchy, and order is presented in direct connection with a regeneration of Romanian democracy.

The method used for assessing the populist features of these parties is qualitative content analysis of data consisting of their programs and statutes as made available on the parties' websites and/or Facebook profiles. Additional information is based on public statements and media reporting on these parties. All of the parties promote an ethnic version of populism, coupled with an *ex negativo* definition of the homogenous community under a wide range of menaces. Although they all lay emphasis on the homogeneity of the community of the people, the characteristic features of the people vary from one party to another. In all cases, however, their discourses tend to simplify the political arena by dividing it between the honest people and the corrupt establishment. In several cases, the anti-establishment discourse includes the negative impact of cosmopolitan elites (and intellectuals in general), characterized as a source of moral, cultural, and religious dis-homogeneity. Often, their programs emphasize the issue of increased law and order to guarantee much-needed discipline for the country.

In the attempt to go beyond an analysis of the usual suspects of populism, this article takes a step forward to filling a gap in the literature, with an eye to the most recent empirical developments in the extra-parliamentary arena in Romania as an indicator for the (continuous) permissiveness toward radical-right populist rhetoric in Romania's post-communist democracy. By focusing on a relatively large sample of parties from one country, the analysis has the advantage of bringing together in-depth analysis, without penalizing observations about intra-familial dynamism and variation. Our data can be considered a preliminary stage of an investigation that sheds light on forms that populism takes in understudied arenas, such as the extra-parliamentary one. We follow in this

article the first steps and interactions of a rather large group of radical-right populist political parties engaged in competition for the same set of limited resources (members and voters) and aiming at occupying an empty niche while starting from relatively similar positions. As we will show, the newly formed political parties have adopted diverse strategies. A few have opted to start as completely new political parties, making use only of their own resources. Others have chosen some degree of continuity with the recent past, being, in fact, splinters from the populist parties that disappeared in the early 2010s. Finally, a smaller group chose ideological continuity with similar parties from the interwar period.

The analysis illustrates that the Romanian populist family can be compared to a phoenix rising from the ashes again and again, although only partially renewed and reborn. Indeed, numerous continuities are documented and the analysis demonstrates the capacity of the extra-parliamentary representatives of radical-right populism to reinvent themselves and remain active in the political arena. Despite the fact that the article focuses only on the Romanian case, we believe that the general elements of the phenomenon that we are studying (removing access barriers, large number of actors engaged in competition for the same resources and niche while starting from similar positions, and using an open field of strategies ranging from continuity to change) will attract the interest of a wider group of scholars.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The first section focuses on discussing the theoretical considerations regarding populism and radical-right populism. The second part provides a conceptual map of post-communist radical-right populism in Romania, explaining the rationale for the case selection and the consequent expectations. The third part aims to present a general overview of the main characteristics of these parties. The final section concludes the paper by identifying potential implications of these findings for the literature.

POPULISM AND EXCLUSION: A MATTER OF DEGREE

A theoretical delimitation of populism is of paramount importance because it will provide the basic definitional criteria that disallow random decisions about who can be classified as a populist (radical-right) party and who cannot. This operation becomes even more useful if we consider the fuzziness of the application of the populist label to post-communist party politics, which has lumped together parties of vastly different nature and varying programmatic content, only because their personalistic leadership valorized the un-institutionalized support of (more or less) unorganized followers.

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing consensus on the depiction of populism as a set of ideas based on an antagonistic relationship between the “pure”

people and the “evil” elite (Tarchi 2015; Pauwels 2014; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Mudde 2007; Canovan 2005; Taggart 2000). Within this context, the consensus definition of populism is provided by Cas Mudde (2004) in the form of a minimal definition: “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the People” (Mudde 2004, 543). On this ground, the references to the pure people, the corrupt elite, and the general will are considered the necessary and sufficient conditions for classifying a phenomenon as populist (Kaltwasser 2014, 479). Still, although this minimal definition accounts for the majority of the movements conventionally labeled as populist, it does not have a lot of precision; a greater degree of precision is provided by assessing the inclusionary and/or exclusionary dimension of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013).

It is precisely on this line of analysis that Mudde (2007) defines the core of the populist radical-right family in relation to a variable combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. On a programmatic level, nativism echoes the focus these parties lay on praising a homogenous community whose main features are defined *ex negativo* (Mudde 2007). In other words, the community is defined in reference to all those who fail to meet specific ethnic, cultural, religious, and/or gender-based criteria (Minkenberg 2015a; Mudde 2007). In the post-communist space, in particular, nativism synchronized with radical nationalism, anti-Semitism, anti-Roma sentiments and, more recently, xenophobia and Islamophobia (Cinpoș 2013; Loch and Norocel 2015; Minkenberg 2015b; Pirro 2015). The second key element of radical-right populism refers to authoritarianism—the disposition of radical-right populists to advocate order and discipline (Mudde 2007). The third core argument refers to a Manichean perception of society as divided between a “we group” and the “others” (establishment, elites, etc.). The “we group” may be subject to various attributions (e.g., the citizens, the peasantry, the poor, the middle-class, etc.). The populist stance endorses the (urgent) need to voice the “general will” of the people and to defend the people against venal and incompetent political elites, intellectuals, international organizations (all of them accused of multiple betrayals either for their petty interests of enrichment or for foreign interests).

THE ANATOMY OF RADICAL-RIGHT POPULISM IN ROMANIA

Before dealing with our sample of parties, it is worth briefly depicting the general features of post-communist radical-right populism in Romania. Except for the 2008–2012 and 2016–2020 legislatures, at least one party from the radical-right populist family (see Table 1) has held seats in every Parliament since 1990.³ During the first post-communist

TABLE 1
Core Arguments of Pre-2015 Romanian Radical-Right Populism

<i>Core arguments</i>	<i>First generation (FSN, PUNR, PRM)</i>	<i>Second generation (PNG, PPDD)</i>
Nativism	Ethnic elements of inclusion	Prevalence of non-ethnic elements of exclusion (i.e. orthodoxy-centrism)
Authoritarianism	Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism	—
	The need for hierarchies	The need for hierarchies
	Emphasis on strong leaders from a syncretic pantheon	—
	Anti-corruption punitive stances	Anti-corruption punitive stances
Populism	Partial lack of loyalty to the institutions of democracy	—
	Anti-intellectualism	Anti-intellectualism
	Anti-establishment	Anti-establishment
	—	Intensive use of simple, colloquial, and slang language

legislatures (1990–1992 and 1992–1996), parties from this group supported the government, either formally or informally, and thus were able to influence political discourses and agendas.⁴ Moreover, throughout the entire post-communist period, both mainstream and radical-right populist parties have used anti-Western, deeply nationalistic, and communitarian ideas (Tismăneanu 1998, 105). As George Jiglău (2010) and Adriana Marinescu (2010) demonstrate, all post-communist parliamentary parties tended to include a nativist component in their discourses, preaching anti-corruption punitive stances, declaring their disaffection with incumbents, and endorsing a hypertrophy of institutional/rational norms in the name of the sovereign people. The fluid connection between radical-right populism and mainstream political parties is demonstrated by the fact that, although most of the radical-right populist parties lost their parliamentary representatives in the 2000s, some of their MPs reacted quickly and managed to save their careers by joining the mainstream parties (Cinpoş 2015, 290).

From a chronological perspective, we can identify two different generations of radical-right populisms (Table 1). These two generations are characterized by quite distinct electoral and political relevance. The first generation is the most successful one: it has been constantly represented in Parliament for almost two decades and it has also held governmental offices. With the exception of the People's Party–Dan Diaconescu (PPDD)'s electoral breakthrough in the 2012 elections, the post-2000 generation from the beginning faced difficulties in contesting elections and it rapidly became electorally irrelevant. Across time, the two generations' core ideology continued to be shaped by the combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, although the content mutated and adapted to different contexts and stimuli faced by the different parties (Andreescu 2015; Cinpoş 2015; Gherghina and Mişcoiu 2014; Soare 2014a). Most notably, the problematic emphasis on anti-Magyar stances characteristic of the early 1990s progressively diminished, while cultural and religious issues became the prevalent criteria of exclusion for the second generation of parties,

with a gender-based dimension becoming increasingly common in their discourses. Similar changes can be shown with respect to their economic agenda. The discourses of the first generation warned against the negative consequences of liberal economy and market-oriented reforms, while the second generation combined protectionist stances with a neoliberal economic agenda. On the authoritarianism dimension, the major difference is related to the second-generation parties' increased loyalty to the institutions of democracy. Both generations advocated tougher sentences for corruption, clientelism, and crimes. Finally, in both cases, the populist core argument relied on a manichean division between the pure people and the corrupt elite. The difference on this dimension is less of content, and more of style. More specifically, the second generation of parties cultivated a lack of intellectual refinement as a catalyst of popular appeal. Their party leaders made use of an extremely simple and vulgar vocabulary, which was exhibited as a symbol of being political outsiders.

The first generation includes the National Salvation Front (FSN), the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). As a common feature, these parties' ideological characters were strongly influenced by communist-era legacies. Not only did the FSN, PUNR, and PRM organizational networks and elites overlap with the structures of the Romanian Communist Party and the communist secret police, but their ideological profiles brought together elements of the rhetoric of the communist regime and 1980s ethnic chauvinism (Ishiyama 1998; Shafir 2008; Soare 2014a,b). All of these parties adopted the repertoire of national communism, echoing radical anti-Magyar discourses, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and, most notably, regular exhortations to violence and authoritarian stances on civil and political rights (Cinpoş 2015; Shafir 2008). Not surprisingly, they often expressed positive attitudes toward communism as well as the pre-communist pantheon of authoritarian intellectual and political leaders in their symbolic references (Shafir 2008; Stojarovà 2013). In brief, these parties portrayed themselves as providers of security in the “unsettled times” brought about by post-communism,

successfully exploiting the strong anti-political and anti-elitist sentiments nourished under communism. Moreover, with the focus on the national definition of the state and the preoccupation with statehood issues in the context of the Balkan wars and conflicts in the former USSR, economic issues were of secondary importance in their discourses (Stojarovà 2013). Their “fantasies of salvation” were regularly influenced by simplistic conspiracy theories with a wide array of enemies: domestic intellectuals, unidentified spies, international organizations, the United States, the Jews, the Roma, the Hungarian minority, the gay community, and so forth. Yet, it is notable that none of these parties were against the EU or NATO. Overall, the ideological core of the first wave of radical-right populism was the protection of the national organic community from non-native elements (other ethnic groups, particularly the Hungarian minority; other states, particularly Hungary, etc.) coupled with economic protectionism.

The second generation of radical-right populist parties in Romania was both less successful at the polls and less extreme in its discourse (Soare 2014a; Cinpoș 2015). The new century’s parties abandoned the exclusionist ultranationalist discourses and implicitly distanced themselves from the semi-authoritarian forms of the 1990s (Soare 2014b). Both the New Generation party (PNG) and PPDD did not pose an open threat to the institutions of democracy. By comparison to the first-generation parties, the main dividing line was represented by the increased tendency of the second-generation parties to embrace historical interwar legacies instead of the national-communist ones (Cinpoș 2013, 2015; Soare 2014b). On the programmatic level, they appeared to be less sophisticated and more inclined to ad hoc improvisations. Their leaders used simplistic, colloquial language (Gherghina and Soare 2017). It should be noted, in this context, that both PNG and PPDD were parties that relied to a high extent on their television presence. The core element of their discourses continued to be the myth of a homogenous Romanian nation, with the caveat that their exclusionary criteria were less ethnic-focused (Soare 2014a). In their discourses, the internal homogeneity of the community relied mainly on moral, cultural, and/or religious dimensions (Cinpoș 2013, 2015). This shift overlaps with the increasingly active role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the post-communist society (Andreescu 2015). Beyond these differences, both generations mobilized their voters in the name of a reunited Romania. Similarly, their programs continued to lay emphasis on the need for increased order and hierarchy, sharing the same distrust of political elites and intellectuals as their first-generation counterparts (Soare 2014b).

Before proceeding, a caveat has to be mentioned. The thirteen parties included in our sample do not exhibit a relevance that fulfills Sartori’s classical definition (1976,

122–23). Indeed, all of these parties are deprived of power, if one measures power by the number of seats in the 2016 Parliament, and obtained only a narrow number of mandates in the June 2016 local elections (Voicu and Dumitru 2016). Hence, it is impossible to assess the parties’ relevance in terms of possible governmental majorities or their blackmail potential. Moreover, it is difficult to predict the duration of their activity, considering the intensity of the Romanian party law’s provisions regarding dissolution or de-registration (Popescu and Soare forthcoming).

Put together, these elements could be considered evidence of the parties’ “scientific irrelevance.” Nevertheless, we think their numerous presence in the Official Register of political parties suggests the existence of a wide reservoir for (latent) revolt of “the pure people” against “the corrupt elite” in Romania. Hence, in accordance with the literature, we assume that, although contemporary parties perform less their traditional function of interest aggregation, they continue to be seen as a collection of societal interests (Lawson and Poguntke 2004). In our understanding, these extra-parliamentary parties represent a “collection” of radical societal demands as well as a proven effort to overcome a relatively intricate (time-consuming and costly) process of party registration.⁵ In addition, the literature assumes that new political parties tend to emerge in those contexts where the supply-side (individual politicians, mainstream parties or alliances) fails to produce satisfactory solutions (Pop-Elecheș 2010) and, as such, these parties can be seen as potential opportunities for challenging (in a more or less near future) the fixed menu of Romanian parties. In parallel, the literature and expert reports document a high level of consonance in the Romanian media and among the mainstream parties with issues defining the core narrative of radical-right populist parties (Shafir 1999, 2012; Ganea and Martin 2006; Țurcanu 2010; Andreescu 2015; Cinpoș 2015; Norocel 2010; Open Lab Report 2016). In our understanding, these studies also confirm the latent fertility of the Romanian political arena with regard to national forms of populism.

In line with the long menu of traditional radical-right populist parties in Romania briefly presented above, we can derive three main expectations regarding the nativism–authoritarianism–populism mix of the third generation of populism. First, in relation to the core nativist dimension, we expect to identify a diminished emphasis on ethnic exclusion, balanced by an increased focus on cultural and religious-based criteria. This expectation is endorsed by the relevance of the debates on the definition of the notion of family in the 2016 electoral campaign and, more generally, by the increased relevance of the Orthodox Church in the political arena. On the authoritarianism dimension, we expect to document a continuing loyalty to the institutions of democracy as well as a constant emphasis on punitive stances against corruption and protective security measures, with an increased focus on the Roma community. Finally, we expect to identify a less sophisticated register of argumentation of the division between us and them, compliant with the style promoted by the second generation of populism.

THE MANY ROOMS IN THE HOUSE OF THE ROMANIAN RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

The main argument behind our case selection has been the utility of analyzing legally new political parties despite their electoral newness. It should be noted that these parties were formed in a particular context. First, the 2015 amendment of the party law is the major element underlying the new radical-right parties' proliferation. Second, they came to be at a moment in time when the populist niche was empty: Vadim Tudor (PRM) died in 2015, George Becali (PNG) was imprisoned in 2013, and Dan Diaconescu (PPDD) was imprisoned in 2015. Third, the new parties benefited not only from easier regulations, but also from easier and cheaper access to potential members and voters via social media, a tool that was not used by the previous populist parties.

Building upon the work of Nicole Bolleyer (2013), we consider that parties' origins have long-term implications not only for the parties' capacity to persist over time, but also for their programmatic features. By temporarily shifting our attention from ideas and values to the characteristics of the party founders and leaders, we can gain a more in-depth understanding of the parties' specific narratives. The starting point is that individuals who were previously affiliated to other parties have created most of the parties gathered in our sample (9 out of 13, see Annex 1). Moreover, we can assume that several of these new parties would have been able to register even under the more demanding pre-2015 party law. For example, this is the case for the National Democratic Party, founded by a group of former PPDD members of the Parliament. In the official presentation of the party, its leader states that the party gathered a list of 34,000 signatures for the registration procedure, which would have allowed the party to be officially registered even before 2015.⁶ The PPDD origins, although without a major contribution in terms of party organization, can also be identified in two additional cases—the Honesty and Prosperity Party and Our Party—both founded by former representatives of the PPDD.

Several parties have origins connected with PRM. The Dignity and National Identity Front was created by a group of PRM dissidents that had been struggling since the mid-2000s to register as a party. Three other parties can track their origins to PRM. This is the case for the National Unity Bloc, founded by a former PRM first vice-president and senator; the Justice, Dignity, and National Solidarity Party, founded by a former leader of the PRM branch in Iași, the largest city in northeast Romania; and the National Party for the Motherland, founded by a group of former PRM supporters among officers of the Romanian army.

The New Right Party is a peculiar case. The party was founded by Tudor Ionescu, president of a radical-right movement organized in the early 2000s (Andreescu 2015). While the discourse of this movement and of the

party it built could be traced back to the prewar Iron Guard, this “ideological” legacy is not openly admitted in the party's public programs and statements, which is understandable, given the legal bans on fascist activities. Even more, the party leader denied any official connection between the New Right Party and the prewar Iron Guard.⁷ At the same time, however, the doctrine subpage of the party's website gives direct access to the full electronic version of the volume *Orthodoxy and Nationalism* (Ortodoxie și naționalism), authored by the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, particularly praised by the prewar radical movement.⁸ Similar intellectual affinities have been associated to Our Romania Alliance Party, founded by Marian Munteanu, the symbolic leader of the students' protests in the early 1990s, who has been involved in different nationalist extra-parliamentary movements over the years.

Previous political linkages can also be found in the case of the National Force Party, directly connected to Laurențiu Rebegea, a former member of the Conservative Party (PC), who was elected as Member of the European Parliament in the 2014 elections and who joined the Europe of Nations and Freedom group in 2015. Most notably, Marine Le Pen attended the first official party meeting. Still, in these last two cases we were not able to document relevant linkages to the previous group, beyond the individual experience of the founder-leader.

The absence of any links to previous political parties is a common characteristic of the remaining three political parties in our sample: the Conservative Autonomous Dacism Party, the Oaks' Party, and the Romanian Force Party.

In opposition to the previous two waves of Romanian populism, most of these parties do not benefit from the support of well-known leaders and the third wave of Romanian populism is compliant to the politics of personality. However, as illustrated in a couple of cases, founding leaders can use the newly created parties as a medium of exchange in the Romanian political arena. More specifically, these parties can be seen as part of individual strategies of political entrepreneurship, considering that in several cases we have been able to document that a couple of these leaders joined more traditional parties (either the liberals or the PRM).

Taking into account the origin stories of each of the political parties in our sample, we can group them in four main categories: the heirs of movements associated with prewar radicalism (New Right Party, Our Romania Alliance Party); the heirs of PRM, a party representing the first generation of Romanian radical-right populism (Dignity and National Identity Front, National Unity Bloc, Justice, Dignity, and National Solidarity Party, National Party for the Motherland); the heirs of PPDD, a party representing the second generation of Romanian radical-right populism (National Democratic Party, Honesty and Prosperity Party, and Our Party); and a group of new political entrepreneurs (National Force

Party, Conservative Autonomous Dacism Party, Oaks' Party, and Romanian Force Party).

The list of the party names (Annex 1) itself offers us an interesting finding. It can be easily observed that most of the names of the political parties in our sample converge upon a similar structure, placing at the center the community (Romania, Romanian, our, national, dacism, national identity) or the idealized attributes of the national community (dignity, unity, justice, solidarity, development, etc.)

Promoters of Prewar Legacies

The New Right Party presents itself as a promoter of a "national, Christian, and social right." With regard to the nativist dimension, national and religious criteria of exclusion tend to overlap. On the first point of the agenda, the party advocates the integrity of the Romanian state and urges reunification with the Republic of Moldova. In direct connection with the national criterion of exclusion, the party program emphasizes the need to defend autochthonous capital and national entrepreneurs. With regard to the religious criterion of exclusion, the New Right party advocates a return to Christian Orthodox values. In a positive dimension, it exhorts the state to protect the sacredness of the family, while in a negative direction it identifies in Western individualism and in the LGBT rights a morally reprehensible community. On the authoritarianism dimension, the party preaches the confiscation of all the illicit fortunes and increased punitive measures against the corrupt administration. The definition of the community of reference is filtered by the above-mentioned criteria of exclusion, with a major focus on Christian Orthodox values. The antagonistic group is schematically depicted as the corrupt establishment.

On similar positions, Our Romania Alliance Party develops an extensive argumentation of the definition of the community in relation to national and religious criteria of exclusion (Values, Declaration of March 27, 2016). These criteria are less concerned with economic protectionism, and place a stronger emphasis on the protection of "national identity rights" (i.e. "the institutions and founding values of the Romanian traditional and modern civilization: family, village, school, Church, army, Christian faith, Romanian language, spiritual, cultural and historical landmarks").⁹ Considering that Romania is defined as a Christian country, based on the traditional family (specifically defined as based on the marriage between a man and a woman), the party calls for a greater role of the Church in the society (Program. Our Romania Alliance 2016). The organization of the community requires democratic cooperation, patriotic solidarity and civic discipline. The argumentation converges on the need to enhance discipline. With regard to anti-establishment rhetoric, the party advocates the need to recruit political staff on the basis of knowledge and competences but also based on their loyalty to the state and the Romanian people (Program. Our Romania Alliance 2016).

Heirs of the First Generation—PRM

The National Unity Bloc is built around the idea of the nation, which is presented, in the party's documents, as being constantly threatened by both "historical" enemies (Hungary, Russia) and by new ones (the plans for constructing a new mosque in Bucharest are interpreted as an unacceptable religious propaganda aimed at defying the majority of the Romanian people). The "us" group is also defined by opposition to a "them" group composed of politicians who have joined forces with the business elite to create a network whose only goal is to steal from the people. The party reaffirms, however, its adherence to the European Union project, characterized as the most generous European political project. The authoritarianism dimension is not present in the party documents we have been able to obtain.

The National Party for the Motherland reflects, even in its name, the life experiences of the founding members, former military officers. Both the nativism and the authoritarianism dimensions are well reflected in the political program of the party. Defending the national character and the traditional national values of the Romanian people is the first principle listed in the political program, followed by support for Christian civilization and defense of the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and national independence of Romania.¹⁰ For the second dimension, the party is promoting an idea quite popular in Romania during the last 10 years and that was adopted by quite a number of the political parties in our sample—decreasing the number of members of the Romanian Parliament. An additional key element for this dimension is unwavering support for the fight against corruption.

In the case of the Dignity and National Identity Front, the program echoes the party's loyalty to the institution of democracy and EU commitments. The nativist dimension is filtered by an emphasis on the concept of "national dignity," defined as the "natural pride of belonging to a community, a tradition, a history." The main criteria of exclusion are "moral and spiritual," stating "the preeminence of spirit over matter." Enemies or threats are mentioned in the various documented presented on the party website, but they are not explicit, they are not named. On the authoritarian dimension, the party program refers less to the hierarchical dimension of the in-group and emphasizes a more rigid discipline within society, in particular with regard to political corruption. The party program voices a critique of the "political establishment," regarded as alienated from the real needs of society. As such, the idea of the people they refer to is vaguely depicted as a homogeneous community of "honest, modest, pious people, close to traditions and national values, defenders of the dignity and identity of the Romanian nation" (About: Dignity and National Identity Front 2016).

In a similar vein, the Justice, Dignity, and National Solidarity Party justifies its political involvement as "an urgent need to stop the dictatorship of political parties" (About: Dignity and National Identity Front 2016). The

party webpage lists numerous famous quotations that converge on the harmony and unity of the Romanian community as menaced in particular by the corrupt establishment. The nativist dimension is connected to the emphasis on the need to protect and guarantee national sovereignty, to reconcile Romanians in the name of the national interest, and, last but not least, to severely punish all those attempting to limit Romania's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The authoritarianism dimension is a direct evolution of this discourse: the party program requires tougher penalties for corruption, an audit of the privatization of state companies, and "punishment of all those who have robbed this country and who contribute to the destruction of Romanian industry."

Heirs of the Second Generation—PPDD

The National Democratic Party is the last party that would meet the criteria of the previous law, with 34,000 members (Starting today ... 2016). Moreover, unlike many of the other parties in our sample, the National Democratic Party managed to run 6,952 candidates in the local elections in 2016, winning 153 seats in local councils and two seats in county councils.¹¹ The nativism dimension is present in the documents of the party, but it is usually understated, forming the background for the other principles of the party. The authoritarianism dimension is also lacking prominence; it is visible only in passing references to cleaning the political arena and to integrity in politics. Although the information available on the webpage of the party suggests it is a leader-structured party (Starting today ... 2016), if one takes into account the three dimensions we used for defining radical-right populist parties, the National Democratic Party fits the definition only to a certain extent. The official documents of the party refer to an ideal community of Romanians and put emphasis on a party designed for defending the interests of all Romanians (Starting today ... 2016). Moreover, there is a systematic emphasis on the integrity of the party representatives in contrast to the current corrupt elite. However, we argue that the National Democratic Party's populism is less an issue of content of the repertoire, and more an instance of strategic usage. By using a thin repertoire of populist mobilization, the party leader can signal to his potential voters that he is not beholden to traditional politics, while simultaneously presenting himself as a potential partner for traditional parties. This strategy proved to be a successful one, since just a couple of months before the 2016 parliamentary elections, the National Liberal Party (PNL) approved a protocol of cooperation with the National Democratic Party, according to which the latter agreed to support the PNL candidates without submitting its own lists of candidates. This example provides evidence supporting the decision to use a more detailed definition of radical-right populist parties, with increased attention to the patterns of interaction with other parties.

The Honesty and Prosperity Party is a second party with roots in PPDD, but its trajectory so far has been quite different from the National Democratic Party. Its founder, Dorin

Curtean, was elected as mayor of a commune in western Romania running on the PPDD ticket. Halfway through his mandate he quit PPDD and created the Honesty and Prosperity Party together with the town hall administrator and the head of the local school. However, at the local elections in 2016, the party leader ran for mayor again, this time on the ticket of the liberals, raising doubts about the future of the party. Along the authoritarianism dimension, the main distinction in the party program is between honest citizens and thieving politicians, who have destroyed "Romanian industry, agriculture, and the service sector" (Program 2016). The nativism dimension is absent from the documents of the party, which state the party's support for protecting the national identity (language, culture, religion) of all minorities living in Romania.

Our Party is the third party in the group of parties whose origins are linked to PPDD. This party has been founded by a former PPDD party member who was elected as a member of Parliament on the PPDD ticket. From this perspective, Our Party is quite similar to the Honesty and Prosperity Party. Moreover, the similarities continue with respect to the ideology of the party as well. The documents we have analyzed revolve around the idea of the citizen, this concept not being restricted based on other criteria, as it was the case in other parties we have discussed in this paper. As it is for many of the parties in our sample, the distinction between the regular citizens and the political elites is central to the party program, which sees the citizen suffering from the actions of a "trans-party oligarchy that has barricaded itself within the state's institutions."

Newly Formed Parties

The category of newly formed parties includes four political parties. The first in this group, using the peculiar name of Oaks' Party, has a political program that voices the need to protect national entrepreneurs (Political Program of the Oaks' Party, 2016). The community of reference is vaguely defined on moral criteria (e.g., honesty), with an explicit reference to the need to include the national minorities in the organic community. Enemies are not mentioned in the documents of the party, the only recognizable threat being a vague reference to the borders of Romania not being negotiable (Political Program of the Oaks' Party 2016). As in the previous cases, the party voices opposition to the corrupt establishment and increased need for order.

The next party in our sample, the Autonomous Conservative Dacism (DAC) Party, uses the acronym of its official name as a reference to the historical ancestors of Romanians, the Dacians, with a *sui generis* concept of autonomous conservative democracy. The party traces its origins back to the interwar Conservative Democratic Party (www.facebook.com/partidul.dac). The description of the community of reference is strongly connected with the national criterion. The Romanian community is defined in connection to a vaguely delineated territory inhabited since

ancient times. The DAC doctrine further enhances the national dimension of the community by laying additional emphasis on moral values (e.g. honesty) and cultural aspects (e.g., the Romanian language) (www.facebook.com/partidul.dac). In this case, the party program has a more Euro-critical argumentation, compliant with Dietmar Loch and Ov Cristian Norocel's (2015) thesis of regained national sovereignty as against increasing control by EU technocrats. Anti-corruption stances and increased punitive measures are highly emphasized (www.facebook.com/partidul.dac).

Laurențiu Rebega, a Romanian member of the European Parliament (EP) with a tortuous political career, was the founder of the National Force Party. Part of the leadership of the Conservative Party (PC), the junior ally of the Social Democrats, Rebega ran for the EP in 2014. Initially a member of the Socialists and Democrats group in the EP, he switched to the Europe of Nations and Freedom political group formed in June 2015 (www.laurentiurebega.ro/). He affirmed his unconditional loyalty to the Romanian nation and the Romanian unitary national state by promoting the values and fundamental interests of Romanian society and Romanian spirituality (www.laurentiurebega.ro/). Most notably, the symbol of the newly created party is the Romanian tricolor flame, the same symbol initially used by the Italian Social Movement and then by the French National Front (Who We Are 2016). The party openly enjoyed support from Marine Le Pen, who attended an international conference of right-wing populist politicians organized by the National Force party in Romania (BalkanInsight 2016). The party values patriotism and spirituality above any other characteristics (Who We Are 2016). The enemy of the true Romanian patriots is multi-faceted: a trans-party, trans-ideology, trans-ethnic, trans-border, trans-religion, and trans-moral conspiracy of criminal solidarity has accessed every vital cell of the society, falsifying its values (Who We Are 2016). There are no inherent problems in the nature of the Romanian nation; the problems arise from the fakery we naively accept as recognized continental values. Globalization and illegal immigration are also threats to the

nation. One of the main promises of the National Force Party is to promote law, order, respect, and dignity (Political Program of the National Force Party 2016).

Dan Tano Alexandru, a publicist known for his nationalist and conservative stances, founded the Romanian Force Party, the last in this group. Although deprived of official political engagement, the party leader was one of the promoters of the short-lived movement Force9, which represented the self-identified middle class (Rețeaua Romania 2.0 2012). Alexandru's involvement in the newly created party was extremely brief, since he decided to leave the party and run for Parliament on the ticket of the Greater Romania Party (BEC 2016). The Romanian Force Party seems to be representative of a series of platforms and civic movements that have developed in recent years, mostly in social media outlets and by rather young people dissatisfied with the existing political parties. The party's official presentation emphasizes the Romanians' "disgust" and "repulsion" with traditional politics (Romanian Force 2016). The party is hence positioning itself in opposition both to politicians, who cannot be trusted anymore, and to political and economic forces from abroad, which aim to transform Romania into a colony to be governed by foreign capital (Objectives of Romanian Force 2016).

CONCLUSIONS: THE EGG OF THE POPULIST PHOENIX AND THE ALTAR OF MAINSTREAM POLITICS

The literature usually acknowledges that the space for radical-right populist parties to emerge depends on both political opportunity structures and the perceptions of participants (Koopmans and Olzak 2004). All Romanian mainstream parties, to different degrees, invoke nationalism and regularly play the anti-corruption card in their electoral strategy. There is also an increased visibility and supportive resonance with radical-right populist themes in the main media (ActiveWatch 2016). As such, we

TABLE 2
Core Arguments of Post-2015 Romanian Radical-Right Populism

<i>Core arguments</i>	<i>Promoters of pre-war legacies</i>	<i>Heirs of first-generation parties</i>	<i>Heirs of second-generation parties</i>	<i>Newly formed parties</i>
Nativism	Non-ethnic elements of exclusion (religion, cultural minorities)	Some ethnic elements of exclusion	—	—
Authoritarianism	Need for hierarchies	—	—	Xenophobia (some, not all)
	Anti-corruption punitive stances	Anti-corruption punitive stances	Anti-corruption punitive stances	Anti-corruption punitive stances
Populism	Anti-establishment	Anti-establishment	Anti-establishment	Anti-establishment

might have expected limited interest in new parties to exploit an already overcharged theme. However, a qualitative analysis of the programs of the thirteen parties has demonstrated the opposite (see Table 2). While much of the consolidated research has analyzed the populist (radical-right) family in relation to parties in Parliament, this contribution has looked at the current extra-parliamentary parties whose ideological features correspond to a heterogeneous combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The (re-)emergence of the Romanian versions of this phenomenon requires an increased understanding of both the political opportunity structures and the variations in the core of their argumentation. However, something is missing from the current literature: the demand side. We know very little about the reasons for participating in these parties. As illustrated by Fiona May Robertson (2009), this might be connected with the so-called “blocked” political space due to the clientelistic links between politics, media, and business that tend to hamper the participation.

Across time, the core arguments have changed in both content and intensity. The systemic loyalty of the parties has been confirmed and alternatives to representative democracy are not mentioned, implicitly or explicitly, in any of these cases monitored. Similarly, with relatively few exceptions, Romania’s membership in the European Union has never been significantly questioned. The main difference concerns the limited relevance of the ethnicity-based criterion, counterbalanced by an increased emphasis on cultural, religious, and/or gender-based criteria. The diminished emphasis on the ethnic dimension is confirmed in almost all cases, with the notable exception of the two parties whose ideology can be traced back to the interwar radical right. In several cases, we have identified instead a focus on economic protectionism, as an alternative option for defending the interests, values and resources of the national community. On the whole, racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia are absent from the official discourses, and there are no examples that we could document of any of these parties approving of violence as a political means. Although not a general trend, a religion-based version of populism seems to play an increasing role on the Romanian political arena. We found extremely interesting the fact that, although the definition of the community of reference maintains its *ex negativo* features, there are limited explicit references to enemies, as compared to what used to be the case in the first generation of populism.

In relation to the authoritarian dimension, the parties converge on the need for increased discipline and major anti-corruption measures, a smooth continuity with the previous forms of populism. All our parties are predisposed to use increased legal sanctions against all form of deviant behavior. The big absentee is the messianic role of the leader, which represented a core issue for the first two generations of parties.

In relation to the third core-dimension, our sample of parties perceive the genuine people (as illustrated by their very names) in opposition to distant, corrupted, self-serving and cosmopolitan political elites. Most of them lay emphasis on the common sense of the people. If compared to the previous forms of populism, the new populism abandoned the witch-hunt of intellectuals that allowed, in particular in the early 1990s, to target all those elements that were accused of national betrayal only because they looked, thought and spoke differently. In different cases, we have documented corrective solutions such as a diminished number of MPs. A caveat has to be mentioned: we are aware that the differences and continuities identified can be further fine-tuned by additional information on the ways these parties use social networks to disseminate their messages and mobilize their supporters. This analysis relies exclusively on official information and the intensity of the arguments is implicitly controlled by the menace of not being registered or being dissolved for unconstitutional behavior. The case of the New Right party is a possible example in this regard: despite the “neutral” tone of the official texts of the party, the media documented the movement’s opposition to the Roma community, Jews, EU, NATO, or its involvement in the anti-LGBT March for Normality organized in June 2016.

All in all, the extra-parliamentary group of Romanian radical populists resembles a phoenix regularly rising from its ashes. The parties analyzed in this article preserved, to different degrees, the *ashes* of their predecessor with regard to the hardcore of their programs and, in several cases, their leadership. As in the original myth, the reborn phoenix has deposited its egg within mainstream politics, considering not only the positive resonance with the mainstream agenda but also individual trajectories from extra-parliamentary parties to parties in Parliament.

Considering the above, the analysis has contributed to the literature in several ways. At a methodological level, the article demonstrates the relevance of contextuality, facilitated by a detailed case study. In terms of empirical information, to our knowledge, this is the first exploratory attempt to analyze the composition of the extra-parliamentary arena in relation to the populist genus. Beyond the reasons detailed in the introduction, recent evolutions in Poland (i.e., the Congress of the New Right in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament) and Slovakia (i.e., Kotleba—People’s Party Our Slovakia in the 2016 parliamentary elections) testify that the extra-parliamentary arena can provide politically relevant offers. Last but not least, in terms of theoretical contribution, the analysis sheds light on the tradeoff between continuity and change in a (partially) renewed assortment of radical-right forms of populism that could be examined in other post-communist countries. However, there is a need for systematic and in-depth comparative studies not only with regard to the extra-parliamentary possibilities and the trade-offs with the mainstream politics but also in relation to another major question: Why do people join these parties?

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Notes

1. Law 27/1996 required 10,000 founding members from at least 15 counties. In 2003 this was changed to at least 25,000 founding members from at least 18 counties (Legea partidelor politice 2003). The 2015 reform was launched by the Constitutional Court's positive ruling following a complaint submitted in 2014 by the Romanian branch of the Pirate Party, which argued that the legal requirement of 25,000 members for registering a new political party was a violation of Romanians' political rights. A similar position was endorsed by a network of Romanian civil society organizations and citizens (Politics without Barriers, <http://politicaforabariere.wordpress.com>) that intensively lobbied Romanian institutions arguing the need to bring politics closer to the citizens and increase genuine competition on the electoral market (Popescu and Soare 2017).
2. On the eve of the 2016 legislative elections, the Party of Romanians from Abroad, founded after the 2015 amendments of the party law, merged with the Romania United Party (Agerpres 2016).
3. The representation of the radical-right populist family in the lower chamber of the Parliament varied from 12 seats (PUNR) in the 1990 legislature, to 41 seats (PUNR and PRM) in 1992, 32 seats (PUNR and PRM) in 1996, 70 seats (PRM) in 2000, 21 seats (PRM) in 2004, no MPs in 2008, 52 seats (PPDD) in 2012, and no MPs, again, in 2016.
4. PUNR was part of the governing coalition from 1995, while PRM has offered its support in Parliament.
5. According to Voicu and Dumitru (2016), despite the 2015 relaxation of dispositions regarding party registration, the process is rather complex: it requires between 21 and 219 days (with an average of 87 days) for the Court of Bucharest to release a final decision on a petition to register a new political party. The publication of the final decision and the inscription in the Official Register of political parties can cause additional delays: the duration is between 51 and 287 days (with an average of 132 days).
6. See www.pndnational.ro/?page_id=1379. Accessed January 26, 2017.
7. See www.riseproject.ro/noua-dreapta-isi-face-partid. Accessed January 26, 2017.
8. See <http://bit.ly/NouaDreapta2017>. Accessed January 26, 2017.
9. See <http://aliantanoastra.ro/valori/>. Accessed January 26, 2017.
10. See <http://bit.ly/PNPP2017>. Accessed January 26, 2017.
11. The National Democratic Party managed to obtain seats in local councils in 30 out of the 41 counties of Romania.

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ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTIES

<i>Registration date</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Origin</i>
06/25/2015	Blocul Unității Naționale – BUN <i>National Unity Bloc</i>	PRM
07/01/2015	Frontul Demnității și Identității Naționale – FDIN <i>Dignity and National Identity Front</i>	PRM
08/05/2015	Partidul Național pentru Patrie – PNP <i>National Party for the Motherland</i>	PRM
08/15/2015	Partidul Național Democrat – PND <i>National Democratic Party</i>	PPDD
11/11/2015	Partidul Noua Dreaptă – PND <i>New Right Party</i>	Prewar
03/31/2016	Partidul Cinste și Prosperitate – PCP <i>Honesty and Prosperity Party</i>	PPDD
04/05/2016	Partidul Dreptății, Demnității, Solidarității Naționale – PDDSN <i>Justice, Dignity, and National Solidarity Party</i>	PRM
04/20/2016	Partidul Nostru – PN <i>Our Party</i>	PPDD
05/26/2016	Partidul Dacismului Autonom Conservator – PDAC <i>Conservative Autonomous Dacism Party</i>	New
06/15/2016	Partidul Forța Națională – PFN <i>National Force Party</i>	Minor
06/16/2016	Partidul Forța Românească – PFR <i>Romanian Force Party</i>	New
08/03/2016	Partidul Alianța Noastră România – PANR <i>Our Romania Alliance Party</i>	Prewar
09/07/2016	Partidul Stejarilor – PS <i>Oaks' Party</i>	New

Note: Party documents are available at: <http://pndnational.ro/>; <http://fdin.ro/> (webpage no longer available); www.facebook.com/partidulbun/; www.partidulnationalpentripatrie.ro/; www.nouadreapta.org/; www.partidulpcp.ro/program.html; www.partidul-nostru.ro/; www.pddsn.ro/; www.partidul-forta-nationala.ro/; www.facebook.com/partidul.dac.din.romania/posts/326576124363275; www.fortaromaneasca.ro/; www.aliantanoastra.ro/; www.partidulstejarilor.ro/. Accessed January 27, 2017.