



ION (IONEL) I. C. BRĂȚIANU
– SPIRITUAL MENTOR –

STELIAN NEAGOE*

Abstract. *The article attempts to convey a portrait of Ion I. C. Brătianu. This personality was meant to lead the Government of the War for the Unification of Lesser Romania (formed by the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia), proving himself to be the architect, in thought and action, of Greater Romania. He faced, bravely and proudly, the arrogance of the most powerful leaders of this world, which wanted to build a postwar Europe based on injustice toward the other belligerents. Then he observed, sadly but wisely, the response of lack of popularity, which occurred following the War. He imposed or dismissed Governments, attempting to moderate the turmoil of the new political currents and to bring about a national front that would exploit the potential of the reunited country. When he considered that domestic conditions and the international context had become propitious, he took power once more, this time presiding over the pacification and unification of all Romanians, in order to be able to lay the constitutional, political, juridical and administrative foundations of a united national State.*

Keywords: *Ion I. C. Brătianu, the Greater Romania, the national State, the postwar Romanian governments, the constitutional framework.*

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Ion I. C. Brătianu was born on the 20th of August 1864, in the parental home, at Florica – Argeş County – and he died on the 24th of November 1927, in Bucharest. He was the eldest son of Ion C. Brătianu and of Pia Pleşoianu, a son of the mountains who came from the Olt region. He graduated in 1882 the prestigious “Sf. Sava” College, in Bucharest. Then he completed a period of six months of voluntary military service – in the Second Artillery Regiment, eventually attaining the rank of second lieutenant. In the afternoons the “voluntary” teenager attended courses at the Civil Engineering School in the capital. From the autumn of 1883 he was in Paris, where he continued and completed his higher education. For a year he was an intern of the class of Special Mathematics A, at the Saint-Barbe Preparatory School. For the next two years he attended courses at the École Polytechnique as an external student. Finally, after three years of Studies at the Collège of Civil Engineering, he obtained a diploma in engineering (in 1889).

When he returned to the country he concentrated on his training at the “Malmaison” barracks, and after completing his training he was promoted to lieutenant. After October 1889 he began to work as a specialist engineer in railway construction under the supervision of the reputed engineer Anghel Saligny.

Four years after the death of his father he embraced the militant party politics, at first as Gorj county deputy (in 1895). Then he became a catalyst for the youthful energies of the Romanian Liberal National Party (PNL), animated by the incorporation of the “poporanist” leaders (that is, the followers of Romanian traditional ideology, established by the journalist Constantin Stere, founded on the idea of uniqueness of Romanian rural civilization) and of the “generous” socialists – such as Constantin Stere, V. G. Morţun, Ioan Nădejde, the Radovici brothers, the Diamandi brothers, I. C. Atanasiu and others. During the same year, 1899, I. I. C. Brătianu achieved the reconciliation with the “flag-wavers”, thus invigorating the great party that had begun to show signs of programmatic inflexibility and structural rigidity.

The interim period between father and son at the head of the party and the national-liberal governments was more assured, and less well in the case of Dimitrie A. Sturdza. When the leader developed an incurable disease, the leadership of the Party and Government in office went almost naturally to Ion I. C. Brătianu, who was voted the winner ahead of the older liberals who became providers of finance.

The PNL Congress from January 11, 1909 accomplished what was nothing more than a procedural formality, when it elected as President the person who over ten years had almost literally identified himself with the party, and set it on its path towards self-renewal.

Ion I. C. Brătianu took part in the Romanian military campaign during the Second Balkan War, when he became aware of the structural problems of Romanian society and decided to launch the PNL into a vast programme of State reform.

In the interval between the shocking Letter published by the young political leader I. I. C. Brătianu in *Viitorul* newspaper at September 7, 1913 and the voting by the Parliament for the War of Unification, and of the grand agrarian and electoral reforms, there were long years of campaigning for the political and economic programme, years of fierce battles against those who were opposed to the idea of allowing themselves to be stripped of power and wealth.

Ion I. C. Brătianu was meant to lead the Government of the War for the Unification of Lesser Romania (formed by the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia), proving himself to be the architect, in thought and action, of Greater Romania. He faced, bravely and proudly, the arrogance of the most powerful leaders of this world, which wanted to build a postwar Europe based on injustice toward the other belligerents. Then he observed, sadly but wisely, the response of lack of popularity, which occurred following the War. He imposed or dismissed Governments, attempting to moderate the turmoil of the new political currents and to bring about a national front that would exploit the potential of the reunited country. When he considered that domestic conditions and the international context had become propitious, he took power once more, this time presiding over the pacification and unification of all Romanians, in order to be able to lay the constitutional, political, juridical and administrative foundations of a united national State.

It is extremely difficult to write about Ion I. C. Brătianu in an encyclopaedic style – when and for how long he led the party etc. A spirit of impressive amplitude, he cannot be captured within the narrow cannons of a dictionary. For these reasons we cannot follow the encyclopaedic approach.

In 1864, when Cuza Vodă orchestrated the *coup d'état*, in order to be able to accomplish the agrarian, electoral and, to a certain extent, the constitutional reforms, was also the year that Ion I. C. Brătianu was born, that historical year – from which dates the parting of the ways between conservatives and the incipient liberals. His parents believed in trying to build foundations for a small country where everything was still to be accomplished and established. The Brătianu parents advised their sons to not indulge themselves in facile and well remunerated PhDs in Law but to engage in higher education in practical domains, to be able to contribute to the long process of national renaissance and prosperity for the Lesser Romania.

Ion I. C. Brătianu thus exercised his knowledge of applied engineering in the construction of meaningful social and economic objectives. He “tailored” and constructed the infrastructure and only afterwards dared to take on the responsibility of modernizing the structure of the Romanian state.

His father fully accomplished his duty. Revolutionary in his youth, a liberal edifying the country at maturity, then an attentive conservative maintaining his accomplishments in his old age. Putting in a huge effort, the generation of Cuza Vodă – Brătianu – Kogălniceanu passed the realisation of the national destiny into the younger and luckier hands of the generation of Ion I. C. Brătianu.

This way, from the beginning of 1909 and until the end of 1927, all the political, social-economic, diplomatic and military life of the two Romania (Lesser and then Greater after December 1, 1918) was overwhelmingly marked by the personality of the all-powerful I. I. C. Brătianu, assisted by gifted, diligent and loyal “aides”.

Year after year, I. I. C. Brătianu brought in and removed from power the governments of Romania, when and as he saw appropriate, having as his aim the reunification of the Romanian people, and the creation of the necessary constitutional framework for the development of Greater Romania, within the parameters of post war Europe.

During his governments I. I. C. Brătianu was not only the authoritative prime minister, who was listened to and followed. When internal and external circumstances required, he was the minister of Internal Affairs, the minister of Foreign Affairs, or the head of the Ministry of War. Everywhere he left his unmistakable imprint of competence and prestige. He was, for instance, the minister of Internal Affairs during the violent peasant uprising of 1907. It was a heavy, yet delicate responsibility that he fulfilled and then he knew to answer the attacks of those who charged that there had been, *post festum*, “useless horrors”.

“Gentlemen Deputies” – said I. I. C. Brătianu from the tribune of the Parliament, on December 5, 1909 – “if it is about the feelings of a human heart, be the repression as small as possible, if only one man would have been killed, of course each of us would feel the pain, and regret the repression. And how can we not judge that it is one of the most tragic and painful tasks, which was imposed by the duty toward the State and the love of nation, when we were forced to oversee these repressions, in which, according to the detailed researches made for the payment of compensation, 419 people found their death?”

“Whoever researches the history to see what was our concern and especially whoever browses through the telegrams, which we sent incessantly and whoever considers the oversight we employed, so that the repression should not degenerate into vengeance, will appreciate the feelings that accompanied those painful acts ordered. [...]

“We made the repression too violent! – And you have claimed in your newspapers there were tens of thousands of victims and you come to accuse us! If you thought so, why were you silent for two years?... You kept your silence during the general election and you kept silent after the general election, for two years. For you did not want to govern, yet nowadays, when you want to govern, you are not silent anymore?!!”

The story says that old I. C. Brătianu’s hair turned white in only one night, the night before Romanian army, fighting in the War of Independence, 1877–1878, crossed the Danube. In a similar manner the hair of his son, I. I. C. Brătianu, too, turned white when he decided that the Romanian battalions should cross the Carpathian Mountains and that Romanian should enter the War of Reunification, a war sprinkled with partial victories, with passing defeats, and also with the apotheoses from March 27, November 28 and December 1, 1918.

Ion I. C. Brătianu – confessed to those who had the opportunity to know him closely, as close as a “Sphinx” as he was known – was a fortunate mixture of humanist spirit, fine Byzantine diplomacy, passionate about History and Mathematics, characterized by an unreserved will when choosing his collaborators. He created a genuine political school, among whose successes were I. G. Duca, Gheorghe Tătărescu and other significant Romanian political personalities.

He governed as a senior figure spanning the reign of three kings: the solemn Charles I was defeated by him in the Crown Council of July 21, 1914; Ferdinand I was his “collaborator for life” – and both died within a four month interval, in the same year 1927. He brought the minor, Michael I, to kingship through the tutelage of a Regency – consequent upon the Act of January 4, 1926, concerning the official recognition of the renunciation by Prince Charles of the throne of Romania.

I. G. Duca has in *Political Memoirs*, a long paragraph on the obsession of I. I. C. Brătianu with the destiny of Caesar Borgia, who genially planned the unification of central Italy under the auspices of papacy, but missed a crucial detail: that he was not in Rome when his father, Pope Alexander VI passed away. Duca invoked the parallel with the tormenting preparations of Brătianu, in preparing for war for the unification of Romania. We are confessing that we are tempted to remark that the similarities of the case Caesar Borgia, represent the final point in I. I. C. Brătianu’s life. The great statesman already set Greater Romania on a solid and European foundation. He had drastically and unhesitatingly resolved the dynastic crisis, “cutting off the rotten branch”, as King Ferdinand said about his fickle son Charles. As well as that, Brătianu nipped in the bud the attempts of emancipating the prime ministers that he “named” in front of the Government. General Alexandru Averescu was deposed at June 3, 1927, and the term of office of his brother-in-law Barbu Știrbei, who abruptly became too strong willed, was shortened to a ridiculous period of 16 days.

Ionel Brătianu – as he was known to his close friends – was not a vengeful spirit par excellence. He was unsurpassed in the art of using people, even his adversaries, but he never pursued vengeance to the extreme. For example, he brought about the divorce of Alexandru Marghiloman from Eliza Știrbei in 1909, and she became Eliza Brătianu; he obliged King Ferdinand I to call Marghiloman to Iași, at the beginning of March 1918, in order to form the Government. The faith of the Romanians during World War had a fortunate outcome and Maghiloman became the “traitor”, the “outlaw” – but he was neither tried nor condemned. There were huge pressures in this respect from Paris and London – but Brătianu would not behave in such an undignified fashion with the man with whom, in December 1916, he had agreed an understanding, in a secret room of a hotel in Bucharest: “Alexander, if the Central Powers win – it will be you, if the Entente wins – me.”

In the autumn of 1927, Greater Romania looked like a middle rank European country, on an ascending route towards a general prosperity. The omnipotent Ion I. C. Brătianu had reasons to be pleased. Year after year, he ensured everything

went well. In a similar manner to Cesare Borgia, he ignored the possibility of his disappearance from life. He had escaped from an attack in 1909. Then...

Without a shred of cynicism, we dare say that for this lucky politician even death came on time. He died in the fullness of glory, at his duty, while leading the country. He did not have to endure days of decline as his father did. He died prematurely from an infectious laryngitis which was untreatable even by the best doctors of the time. But he was spared of the sadness of witnessing the changes which took place in Romania, which occurred in conjunction with many less assessable factors: the loss of power by the PNL, in favour of the National Peasant Party, which eased the self-Restoration of Charles II to the Throne; the (general) world crisis, which seriously affected our country too; Charles' dictatorship that Brătianu predicted correctly; and, finally, the dismantling of Greater Romania, by ultimatums and diktats, each one more forcibly imposed than the next.

For his work as the founder of Greater Romania – that achieved European status – for his providential luck that reflected so beneficial on his country, Ion I. C. Brătianu is the greatest Romanian politician and statesman of all time. Providential and auspicious was Cuza Vodă as well, but the especially complex events and the shortage of time did not bring Cuza to the position of Brătianu, who, maybe not accidentally linked his destiny with that of the Prince of the unified country, through the birth of his only son from the morganatic relation with Cuza Vodă's daughter-in-law. Gheorghe I. Brătianu was proud to build and cultivate this extremely rare historical bridge for the Romanians.

How could we better conclude this modest tribute to this great politician and statesman, than making room for the astute characterization made by the minister of France about the Government during the Romanian War of Unification, the Count of Saint-Aulaire: "He excelled in winning without making enemies. The immediate future revealed in him the highest qualities that make him one of the greatest statesmen of his generation, greater than 'the great three': Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau. Nothing is more natural: in small countries, great men."

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Political and State dignities:

Minister of Internal Affairs, several times: March 12, 1907 – December 15, 1909; February 6 – December 28, 1910; October 30, 1923 – March 27, 1926, in Governments led by himself.

President of the Council of Ministers, several times: December 27, 1908 – December 28, 1910; January 4, 1914 – January 28, 1918; November 29, 1918 – September 12, 1919; January 19, 1922 – March 27, 1926; June 22 – November 24, 1927.

President of the National Liberal Party since January 11, 1909 and until November 24, 1927.

Minister of Foreign Affairs: December 8, 1916 – January 26, 1918; November 29, 1918 – September 12, 1919; June 22 – July 6, 1927, in his administrations.

Writings: *Notre commerce de céréales* [Our trade with grains] (1899); *Chambre des députés* [Deputy Chamber] (1904); *Chestiunea tramvaielor* [Trams' question] (1911); *Manifest-Program* [The programme-manifesto] (1911); *România și Peninsula Balcanică* [Romania and the Balkans Peninsula] (1913); *Către cetățenii Transilvaniei* [To the citizens of Transylvania] (f.a.); *Situația internațională a României* [The international situation of Romania] (1919); *Din amintirile altora și ale mele* [Others' memories and mine] (1922); *Centenarul lui Avram Iancu* [Avram Iancu's centenary] (1924); *Amintiri din Țara Moșilor* [Memories from the country of Moși] (1925); *Activitatea Corpurilor Legiuitoare și a Guvernului de la ianuarie 1922 până la 27 martie 1926* [The activity of the legislative bodies and government from January 1922 and until March 27, 1926] (1926); *România și chestiunea Orientului* [Romania and the question of Orient] (1927); *Cuvintele unui mare român (1914-1927)* [The words of a great Romanian (1914-1927)] (1928); *Discursurile lui Ion I. C. Brătianu* [Ion I. C. Brătianu Discourses], vol. I–IV, George Fotino edition (1933-1940).

P. S.

Octavian Goga has an evocation where the first words are lapidary: “In the beginning was Kogălniceanu...” – a saying by which he situated that encyclopaedic spirit above all the great forerunners of the Romanian national renaissance.

At our institute, too, at a certain moment “In the beginning was Kogălniceanu...” Director Dan Dungaciu and I have thought for two years of choosing Mihail Kogălniceanu as a spiritual patron of our institute.

For instance, even then director Dungaciu had placed on the wall behind his desk the framed portrait of Mihail Kogălniceanu, who already watched over the destiny of an academic institution born after December 1989.

As a consequence, we were just waiting for the appropriate moment to take the necessary steps. That this is how things were is shown by our proposal to the governing board of the Romanian Academy to obtain the completion of the title of the institute, with Mihail Kogălniceanu as its spiritual mentor.

But after consultations – and from the discussions our director had with the President of the Romanian Academy, university professor Ionel Valentin Vlad, DSc – we decided upon another celebrated name (unanimously accepted), that of Ion I. C. Brătianu.

This is not to imply that Mihail Kogălniceanu was not worthy to be our spiritual patron – praise the Lord, he is patron to numerous scientific and academic institutions – but that the great politician and statesman Ion I. C. Brătianu covers in a more suitable manner with his historical and providential character, the field of the Institute of Political Science and International Relations (abbreviated in Romanian ISPRI).

The spiritual patronage of Brătianu the younger honours us, but also this obliges us to cultivate his substantial heritage, purposefully, editing his written

and oral works, elaborating his monographs and syntheses for the “Sphinx” from Florica village, Argeş County.

The process of restitution is on its way. Until the finalization of those voluminous tomes, in the publications of our institute, via the volumes, the journals, the scientific sessions, symposiums and other scientific manifestations, we are going to evoke the personality of the emblematic founder of the Greater Romania, through historical and diplomatic works of lesser degree – toward an increased visibility for ISPRI, ennobled with a symbolical and perennial name, resonant of the birth and continuance of Romania.

Last but not least, we are going to collaborate with those institutions that have as their main objective the preservation of the treasures documenting the meaning of the life and activity of Ion I. C. Brătianu.

Translation by *Henrieta Anișoara Șerban*