

Adrian Gorun

# Stasiology and Electoral Systems



PETER LANG

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Translated by Camelia Dicu



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# Political Parties

## 1.1 General description

In 1951, M. Duverger introduced the term “Stasiologie” (stasiology) in his study **Les partis politiques**, in order to denominate the structure of politics – the science of political parties. Conceived as an institution, the party “is a field of social existence”<sup>1</sup>, a period in which “politics develops along established trajectories”<sup>2</sup> and provides the framework for confrontations between ideologies, principles, personalities.

“The modern political pattern – fortunately or unfortunately, as Dumitru Lepădatu notes – is imbued or over-imbued with partidism. It seems that the majority of political life cannot be conceived outside parties and their role as society mentors”.<sup>3</sup> The subject matter of policy setting in the Modern Age and late Modern Age through the expansion of the party as a concept engenders two types of influential consequences on the political system and political regime. On the one hand, the party is “the compulsory vehicle of democracy”<sup>4</sup>, with democracy not being able to be conceived as reality, as a political system including a desirable system of values apart from some political institutions that are necessary to achieve a democratic government.

On the other hand, if the democratic political regime requires the existence of political parties, it is as true that an existential need has led to a domination of political parties on social and political aspects, talking more and more – as the aforementioned author notes – about “partidocracy”, thus “of a quasi-total domination of politics by parties”, the political regime being identified with the parties regime.<sup>5</sup> “Parties are, in this way, through their activity in parliaments or outside them, privileged mediators and manipulators of political opinion and will” – writes D. Lepădatu. Nothing escapes the interest of parties because their

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1 Dumitru Lepădatu, *Political Processes and Phenomena*, Actami Press, Bucharest, 2000, p. 220.

2 Ibidem.

3 Ibidem.

4 D.L. Seiler, *Les partis politiques en Europe*, P.U.F, Paris, 1982, p. 2.

5 D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 220, the author refers to Gaulle’s work.

major purpose is related to the conquest of political power. It is therefore easy to see and understand why they are so concerned to know and rule, thus to govern, social and political life”.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, how do we arrive at a (free) association of individuals in parties, at an almost complete domination of political life by parties? The answer to this question cannot be a fair one if we do not take into consideration the aspects that lead to association: partisan demonstrations in society. This was considered by P.P. Negulescu when characterizing the grouping of citizens into parties as “a social phenomenon”<sup>7</sup>, the party being the “keystone to modern politics”<sup>8</sup>, the support, the carrier of these partisan demonstrations. “So the ineluctable sociality of man” – notes D. Lepadatu – influences this condition of partidism to a great extent, as a feature due to which individuals associate into parties. From this quality of association begins the path to almost complete domination of political life by parties. Therefore, parties overwhelm, on a general scale, the political scene in such a manner that society’s destinies are decided in their laboratories. The strategy and tactics of parties do not leave a single landmark of the human ontology untouched by their doctrinaire or practical influence.”<sup>9</sup> We bear in mind the idea of partisan demonstrations in society as the cause of the social phenomenon of citizens’ organization in parties (political partisanship), and the moment the social partisanship turns into excessive party partisanship as an evolutionary moment of social life in predominant political life. Here, we have to search for the distinction between moderate partidism and partidocracy, in a political setting where parties coexist with other forms of political participation, and the over-imbued (unbalanced) political setting where a domination of politics over parties occurs. Between the party as a “compulsory vehicle of democracy” and the party as an institution, a certain regime is established – “parties regime” – an institution that subordinates social aspects through the exacerbated role it plays in human existence. Becoming predominantly political, social life enables the “invasion” of the dominating partidism. «Partidocracy» – as D. Lepadatu justly notes – is dangerous in essence, for social existence (has to remain autonomous, various, human) overcomes the logical and psychological condition of the partidist partisanship. Subscription to a party is *logically* achieved through the temptation of certain ideas, principles and doctrines; *psychologically*, attachment given by infinite causes nurtured by the hope of promised prosperity, an expected benefit, becomes pervading in the modern age and especially nowadays.

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6 Ibidem.

7 P.P. Negulescu, *Political Parties*, Garamond Press, Bucharest, f.a, p. 55.

8 S. Newman, *Why Study Political Parties?*, in *Modern Political Parties*, The Press of Chicago University, Chicago, 1965, p. 1.

9 D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The party is a quasi-planetary phenomenon, not just from the geographical point of view, but as a general human tendency as well. The space of current society is occupied by dominating partidism. Not being in any party and not sympathizing with any, such as many proclaim emphatically, does not save individuals or society from this quasi-absolute domination. For beyond the partidist “inappetence” or the obstinate, apparently rescuing refusal from the declared obstruction, the party remains a predominant factor through the power it exercises on political reality. The statement does not seem hazardous “if we take into account the diffusion of the party spirit and the penetration of partidist actions within the structure and dynamics of political processes of contemporary societies.”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, it is not moderate party partisanship – objective and natural in any society – that generates dominant and dominating partidism, but its excess (leading to the predominantly political quality of social aspects) that produces partidocracy. And because “partidism” is understood only as more party systems at the level of ordinary conscience, we have to say that the statement according to which “parties dominate political reality” is confirmed anywhere. But *above all in those political regimes where there is only one party*, as a consequence of their essence: “That is why single party systems, due to the will of this dictatorial circumstance, just like in the cases of a very broad party range where a diffusion of univocal impacts would be hoped for, parties are factors of political exception. He who ignores this party pre-eminence risks ignoring one of the most obvious realities of political activity; he equally ignores the ill-turns potentially caused by this dangerous centrality. To exercise all political life under this sign of the party means that society has to be held responsible, either for making the parties correspond to such domination or for controlling the movement in order for the «dictatorship» not to cancel the rationality condition of society. This is because «partidocracy» exists even when we ignore it”.<sup>11</sup> The single party dominates society absolutely, because it governs absolutely, and the political struggle – as a struggle between parties – is replaced with the class struggle. The unique party establishes its policy (void of subject matter), more than any other party from the competition system, through the idea that the party interest is a general interest, not only from the point of view furnished by P.P. Negulescu with regard to interest as an emotional state, but from an (again) dominating view, that of material and economic support. The single party does not compete for temporary ascension to power; it acts univocally and dominantly to exert power and permanently maintain power. Single party systems’ “partidocracy” makes the party a vehicle of the totalitarian regime and not of democracy.

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10 Ibidem, the author quotes M.M. Petrescu, *Parties, classes, nations*, Political Press, Bucharest, 1977, p. 24.

11 Ibidem.

Social partisanship in totalitarian regimes is constrained to evolve towards a single party partisanship, whereby divergent individual (or group) interests are suppressed. This is the reason why the imbuelement of the modern political environment by partidism has to be thoroughly analyzed, depending on the democratic or totalitarian regime, the two-party or multi-party system.

## 1.2 Party origins

The term political party has been used for a long time, but today's meaning of political parties has been discussed since modern politics started to develop and become more complex. The amplitude of modern politics supposes:

- More extensive participation;
- Evolution towards competition;
- Distribution of representation and governing functions through electoral discussions.<sup>12</sup>

The origin of political parties has, due to its deliberate purpose, a complex causality: shaping of a collective personality; through organized integration and unity “it continues to have deep causes, of various natures, both of objective and subjective types located in human records”.<sup>13</sup> Political party shaping is a process with a “special determination”, and represents organizations with a precise goal, that of “gaining and exercising power in society, distinguishing itself from other organizations that only seek to influence power without trying to exert it”.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of political parties is established by reference to power hence the complexity of the aim we discussed above. Some authors are concerned with the opinion of political parties, some of them insisting on *the deep transformations that have occurred in society*, leading to the necessary and inevitable emergence of parties, others insisting on *the role played by some institutions*.

Therefore, Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner consider that the factors inevitably leading to the emergence of the party are:

- Sustainable organization whose political span is larger than that of common leaders;
- A consolidated and visibly sustainable local organization with regular and various relations to the national echelon;

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12 G. Pasquino *Political Science Course*, European Institute, Iași, 2, p. 150.

13 D. Lepadatu, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

14 Ibidem, the author quotes also S. Tamas in determining the differences of purpose.

“... Deliberate will of national and local leaders to take and exercise power alone or together with others and not just in order to influence power”;

- Search for popular support via elections or any other way.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, G. Pasquino considers that parties' coming into being is related to the moment when “candidates for certain functions, often known in uninominal circumscriptions, feel the need, on the one hand, to organize their own electoral and political activity and, on the other hand, to join other candidates who share the same opinions.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the competition character of modern politics leads to a more efficient organization of individual electoral activity, effectively establishing a collective personality – as an association of those who share similar opinions. Pasquino quotes Maurice Duverger who considers that the main cause for parties' coming into being is the institution of parliament, this phenomenon referring to a cleavage created between groups of *MPs (who mobilize party organizations starting from their own electoral circumscriptions)* and members of the opposition to MP groups, organized outside parliament, “in certain pre-existing networks like associations for defending workers' rights, professional associations or ethnic groups”.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, neither the criteria proposed by LaPalombara and Weiner, nor the one introduced by Duverger are enough to explain the formation and perpetuation of political parties. Starting from the obvious reality that parties are not only “organized”, “sustainable” groups “ordinate as local or national activities”, expression of the will to gain power (by themselves or in coalitions) by the group developing its activity “under the pretext of legitimacy won through elections or in any other way”, and also from the need to eliminate the confusion between parties and other political groups, Dumitru Lepădatu – referring to the extensive bibliography in the field – insists on the need to introduce other “social elements” in the analysis that are “able to add and complement the extensive social framework that really becomes the origin of the party.”<sup>18</sup>

Avoiding detracting from the image of parties by limiting their social “determinations” becomes compulsory: “we therefore have to add other social elements like:

- a. the relation of the party with *social groups* (group and class structure not necessarily understood in the Marxist sense); *R. Dahrendorf* refers to classes in the sense of rich or poor, ethnic or social groups, dominated by anomy (anomie), living in the ghetto of big metropolises etc., in a word «the lower class»; hence the idea to create representative

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15 LaPalombara, M. Weiner, *Political parties and political development*, Princeton, 1966, p. 6, apud. D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*

16 G. Pasquino, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

17 Ibidem.

18 D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

parties by these outsiders; this is why Dahrendorf asks, for good reason, «why there is no party of the unemployed and a party of the poor»;

- b. ideological, programmatic perspective (parties with no ideology, no programmes, with no strategies oriented towards principles are difficult to conceive);
- c. behaviourist perspective (type of action a party relates to);
- d. position of the party in the wholeness of a given social system (relation to economic, social, cultural activity etc.);
- e. position vis-à-vis the political system and regime”;<sup>19</sup>

We notice that the system of criteria introduced in the analysis of party origins involves both aspects related to causes (in essence they regard the deepening of the cleavage between various social categories, economic, ethnic, racial cleavages etc.), and means (ideologies, programmes, strategies) and their defined purpose (by reference to the political system and regime and to the other political organizations), that of achieving political power in the social system.

I think that G. Pasquino clearly explains – at least from a didactic point of view – the analytical positions of the theme related to political parties’ coming into being. He considers that there are *two* points of view resulting from the textbooks studying this matter:

- a. genetic perspective – “deliberately” interested in the ways in which political parties have emerged throughout the time;
- b. structural perspective – that refers to parties’ differentiation based on organizational characteristics.

The aforementioned author quotes *Stein Rokkan* – a Norwegian researcher – who “framed the most complex and persuasive genetic explanation for parties’ emergence”<sup>20</sup>.

He based the genetic explanation for political parties’ emergence on *four cleavages* discovered in a macro-sociologic analysis of nation states’ formation in Western Europe and democratization processes that were the origin of representative organizations for certain social groups<sup>21</sup>.

Therefore, during the phase of state formation, conditions occur for two possible cleavages:

- a) cleavage between downtown and the outskirts;
- b) cleavage between state and church.

Based on the first cleavage, the possibility occurs to establish:

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19 Idem, p. 223-224, references to Dahrendorf are included in *Modern social conflict*, Humanitas Press, Bucharest, 1996 (p. 201-215).

20 G. Pasquino, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

21 Ibidem.

1. a party that would represent downtown (interests and goals defined by reference to “availability to strive for profit and power”) and
2. one or more parties that would represent the outskirts (interests and goals defined by reference to ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even habitual-regional features)<sup>22</sup>.

The cleavage between state and church creates the premises for the emergence of two parties: one that would represent the state; and another in opposition that would represent the churches’ goals. This is a simplified context since the cleavages may overlap, reaching other possible cases in which, for instance, the downtown party and the state party would form one political organization and the church and outskirts another (sole) organization (under the aegis of the church). “In this case, at the end of a process that is always liable for variations and alterations – writes Pasquino – the system of parties could include three or even two parties: a liberal party and a confessional party; or a liberal party, a confessional one and a regionally concentrated party of ethnic minority”.<sup>23</sup>

The second set of conditions for potential cleavage is correlated by Rokkan *to the Industrial Revolution* that generates premises for other two breaches of interests. This is (c) the cleavage between agrarian interests and industrial interests and (d) the cleavage between employers, entrepreneurs, production means and owners’ interests as opposed to the interests of industrial workers and farmers. These cleavages might lead to the emergence of some specific parties. Two possibilities have been outlined: either the – already existing – Liberal and Conservative parties together take over and represent the interests of entrepreneurs and farmers, or a new party of farmers and peasants emerges that joins the two existing ones. In both cases, a party consisting of employees carrying out their activity in industry definitely emerges.

Combining cleavages and represented interests, taking into consideration an extension of suffrage, Rokkan considers at the beginning of the 1920s that free elections may lead to a five-party system in Western democracies: “From right to left we could have: a conservative party, an agrarian party (or a party of a conscious, consistent and concentrated minority), a liberal party, a confessional party and a socialist party”.<sup>24</sup>

As we can see, up to this point, only social cleavages are taken into consideration. The genetic perspective refers to another category of cleavages – *political ones*. In G. Pasquino’s view, immediately after World War I, party systems specific

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22 Pasquino insists on the need not to identify between political connotations “centre”/“periphery” with strictly geographic connotations.

23 Idem, p. 153.

24 The remark belongs to G. Pasquino, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

to Western democracy were pervaded by two new (*political*) cleavages, processes favoured by “*the amplitude of the suffrage*” as well as “*the intensification of social and political mobilization, as a consequence of World War I*”. The two cleavages were generated by a redefinition of interests and identity within the political right and left: “within the right side there has been a redefinition of interests and identity that generated Fascist movements, almost everywhere, obviously with various identities. Within the left side, the Bolshevik revolution and Lenin’s request that Socialist parties accept the 21 theses of the Communist party of the Soviet Union caused dissidence between Socialist parties resulting in the emergence of Communist parties.”<sup>25</sup>

We can note how the occurrence of political cleavages leads to the emergence of ultra-radical parties, that may limit (or even temporarily cancel) the actions of competition democracies when they come to govern in some countries. At the same time, we have to admit that, despite the events from the 1920s and the great dislocations “caused in political life by World War II, party systems that managed to survive in competition with democracies had a certain resistance over time, and even relative stability”. In this respect Lipset and Rokkan’s remark is special: “The systems of parties from the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the structure of the cleavages from the 1920s. This is a fundamental characteristic of political competition in the West during the age of the «consumer’s society»: party alternatives and, to a large extent, even party organizations are older than national electorates. For most Western citizens, active parties have been part of the political background since childhood or since they are in a position to choose between alternative “packages” on elections day”.<sup>26</sup>

Another “less complex and less ambitious” (Pasquino) perspective on parties’ coming into being, is the perspective introduced by Maurice Duverger in **Les partis politiques**, called by Pasquino “substantially structural”. The criterion utilized by Duverger to explain the coming into being of political parties is one that includes the relations between proto-party organizations, parliament and the vote. He therefore defines two stages of party emergence:

- a) The phase of limited vote, when parties exist in parliament, but are poor from an organizational and structural point of view (“respectable connections” between MPs, as Edmund Burke calls them);
- b) The phase of vote expansion, when extra-parliamentary parties can emerge, based on organizations from outside parliament acting in order to acquire representation in parliament. Parliamentary parties are “quasi-party organizations,

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25 G. Pasquino, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

26 S. Lipset și S. Rokkan (ed.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York, The Free Press, 1976, p. 50, apud. G. Pasquino.



with a parliamentary basis and extremely limited projection”<sup>27</sup>, while extra-parliamentary parties have a broader basis provided by the pre-existence of some associations and networks of associations, under the influence of the church and trade unions. Confessional and Socialist parties take advantage of pre-existing networks of associations.<sup>28</sup>

Once the parliamentary system and the party systems have been consolidated, criticism and disputes increase against them, some of the parliamentary parties have a marked anti-parliamentary character: “Catholic parties and Socialist parties emerged outside parliament, but they later sought and found an adequate method for changing its mode of operation, extending its representativeness and responsibility. In the 1920s, Fascist and Communist parties took advantage of the anti-parliamentary critics to gain electoral support and, upon entering parliament, they intended to destroy it”.<sup>29</sup> And the intention became actual reality when the political regime was changed, and totalitarianism turned parliaments into voting machines in favour of the one party; unanimity, annihilation of the opposition and suppression of free expression were characteristics of political life during such regimes.

In a totalitarian or authoritarian regime, the parties’ area of activity is, of course, different from competition democracies. In a democratic regime, anti-parliamentary parties (of Fascist and Communist origin) cannot go beyond the constitutional framework as they are compelled to accept the rules of parliamentarianism and comply with the result of the electoral vote. Things are different in totalitarian regimes where the single party takes over the structures of the state (including legislative power), suppresses competition (replaces it with quasi-general domination) and exerts – through state and legal means – compulsions on the electoral system and upon parliament. From being a democratic institution, Parliament becomes a formal institution through procedures and debates, but important enough through its role in favour of the regime it is a part of.

We addressed above a standpoint expressed by G. Pasquino regarding the origin of political parties by analyzing the genetic and substantial-structural perspectives. But there are many theories and opinions on the matter. For instance, LaPalombara and Weiner divide the theories on the origin of political parties into three groups: a) *institutional*; b) *situational-historical* and c) related to *social and political modernization*.<sup>30</sup>

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27 G. Pasquino, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

28 Ibidem.

29 Idem, p. 155-156.

30 Idem, p. 155-156.

Within *institutional theories*, the rise of political parties is related to the existence of parliament, Duverger being one of the exponents who, as previously noted, relates the parties' coming into being to the origin of parliament and the increase in vote significance, as well as to the transformation and transposing of some organizations of political or non-political origin into parties (trade unions, freemason organizations, peasant professional groups, religious groups and associations, former active soldiers' associations, clandestine or secret groups, financial or industrial groups, etc.).

*Situational and historical theories* focus on events that turned into opportunities, "forcing" the construction of the party: "Some events become opportunities that accelerate or stimulate the conditions of necessity depending on which the party (or partidism as a feature of the system) becomes reality. Moments of crisis, of revolutionary emulation, paroxysm moments of various social themes, wars, economic perturbations, confrontations on community grounds (ethnic, national), conflicts on religious grounds, etc. may become the starting point of a doctrine or action enabling the party's coming into being"<sup>31</sup>. Today, group association is facilitated by the swift diffusion of political ideas, given the significance and global reach of technological means: "The emergence and extinction of some parties is connected, not only to the liability, compromise or inconsequence of some individuals, but also to a special pervasiveness resulting from the accelerated diffusion of political ideas. The reconstruction of political accession has a renewed fluency, through faster and broader channels"<sup>32</sup>.

The third category of theories – those related to social and political modernization – connects party emergence to the evolution of the social and political system, to the improvement of its structure and operation, to the need for new institutions to take over some activities, social messages, groups' demands. As an institution with specific activities, and as part of the political system and regime, the party "takes over some activities from the system, develops them in an articulating way, and leaves a special mark on them". Within the political system, a party has certain responsibilities related to the general ontology of politics that it fulfils by making use of individualized methods that it personalizes through its activity. "The party is a political autonomous body, with a well-shaped structured profile, with a genuine image and distinct functionality. The party is also the result of separation, specialization, leading to more and more profile-oriented activities that foster the functionality designed and expected by society. The party is a body that contributes to the political development of society at large" in its own way (s.n.).<sup>33</sup>

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31 D. Lepădata, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

32 Ibidem.

33 Idem, p. 225-226.

Perspectives on political party emergence vary but they can be grouped depending on the aforementioned criteria: *social and political cleavages, historical circumstances, social and political modernization, industrial development*, etc. One point of view that we consider worth discussing here – especially if we relate it to the current political life in Romania – is that expressed by Dimitrie Gusti in **Sociology of Nations and War**. Manifested also as *moral reference points* of society, parties may also emerge for such a goal, as they answer special needs and opportunities of an ethical nature.

Consequently, besides functional and material aims, parties have cultural, moral and spiritual aims, as well. The political party – said D. Gusti – “is a free association of citizens permanently united by common, general interests and ideas whose aim is the power to govern in order to achieve a social ethical goal”.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the etymology of the term party – *pars, partis partes* in the plural in Latin = part – the opinions of some scholars debate the idea that political parties emerged in Ancient times, after the separation from archaic society, due to the crystallization of different, at times competing, interests. Group behaviour is influenced by differences in wealth, by the slaves’ status and privileged status of other social categories, by the political struggles among the groups, by the organization’s need to gain and maintain power. Analyzing these conditions, D. Lepadatu places them in the phase that Duverger called “*prehistory of modern partidism*”: “With the only difference that these origin conditions are at the beginning. Society had not acquired such structures, especially group structures, with strict arrangement of interests, with such precise programmatic conduct. Parties would be established later, in modern ages. The emerged distinctions would have to be consolidated throughout the centuries, so that it was only by the time of the bourgeois and democratic revolutions in the XVIII and XIX centuries that we had real images of parties. Although states (Greece, Ancient Rome) had been consolidated and although political regimes had largely revealed their essential characteristics, parties were still far from their modern status. Social stratification had not advanced very much sociologically. Trends towards thorough social division had just started to occur. Contiguous group conscience started to be visible; these were *pre-parties* (or *proto-parties*)”.<sup>35</sup> Among the factors that D. Lepadatu considers when asserting that various social parts do not meet the conditions in order for them to be labelled as parties during the pre-modern period, we list:

- > occasional existence, especially due to certain social or political circumstances (ad-hoc presence, sporadic, ephemeral character);

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34 D. Gusti, *Nation and War Sociology*, Floare albastră Press, Bucharest, 1995, p. 78.

35 D. Lepadatu, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

- > weak structure, insufficiently organized;
- > potential goal to be pursued was reduced to the aspirations of a social structure, still not sufficiently dissociated; goals did not comply with the logics of group interests, pursuing primary objectives related to minor, personal interests;
- > proto-parties did not have a well-structured form; they belonged especially to privileged social groups – patricians or aristocrats in Ancient times, dynastic families in the Middle Ages (more rarely and later they also belonged to disadvantaged social categories);
- > pre-parties were secret societies (most of them) developing occult activities, especially as complots; the pre-parties rarely submitted to direct observation, contact and general control, legal practices or the open character of the public life.<sup>36</sup>

The “prehistory” of political parties makes these organizations fundamentally different in terms of quality of structure and the failure to frame specific functions by political parties in the modern sense of the term: “That is why the real age of party existence may be said to be very different, inaugurated by centuries of advanced capitalism development where, in this age of great democratic revolutions, parties achieved their own sense”.<sup>37</sup>

Dumitru Lepădatu does not limit himself only to establishing the factors that make proto-parties out of pre-modern organizations, but analyzes the factors that encouraged the emergence of political parties in modern ages. Accordingly, parties “achieved their sense” in modern ages, because:

- they left the past condition, the sporadic character, ephemeral relations among organized groups, the ad-hoc character of certain circumstances, without being established according to the rule of facile opportunities (parties had become organized for “quasi-permanent periods”; age of some parties – though evolving in internal structures – sometimes exceeded hundreds of years, some of them making their history a criterion of legitimacy and legitimating);
- The new parties were organized and structured differently: “They had the ability to order the activity of this political group not only locally, but especially at national level. For this quality of the political institution that we analyze, there is also a structurally beneficial «technical» framework. A national system emerged, of an integrating market that destroyed feudal autonomy and autarchy, a complex of relations, a system of communications favouring the exchange of information and political substance”;

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<sup>36</sup> Idem, p. 227-228 .

<sup>37</sup> Idem, p. 228.

- Political parties have – compared with pre-parties – *a status* of organization, a status officializing the purpose, the organization form, aims (objectives), specific conditions to carry out activities, management organization, hierarchic or cooperation relations, etc.
- Political parties are created from another background of ideas, being built at another level of political conscience and political culture; they “are the expression of a certain *ideology*, specific to certain social groups, special circumstances, perspectives, certain values, concepts, principles. Ideologies, characteristic forms of political conscience, defining at the same time the specific adhesion that a party can materialize in relation to forms of culture: religion, moral options, etc.”;
- Modern political parties are fundamental reference points for the *strategic decision* required by a community, by virtue of the central position that they may have (or have) in the leadership of society; they strive for fundamental decisions either through direct relationship with political power (the case of governing parties), or through an indirect relationship (opposition parties that influence the political decision);
- Political parties become political action instruments at sight; by leaving behind the secret character of the activity, parties become an official part of the political system. They become *legal* organizations where opinions are freely expressed and the competition for values and ideologies remains open;
- The declared aim of a modern party is *access to political power*, which makes it a *competitor*. The struggle to acquire political power is manifest in democratic regimes as competition between parties, as competition among ideologies, programmes, strategies, using various means (some of them fair as a reference to electorate, some of them manipulating);
- Modern societies (except for dictatorial regimes) firstly reveal an intrinsic quality of the party – *partidism* – which is a prerequisite in the competition for power and even for the existence of the modern party: “the party – says D. Gusti – supposes at the same time the existence of an opposite party, which makes it, because a party ceases to exist when there is no other but itself”;
- As a fundamental political institution, the political party has to express – as D. Gusti noted – general interests and ideas: “A party is not a group, opinions or actions club. It is not a camarilla existing in the entourage of a famous person with prestige, like a monarch for instance, who benefit completely from the benevolence of that prestige. It is not a secrete organization like freemasonry or the mafia, not a band of individuals gathered around a bad goal for the society, nor a sect, organized around mystic criteria or special beliefs; nor a group with secret goals; nor a meeting gathered around hypocritical, dangerous, seductive ideas”;

- The party moulds the actions of social groups, participating in the development of political conscience and culture, in the transformation of will and ideas into political facts; expressing more and more general trends, and some special ones, the party synthetically reflects a certain relation between social and political forces: “Political parties have become special laboratories, allowing the development of political battles, even of wars for promoting national states and the entire picture of the revolutions from the XVIII and XIX centuries”.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.3 The concept of the political party

Political parties cannot be approached by ignoring the essential and general characteristics that give them a certain identity within politics. At the same time, the role and position of the party in society cannot be analyzed without revealing certain contextual elements regarding the nature of the political system and regimes in their historical and geopolitical evolution, apart from those elements that are deemed “constant” – elements that are valid anywhere and anytime in defining these institutions. “The complexity of the defining framework of a party was to be related to its aims; or to specific answers to various social problems the party was created for.”<sup>39</sup>

When defining a party, we should keep in mind the aspect (accurately proved by D. Lepadatu) that is generated by the pauperization of its content, whereby various authors have underlined certain defining notes. Restriction of the concept of the political party has contributed to the growing unilateral significance of these factors (considered a priority in the definition), neglecting the value of others: “By limiting the area of the partidist phenomenon to only certain components, the richness of the phenomenon decreases, is vitiated”.<sup>40</sup> In the aforementioned work, D. Lepadatu insists on these limitations, providing the lack of elements used in the definitions given.

Accordingly, the definition given by LaPalombara and Weiner that considers four elements (ongoing organization, its complete character at local and national level, the will to exercise power, and the search for popular support) is limited. Equally limited is the definition given by Max Weber who, although he considers other elements, excludes major components that individualize the party on the political stage. In Weber’s view, parties are organizations based on members’ free association, which has a formal character and the purpose of elevating their

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38 Idem, p. 228-230.

39 Idem, p. 232.

40 Ibidem.

leader to government. This purpose is not a purpose in itself, because it provides the favourable conditions for economic objectives for leaders and for obtaining personal privileges.

For some authors, the definition is restricted even to a single element, such as interest – national, economic, moral – or doctrine, organizational structure, ideology, goal, etc. If we consider such definitions, we have to admit that simplifications either make it impossible to capture the differences between parties, or force acceptance of an implausible case – that distinctions between parties are not significant; differences in emphasis are responsible for the simplification and restriction of the concept of the political party.

And examples are edifying:

- The father of conservatism, Edmund Burke, believes that the *interests pursued at national level* should be emphasized when defining a party.<sup>41</sup>
- A. D. Xenopol thinks that the *group interests are fundamental* for the formation of the party.<sup>42</sup>
- Benjamin Constant insists in his definition on the *political doctrine*, as the party “is a reunion of people with the same political doctrine”.<sup>43</sup>
- Maurice Duverger considers that the essential elements in the definition have to be those of the *specific institutional organization*: modern parties are defined less and less through their programme or their affiliation with a certain social group of members; *the nature of the organization* is what gives parties an identity in the political system: “Modern parties are characterized *first of all* by their anatomy”.<sup>44</sup>
- In his definition of party, D. Gusti emphasizes an element relating to the deontology of the political act and human act (therefore continuing a line originating in Ancient times and classic German philosophy); for him, “general interests and ideas” lead to the association of people in parties, and government has to be made in the name of an ethic and social goal;<sup>45</sup>

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41 “The party is a body (group) of people united in order to form, through their mutual efforts, the national interest.” — Burke Press, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in the Works of Ed. Burke, vol. II, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 82, apud. D. Lepădăm, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

42 “Individual interests common to a more or less restricted group form the sub layer of political groups or parties” – A. D. Xenopol, *History of political parties in Romania*, 1910, preface, p. II-VI, apud. D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 233 .

43 Apud. O. Trăsnea, *Problems of political sociology*, Political philosophy, Political Press, Bucharest, 1986, p. 107.

44 Maurice Duverger, *Les partis politiques*, Paris, A. Colin, 1951, p. IX-X, apud. D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*; organization content was supported by Marxists, including by A. Gramsci.

45 D. Gusti, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

- R. Michels insists on collective psychology in defining parties: “Party definition is not possible without considering the masses’ quasi-religious trends, the force of habits and customs, collective practices, ideologies, beliefs, the need for leaders, and their veneration, all of which influence the concept behind such an institution”. R. Michels relates the need to organize the masses to “their impossibility to reach a certain level of understanding and action. Parties emerge as an expression of leaders’ intellectual superiority, of politicians’ professionalism and the formal and real incompetence of the masses. Parties occur as a trend to acquiring *competence*. This is not achieved by general democratic participation in solving vital social matters, but by creating parties as professional units.”<sup>46</sup>

Such examples may continue, but they do not resolve the matter of defining political parties because they do not resolve the system of defining causes and circumstances. The national or group interest, political doctrine, organizational structure, collective psychology, even the social ethic goal are defining elements, but if taken separately, they are not enough.

Dumitru Lepădatu makes use of a definition of synthesis offered by O. Trasnea: “The concept of party is *divided into six perspectives*. These are: a) the Party as an *association*; b) usually expresses and promotes the *fundamental interests* of a determined group; c) has an *organized character*; d) it draws-up a *programme* based on a certain ideological platform; e) it has the objective, among others, and the capacity to form *leaders*; f) as an essential aim it proposes to exercise *power* in the society, in the state”.<sup>47</sup>

The more concise contemporary definition appreciated in specialty literature stems from Giovanni Sartori: “a party is a political group identified through an official label, which takes in elections and is capable of placing candidates for public functions through elections (free or not)”.<sup>48</sup>

## 1.4 Functions of political parties

It must be noted that parties only exist and are manifest in political life by exercising certain functions.

Political party functions are “established” with reference to the objectives they propose, pursue and apply; they differ in role and structure, they coherently

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46 D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 236; the author refers to the work of R. Michels, *Les partis politiques*, Flammarion, 1971, p. 75-85.

47 Idem, p. 236.

48 G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 63 .



“respond to the demands of the political system at large, and are thus *omni-functional*”.<sup>49</sup> In practice, party functions express *the general trend of political action, power gain*; their existence objectifies political practice by describing general political options. Based on documented analyses, D. Lepădatu identifies three functions of political parties: a) formation of political opinions; b) function of candidates’ selection; c) functions of necessary correlations among the elected persons and the electorate.

We shall analyze them one by one, through reference to the way in which the main political parties in today’s Romania exercise these functions.

*a) Formation of political opinions.* In exercising this function, parties wish to contribute to the creation and maintenance of political conscience – through the information and formation of public opinion.<sup>50</sup> Parties make an offer both to the electorate and for candidates – an offer circumscribed as a doctrinarian topic. “Public opinion is shaped through idea projects, built on the symbol structure of political options, and evolution trends.”<sup>51</sup> This offer – in the form of a doctrinarian topic – is the “reference framework” for public debates, with parties being the platform (Easton) through which the electorate and candidates freely express their options. The acknowledged public opinion “may be *coherently structured*” based on the competition among parties, as well as among candidates and depending on the coherent structuring level of public opinion, attitudes “may be fathomed” from the point of view of political offer acceptance or rejection. Acknowledged and structured in a coherent way, *public opinion is both a barometer for parties and candidates, and a transmitter of new messages, depending on which political offer may be amended* in such a way that, by covering options, their support basis may grow.

We have to say that, following the formation of political opinions, the function is not usually exercised only during electoral campaigns, but for the entire period of a party’s existence, whether it is in office or in opposition. It has to be intensified through a multiplication of actions where political conscience and, especially, political culture are weak. The case of Post-Decembrist Romania is edifying: the parties – irrespective of their size, doctrine (if any), or whether they were in office or in opposition – demonstrated little inclination for the information and formation of public opinion, in many cases even for the information and formation of their own members. The call to tradition, customs, and myths (in a

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49 See D. Lepădatu, *op. cit.*, p. 242 et seqq..

50 Idem, reference to R. Schwartzenberg, *Sociologie politique*, Ed. Montesquieu, Paris, 1971, p. 337.

51 Idem, p. 243.

word to history) to the detriment of factual realities, to mentalities to the detriment of political rationality and reason, to disinformation to the detriment of truth, decreases this function. Yet the substitution of political programmes with electoral programmes almost atrophied it.

*b) Function to select candidates.* According to D. Lepadatu, *recruitment is, first of all, a political process*: “Candidates are nominated by the criteria symbolized by every party, according to the standard values proposed by it. The appointment of future leaders is a very complicated process. We meet the difficulty of choosing candidates from a mass of objectified supporters or potentials, attracted through manipulating manoeuvres or on the other hand those who have left other parties. Selection must comply with the predetermined rule of the political game. We hope that it is always democratic, though there are risks of pushing selection towards building a party oligarchy”.<sup>52</sup>

The fear expressed by the quoted author regarding *the risks of establishing a party oligarchy* is justified. I refer here to the way party leaders are selected, as well to the selection of various parties’ candidates for various functions, irrespective of their rank. Again, I am taking into consideration how parties in Romania exercise this function. “Anyway, candidates’ recruitment, confrontation, mediated by the party among the leaders and those being led – according to D. Lepadatu – is a phenomenon of utmost importance. The party is personalized through the recruits. Those who are to lead the party or society should only be elected through actual participation of the party, as a collective organism. Various competences have to be established at least as an idea, a designed state, through an open, general election.”<sup>53</sup>

The political range is varied enough within the context of partidism. The desideratum expressed here by the quoted author – that those who are to lead the party or society should only be elected through actual participation of the party, as a collective organism – may become reality in political life as well only if *democratic mechanisms* operate within parties. Election gains legitimacy if it is based on competition procedures – and not the appointment of leaders and “*ex officio*” appointment of candidates. In many cases, parties become excessively personalized, enabling not only the establishment of a party oligarchy, but even uni-personalization (the party identifies with only one leader).

As far as this function is concerned, the parties in Romania have particularities, established oligarchies being the ones that propel their own leaders or candidates to various portfolios (at local or national level). A retrospective of how various parties in Romania evolved after 1989 is significant for proving both the

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52 Idem, p. 243.

53 Ibidem.