

**Long Live Death:  
Violence & Martyrdom in Eastern Europe's Fascist Movements,  
the Legion of the Archangel Michael & National Democracy,  
1919–1933**

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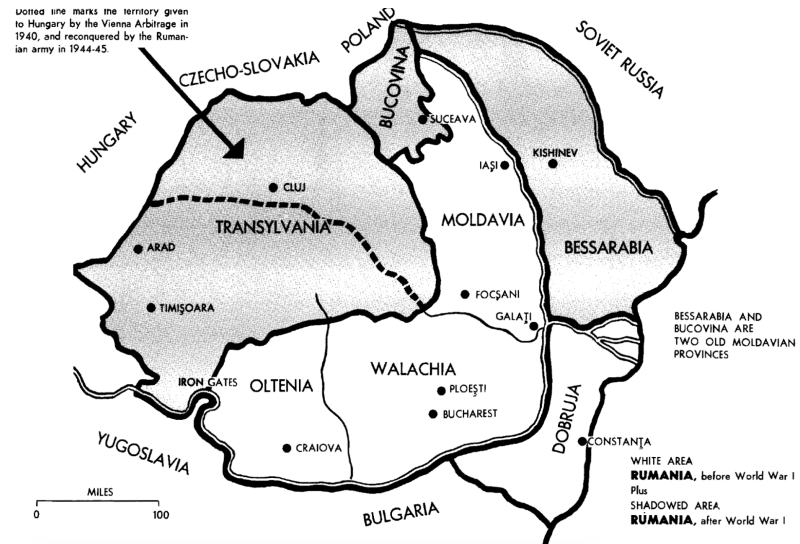
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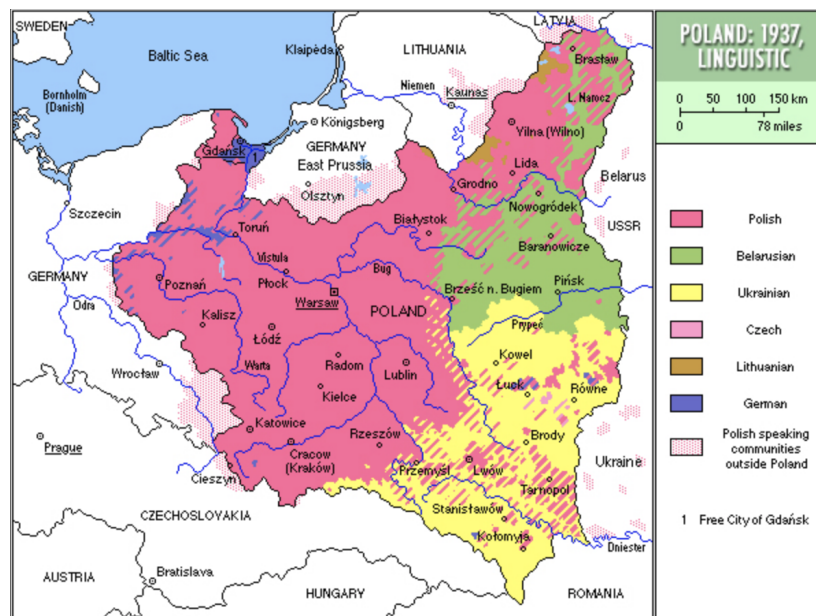


Map of Europe, 1920<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Historical Atlas of Europe (12 November 1920): Treaty of Rapallo." *Omniatlas*, [omniatlas.com/maps/europe/19201112/](https://omniatlas.com/maps/europe/19201112/).



The Kingdom of Romania, 1918–1940<sup>2</sup>



The Second Polish Republic, 1937<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sturdza, Mihail. *The Suicide of Europe: Memoirs of Prince Mihail Sturdza Former Foreign Minister of Rumania*. Western Islands, 1968. 30

<sup>3</sup> "Map of Poland, Linguistic (1937) *USM Open Source History Text*

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## Introduction

*“For all are born only to die. And die to be reborn.”*

*– Mihai Eminescu.<sup>4</sup>*

In the eyes of Corneliu Codreanu, a passionate twenty-two year old nationalist, the National Liberals’ decision to emancipate the Romanian Jewish community in December 1922 had “sealed a tombstone over the future of [Romanians].”<sup>5</sup> In the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca, a student, Ion Moța, put out a battle cry: “We have to fight for our preservation! Our cause is holy and so will be our sacrifices!”<sup>6</sup> Moța’s call to action was echoed in Iași by Codreanu.<sup>7</sup> Codreanu perceived the Liberals’ decision as “a national betrayal” and a sign that “we were losing our country” to Jews and foreigners, “that we were going to no longer have a country.”<sup>8</sup> At the Congress of the Student Movement’s Leaders in August 1923 – where Moța and Codreanu met – they swore to purify the nation: “We will fight against [our enemies] with all our might and we will not turn away from any sacrifice which could be for the benefit of our Romanian country.”<sup>9</sup> Their shared fanaticism, antisemitism, and apocalyptic worldview resulted in a terrifying movement known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, which became infamous for killing its enemies – “tycoons,” “Jews,” foreigners, and corrupt politicians – in the name of the national interest.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eminescu, Mihai. “Luceafărul, 1883” Translated by Petru Dumitru, *Mihai Eminescu’s Lucifer*, [www.estcomp.ro/eminescu/cuclin1.html](http://www.estcomp.ro/eminescu/cuclin1.html)

<sup>5</sup> Codreanu, Corneliu Zelea. *For My Legionaries*. Edited by Kerry Bolton and Lucian Tudor, Sanctuary Press Ltd, 2019 [1936], p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> Moța, Ion. “Cauza Noastră E Justă în Ordinea Morală și Servește Progresului Social [Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress],” *Dacia Nouă*, December 23, 1922.

<sup>7</sup> Codreanu, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>9</sup> Moța, Ion, “Necesitatea Naționalismului Radical [The Need For Radical Nationalism],” *Dacia Nouă* November 20, 1923.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Although Poland had been reborn in 1918 after 123 years of being partitioned among Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, the Polish nationalist press framed the 1922 election of Poland's president, Gabriel Narutowicz, as a threat to the very existence of the Second Republic. As one newspaper of National Democracy, or Endecja, a nationalist party, warned, "the fight for Poland and the right of the Polish nation [will] continue, and in this fight the Polish nation must be victorious."<sup>11</sup> Another article called on Poles to liberate Poland "from Jewish-Masonic influence."<sup>12</sup> National Democrats responded with violence in the streets of Warsaw, demanding the resignation of Narutowicz, and beating up Jewish journalists. Meanwhile, National Democratic leaders condoned "the offended feelings" of the rioters, but also called on them to obey the law.<sup>13</sup> President Narutowicz refused to resign and was assassinated five days later on December 16, 1922 by a sympathizer of Endecja, who claimed that his act had protected "the Polishness of Poland."<sup>14</sup>

The violence of young men and the rhetoric of a nationalist press highlight a core concept of fascism, national rebirth. Fascism is a political philosophy that exalts the nation, or race, over the individual and favors a centralized and autocratic government led by an all-powerful leader.<sup>15</sup> Despite the varieties of fascism, common characteristics include contempt for traditional law, authority, and parliamentary democracy; brutal repression of all opponents; an emphasis on emotions over logic; the subjugation of the individual to the nation; radical nationalism; a glorification of violence, and an obsession with national rebirth – purification and renewal.<sup>16</sup> Radu Ioanid writes that "the genesis of fascism [was a] consequence of the economic, political, and ideological crisis that set in after World War

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<sup>11</sup> Brykczynski, Paul. *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2018, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>15</sup> Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Vintage Books, 2005, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Griffin, Roger. *Nature of Fascism*. Routledge, 1999. 45–46.

One.”<sup>17</sup> At the end of the war, Europeans were torn between an old world that could not be revived and a new, uncertain one. Massive crises and social upheaval in World War One’s aftermath deepened political divisions, intensified anxieties, and created problems that existing institutions were not prepared to resolve.<sup>18</sup> Against this crisis, the “mythic core” of fascism – national rebirth – took root.<sup>19</sup>

Roger Griffin argues that national rebirth, or palingenetic ultranationalism, is a core concept at the center of every fascist movement.<sup>20</sup> Paul Brykczyński defines the “palingenetic myth” as “the idea that the national community is locked in a battle for survival with the forces of decadence and degeneration...and that victory in this battle will usher in a new age of national regeneration and glory.”<sup>21</sup> Griffin argues that fascism exploits the palingenetic myth to rally those who have lost their faith in traditional politics by promising them a revolution under fascist rule to rid the nation of decadence.<sup>22</sup> Fascists considered it imperative that Poles and Romanians take up the fight to purify their countries, even at the cost of their lives.<sup>23</sup> This myth was reflected in the actions and rhetoric of National Democratic university students and the founders of the Legion. The Polish students’ violence was fueled by the fear of a Jewish takeover of Poland; Romanian students feared that the emancipation of Jews would destroy Romanian culture, synonymous with Eastern Orthodox Christianity; they believed they were fighting against the workers “of Satan.”<sup>24</sup> In both Romania and Poland, Jewish emancipation exacerbated

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<sup>17</sup> Ioanid, Radu. *The Sword of the Archangel Fascist Ideology in Romania*. Columbia Univ. Pr., 1990, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Rusu, Mihai Stelian. “The Sacralization of Martyric Death in Romanian Legionary Movement: Self-Sacrificial Patriotism, Vicarious Atonement, and Thanatic Nationalism.” *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 17, no. 2-3, 2016, 251.

<sup>19</sup> Griffin, 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 46–47.

<sup>21</sup> Brykczyński, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Moța, Ion. “Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress,” *Dacia Nouă*, 23 December, 1922.

<sup>24</sup> Codreanu, 186; Brykczyński, 13.



fears of decay and contempt for traditional politics, which turned antisemitic, disenfranchised students toward fascism.

Griffin argues that the synthesis of palingenesis, or rebirth, and ultranationalism differentiates fascism from other authoritarian and nationalist ideologies.<sup>25</sup> He excludes Endecja from his study, claiming that it was based on narrow ethnic nationalism and did not create a mass base, seek an ultranationalist revolution, or embody fascism's regenerative core.<sup>26</sup> Yet Griffin's argument does not take into account the palingenetic rhetoric and views that were spreading among some National Democrats in 1922.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1920s, Endecja was not yet a fascist party, although it progressively became one; National Democrats had not yet embraced the myth of national rebirth or been deprived of their state power.<sup>28</sup> This project compares the Legion with Endecja to highlight the shades of fascism. Whereas the Legion was fascist from its inception, Endecja's radicalization toward fascism was a gradual process; additionally, Legionaries embraced aspects of fascism that National Democrats did not. At the time of Narutowicz's election, National Democratic students showed "fascist sympathies," but National Democratic leaders did not hold the same apocalyptic worldview or desire an ultranationalist revolution.<sup>29</sup> During the first post-war years, Endecja was more conservative than fascist; there was little radical about its agenda except for its antisemitism.<sup>30</sup> Later, when Endecja turned toward fascism and totalitarianism, Poland was no longer a democracy, and a new radical generation had taken control of the party's direction.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Griffin, 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>27</sup> Brykczynski, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Walicki, Andrzej. "The Troubling Legacy of Roman Dmowski." *Eastern European Political Societies*, Vol. 14, 2000, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Rusu, 272.

<sup>30</sup> Wilicki, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Brykczynski, 12–13. Jozef Pilsudski launched a coup in 1926 against National Democratic Poland, which turned the country into a "soft dictatorship." The economic breakdown of the 1930s exacerbated tensions in Poland, which sent the country in a more totalitarian direction.

This study analyzes home-grown fascism, violence, and the destructive power of national rebirth in the Romanian student movement, later the Legion, and Endecja. Why did violence and martyrdom become more prevalent in the Legion than in Endecja? Reinforcing Griffin's argument, I argue that Legionaries' embrace of national rebirth explains why martyrdom and retributive violence became more pronounced in the Legion. In the Legion, the "palingenetic myth" fostered a biblical, apocalyptic worldview and glorified sacrificial patriotism.<sup>32</sup> Sacrifice was imbued with the Eastern Orthodox concept of the salvation of the soul. By living and dying righteously, a Legionary could contribute to the salvation of the nation; the myth of rebirth cast martyrdom as a patriotic and Christian duty.<sup>33</sup> Endecja lacked the synthesis of palingenesis and ultranationalism; the movement's ultranationalism and ideology was rooted in Social Darwinism, a notion that ethnic groups are subject to the laws of natural selection.<sup>34</sup> In National Democrats' worldview, Poles had to fight for their survival in a perpetual war-of-all-against-all.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in the early 1920s, Endecja had the power to influence change at the state level, whereas Codreanu and Moța did not. The lack of state power turned radicals toward fascism and violence as solutions.

In analyzing Endecja and the Legion, this study also seeks to understand the allure of fascism over liberalism and conservatism – a specter that continues to haunt our world.<sup>36</sup> Although Romanian and Polish fascism did not become a politically significant political force until the 1930s, the 1920s were fascists' formative years; the inequities and deficiencies of liberalism and social and political upheaval shaped the fascist worldview.

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<sup>32</sup> Codreanu, 384–385.

<sup>33</sup> Nagy-Talavera, Nicholas. *The Green Shirts and the Others: a History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*. Stanford University, 1970, 349, 371.

<sup>34</sup> Dmowski, Roman. *Myśli Nowoczesnego Polaka [Thoughts of a Modern Pole]*. Wydawnictwo Nortom, 1902, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Griffin, 157–158.

<sup>36</sup> Paxton, 148; Brykczynski, 15.

The anarchy surrounding President Narutowicz's election in 1922 and the radical Romanian students' response to the emancipation of Romanian Jewry that same year show how quickly fascist thinking can take root and spread among the young and politically disillusioned. Eugen Weber and Brykczyński emphasize the generational gap between traditional politicians and university students. As Weber writes, students' youth "brings out their marginality, their restlessness...altogether their availability for radical visions and enterprises before which their elders might be inclined to hesitate."<sup>37</sup> The students' shattered optimism and distrust of traditional politics made them more susceptible to radicalism, which gave fascism a "youthful quality." As fascism was a rebellion against an old system, it was also a "generational revolt against the elders."<sup>38</sup> Although fascist movements emerged on the fringes, they gradually managed to capture the allegiance of millions by promising radical reform, unification, and purification.<sup>39</sup> To achieve this aspiration, some men were willing to kill or be killed.

My evidence comprises primary and secondary sources in Polish, Romanian, and English. The lack of sources translated into English encouraged me to utilize Polish and Romanian ones. My primary sources consist in large part of Polish and Romanian memoirs, newspaper articles, and books written by members of the Legion and Endecja. Roman Dmowski, one of the founders of Endecja, published a series of books on National Democratic ideology and Polish history.<sup>40</sup> To better understand the mindset of the Legion, I draw upon Codreanu's 1936 memoir and on newspaper articles by Moța, the Legion's second-in-command.<sup>41</sup> I also rely on publications by antisemites, fascists, and radicals to

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<sup>37</sup> Weber, Eugen. "The Men of the Archangel." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1966, pp. 101–126, 109–110.

<sup>38</sup> Weber, E. 109; Paxton, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Paxton, 148.

<sup>40</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*. Oxford University Press, 2002, 168.

<sup>41</sup> Moța, Ion. "Da, Sunt Nelămurit?[Yes, I am Dissatisfied]" *Pământul Strămoșesc*, September 15 1928.

better portray their worldview, justifications, and radicalization.<sup>42</sup> Secondary sources come from a variety of scholarly books and articles that complement and explain the ideologies, emotions, and violence of the perpetrators.

The chapters that follow this introduction are organized thematically to highlight similarities and differences between the Legion and Endecja. The first two chapters center on the impact of the early interwar years. Chapter One focuses on the murder of two authority figures in 1922 and 1924: Poland's first president, Gabriel Narutowicz, and a Romanian police prefect, Constantin Manciu. I explain how Eligiusz Niewiadomski and Codreanu, the killers, used their trials to create a narrative of their violence as righteous, retributive, and for the good of the nation.<sup>43</sup> I analyze the attitudes of Codreanu and National Democrats toward democracy, legality, constitutionalism, and parliamentarism. Drawing on Max Weber's study of charismatic authority, I explain radical Romanian students' complete contempt for law and traditional authority in favor of heroic violence, and National Democratic leaders' ambivalent yet legalistic and rational approach to exploiting violence.<sup>44</sup>

Chapter Two focuses on the antisemitic worldviews of the Legion and Endecja and the imposition on Poland and Romania of Minority Treaties in 1921 and 1923, which inspired violence against Jews and their allies. The imposition of the Minority Treaties radicalized National Democrats and Legionaries' worldview, I argue, and inspired them to embrace violence as a weapon of self-defense.<sup>45</sup> But the apocalyptic worldview of the Legion and lack of state power inspired more antisemitic violence in it than in Endecja.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Brykczyński, 117.

<sup>44</sup> Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth, Univ. of California Press, 2013, 242.

<sup>45</sup> Wilicki, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Ioanid, 24.

This chapter also examines the growing cleavage between leading National Democrats and younger members; although Endecja as a whole was not fascist, fascism was developing within its ranks.

Chapter Three analyzes the cult of death that developed in the Legion but not in Endecja. By analyzing National Democratic and Legionary ideology and members' interpretation of sacrifice and patriotism, we can better understand why the Legion adopted a sacrificial form of patriotism and why martyrdom became more prevalent. Because of National Democrats' Social Darwinian worldview, I argue, National Democrats valued collective struggle but rejected the glorification of violence and self-sacrifice. Even after Endecja adopted a semi-fascist model in 1926, National Democratic leaders were too uncharismatic, legalistic, and rational to embrace fascists' ideological zeal.<sup>47</sup> Legionaries wanted not only to redeem the nation before God on Judgement Day, but also to inspire an ethical and moral revolution across Romania. They combined sacrificial patriotism with a Christian philosophy of history to lay the foundations for palingenetic nationalism and a cult of death.<sup>48</sup>

I end this study in 1933 because around this time multiple events changed the political landscape of Poland and Romania. The Great Depression exacerbated economic and social tensions. The inability of traditional parties to solve these crises turned many disillusioned Poles and Romanians toward fascists, who offered promises and programs of radical change and salvation.<sup>49</sup> In 1931, King Carol II returned to Romania and quickly applied himself to turning the kingdom into a personal dictatorship and to using all his power to suppress Codreanu's movement. At the end of 1932, Endecja's traditional

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<sup>47</sup> Griffin, 158.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Weber, E. 125.

leadership was usurped by a younger and more radical generation with a new ideology and goals. In January 1933, finally, the Nazi Party came to power in Germany, marking a shift in European politics. Ending this study with a brief examination of the legacies of Endecja and the Legion, I conclude that fascism and the palingenetic myth fostered a cult of heroic death in the Legion and that the study of Romanian and Polish fascism is of importance today.

## Chapter I: Messiah: Charismatic Leadership, Democracy, and Constitutionality

*“There is a violence that liberates, and a violence that enslaves; there is a violence that is moral and a violence that is immoral.”*

*– Benito Mussolini<sup>50</sup>*

On 11 November, 1918, Polish national sovereignty was officially restored after 123 years. Now Polish nationalists confronted the difficulties of unifying a Poland that was ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and ideologically heterogeneous. In the perspective of Roman Dmowski, the founder of Endecja, the diverse populace hindered “the native Polish land” from becoming a strong “nation-state.”<sup>51</sup> On March 17, 1921, the Polish Constitutional Assembly produced a constitution that was too conservative for socialists but too democratic for National Democrats or conservatives. The Right, Endecja’s conservative coalition, was deeply disappointed that the Constitution failed to enshrine its understanding of the nation as ethnically uniform. The Constitution established a bicameral legislature with an elected lower house, the Sejm, and a Senate. Any party or coalition of parties that received 50% of seats in the Sejm could choose a prime minister and form a government. A joint session of the Sejm and the Senate elected Poland’s president, whose duties were mostly symbolic.<sup>52</sup>

In 1921, a newly elected and politically fragmented Parliament began to choose Poland’s first president. Tensions between the Right and Left camps were high because of two recent developments. First, through the League of Nations, the Great Powers – the United States, France, and the United Kingdom – imposed a Minority Treaty on Poland that guaranteed and protected the civil and political rights of minority populations (Germans,

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<sup>50</sup> From a speech in Udine, Italy, September 20, 1922, as quoted in George Selden. *The Great Quotations*. Simon & Schuster, 1967. 950.

<sup>51</sup> Porter, Brian. *Poland in the Modern World. Beyond Martyrdom*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Porter, 2014, 91; Dmowski, Roman. *Polityka Polska i Odbudowanie Państwa*. Wydawnictwo [Polish Politics and the Rebuilding of the State] Nortom, 2015[1925], 22.

Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews), which comprised 31% of the citizenry.<sup>53</sup> The Minority Treaty infuriated Polish nationalists. But they could not reject the document, because the diplomatic recognition of Poland as an independent state hinged on it.<sup>54</sup> Under the Minority Treaty, all minorities could participate in national politics, which exacerbated anxieties among Polish nationalists. Second, elections in November 1922 created a Sejm split almost exactly between the center-left and nationalist right. Józef Piłsudski's Left coalition (the Socialists, Emancipation, and National Labor) secured 30% of the vote and Endecja's Right coalition received 29%. The centrist peasant Piast Party received 13%, and the remaining 22% of seats were held by the Bloc of National Minorities (the Bloc) – a coalition of Jewish, Ukrainian, German, and Belarusian groups.<sup>55</sup> The Left and the Right were bitter rivals because the Left's civic nationalism clashed with the Right's ethnic one. Piłsudski and Dmowski were sworn enemies. The Right were adversaries of the Bloc, whose members were not ethnic Poles. The Bloc had come together after Endecja had begun to call for restrictions on ethnic minorities' participation in politics.<sup>56</sup>

Since neither the Left nor the Right could rule without a coalition partner, Endecja immediately began to court the Piast. It also deployed the "Judeo-Bolshevik myth," the idea that all Jews were communists trying to usurp power, to scare the Piast away from allying with the Bloc, which was led by Zionist leader Yitzhak Grünbaum. But Wincenty Witos, the leader of Piast, considered his party part of the Left and formed a coalition with the Left and Bloc, which thus secured the 50% of the vote required to form a government.<sup>57</sup>

Enraged, National Democrats condemned the Left for aiding in Poland's destruction and

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<sup>53</sup> Janowsky, Oscar Isaiah. *Nationalities and National Minorities (with Special Reference to East-Central Europe)*. Macmillan, 1945, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Porter, 2014, 92–93.

<sup>55</sup> Brykczynski, 85.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 66–67, 76–77, 85–86.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.



warned of an impending Jewish takeover.<sup>58</sup> A National Democratic newspaper warned its readers that Jews were already discussing the Judaization of Polish politics “as if Poland was already their cabal courtyard, where everything must take place according to Jewish will.”<sup>59</sup> The presidential oath specified in Article 54 of the March 17, 1921 Constitution read as follows: “I vow to Thee, Polish Nation, that...I will keep and defend faithfully the laws of the Republic and above all the constitutional law; that I shall serve devotedly, with all my power, the general good of the nation.”<sup>60</sup> Envisioning Poland as an ethnic nation-state, National Democratic authors of the Constitution argued that the power of the state belonged to the Polish nation, not to the remaining 31% of the citizenry. National Democrats put forth a “Doctrine of the Polish majority” to block the political influence of minorities. The Doctrine asserted that “the [presidency] belongs, and can only belong, to the [person] chosen by the [Polish] Nation, because according to the constitution supreme power in Poland belongs to the Nation and the president is but an organ of the Nation in the domain of supreme power.”<sup>61</sup> In short, Endecja insisted that the president had to be ethnically Polish and elected by a majority of ethnic Poles to qualify as a legitimate leader. Otherwise, the president was a representative not of the Polish nation, but of non-Poles.<sup>62</sup>

On December 9, 1922, the National Assembly elected the moderate liberal Gabriel Narutowicz. He triumphed over the Right’s nominee, Maurycy Zamoyski, thanks to the votes of the Left, the Bloc, and Piast. Narutowicz had returned from Switzerland to Poland in 1919 to become the first Minister of Public Works. In June 1922, Piłsudski had chosen him as Poland’s Foreign Minister. One week before the presidential election in December,

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85, 87–88.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Article 54, Constitution of the Republic of Poland, March 17, 1921 <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1921.html>.

<sup>61</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska* quoted in Brykczyński, 90.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

Piłsudski had decided not to seek the presidency because the March Constitution had limited the power of the president. Narutowicz was nominated in Piłsudski's place. Although Narutowicz was known among Polish politicians as a reasonable man, he was virtually unknown among regular Poles.<sup>63</sup> Narutowicz's reputation, however, did not save him from the wrath of the Right.

National Democrats rejected Narutowicz as illegitimate. Upon the announcement of Narutowicz's victory, the streets immediately filled with National Democrats shouting "Down with the one chosen by Jews!"<sup>64</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska* wrote the next day that "thanks to the votes of Jews, Germans, and other 'national minorities,' from the breasts of the youth a single spontaneous cry went forth 'We don't want this president!'"<sup>65</sup> National Democratic university students ignited violent riots in Warsaw, beating up anyone who "looked Jewish," which prompted the government to declare martial law.<sup>66</sup> Narutowicz was inaugurated on December 11, National Democrats boycotted and rioted, and Julian Nowak resigned as Prime Minister on December 14. Five days later, Eligiusz Niewiadomski, a National Democratic sympathizer, assassinated Narutowicz at an art gallery in Warsaw. The following week, the Left, Piast, and Bloc elected Stanisław Wojciechowski, a Piast member, as president. This time there was no outcry from the Right, because Wojciechowski was more conservative.<sup>67</sup>

At his trial, Niewiadomski pleaded guilty, requested the death sentence, and refused legal counsel. Stanisław Kijeński, a Warsaw lawyer and National Democratic sympathizer, intervened and persuaded Niewiadomski to tell his story.<sup>68</sup> Niewiadomski confessed that he

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>67</sup> Porter, 2014, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Brykczyński, 114–115.

had planned to kill Piłsudski since 1918 for his liberal social reforms. When Niewiadomski learned that Piłsudski did not plan to seek the presidency, he changed his target. Niewiadomski admitted to the crime but not to moral guilt. He argued that he had acted to protect the “Polishness of Poland” against the relentless efforts of Jews and Piłsudski to create a “Judeo-Poland.”<sup>69</sup> Two weeks later, Niewiadomski was sentenced to execution by firing squad.<sup>70</sup> Even before his execution on January 30, 1923, National Democrats hailed Niewiadomski as a hero, albeit one who had taken his commitment too far. Capturing Niewiadomski’s influence, the Piast leader, Witos, wrote in the 1930s that “even today...Niewiadomski’s grave is a place of pilgrimages and the anniversary of his death brings many admirers here... it is clear that they consider him to be at least a saint.”<sup>71</sup> Poland had only just been reborn, but Niewiadomski had already shaken its fragile foundations.

Almost a year after President Narutowicz’s assassination, a small group of Romanian university students planned assassinations of their own. In October 1923, the twenty-four-year-old nationalist leader Corneliu Codreanu and a few associates conspired to assassinate rabbis, bankers, journalists, and Romanian politicians who had supposedly betrayed Romania by supporting the naturalization of Jews as Romanian citizens. Ion Moța had introduced the idea of multiple assassinations to ignite a wave of antisemitic violence across the country after university administrators had refused to enact a *numerus clausus* to limit the enrollment of Jews. Aurelian Vernichescu, a conspirator, however, got cold feet and told the authorities, who arrested Codreanu’s gang for plotting to “spark a civil war.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>72</sup> Livezeanu, Irina. *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*. Cornell University Press, 2000, 280.

Of the students involved in the plot, six took the spotlight: Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion Moța, Ilie Gârneața, Radu Mironovici, Tudose Popescu, and Corneliu Georgescu. Collectively this group became known as the “Văcăreșteni” after the Văcărești prison in Bucharest, where they spent six months awaiting trial.<sup>73</sup> In 1927, this group became known as the founders of the Legion of the Archangel Michael.



The Văcăreșteni, also known as the founding members and charismatic nucleus of the Legion. In the center is Corneliu Zelea Codreanu with Tudose Popescu at his right and Corneliu Georgescu at his left. In the upper row, Ilie Gârneața on the left, Radu Mironovici center, and Ion Moța on the right.<sup>74</sup>

On the day of the trial, some students in Cernăuți staged a demonstration in support of the Văcăreșteni, while others traveled to Bucharest, where thousands of supporters filled the streets. As a newspaper described on 29 March 1924, “both in the courtroom and on the streets, among numerous military cordons, [there were] crowds of male and female students and other Romanians dressed in traditional holiday garments.”<sup>75</sup> In the middle of the

<sup>73</sup> Clark, Roland. *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*. Cornell University Press, 2015, 42–43.

<sup>74</sup> As cited in Iordachi, Constantin. “Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania’s Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael”, in John R. Lampe, Mark Mazower (eds.), *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-century Southeastern Europe*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2004, 23.

<sup>75</sup> Clark, 41.

proceedings, Moța pulled out a gun and fired at Vernichescu, who had been brought to the trial as a witness. The students confessed to planning murder but claimed that they had not chosen a specific date. The jury acquitted them.<sup>76</sup> Horia Sima, Codreanu's eventual successor, described the pressure created by the Văcărești's supporters: "The trial took place in an atmosphere that managed to disconcert governmental circles. The roles had been reversed: it was no longer a question of trying the students, but rather the ruling class...Public opinion had identified the true culprits." The jury gave the acquittal verdict to the applause of the whole audience.<sup>77</sup>

The Văcărești returned home to Iași as heroes. Sympathizers greeted them in crowds, but the police officers of Iași grew angry when they saw Codreanu back on their streets. Conflict quickly developed between the local police prefect, Constantin Mănciu, and students. Appointed by the Minister of Justice in September 1923 specifically to suppress the student movement, Mănciu immediately began to arrest violent students and dispatch soldiers to universities, where students were provoking antisemitic violence. The Văcărești labeled Mănciu their "worst enemy."<sup>78</sup> At 4:00 a.m. on 31 May 1924, Mănciu and a group of officers found Codreanu speaking to a few dozen university students with a floor plan of Mănciu's house. The police arrested and interrogated a number of those in attendance, but released them the next day.<sup>79</sup> Codreanu was humiliated by the experience and planned vengeance. The students collected signatures and demanded that Mănciu be punished for abuse of his authority, prompting a trial of the prefect. On the first day of the

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<sup>76</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 366. According to the Napoleonic Code, a determined date was required for the act to be considered an assassination attempt or pre-meditated murder.

<sup>77</sup> Livezeanu, 280–281; Clark, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Clark, 49.

<sup>79</sup> Codreanu, 211.

trial, October 25, Codreanu followed Manciu out of the courthouse and shot him to death on the front steps. The Văcăreșteni were once again arrested.<sup>80</sup>

Again the ultranationalist community rose in Codreanu's defense, sending money, writing petitions, and filling its newspapers with supportive articles. Together with pamphlets and posters, the National-Christian Defense League (LANC) published twenty-five songs honoring Codreanu, written by his fellow students. Originally, Liberals scheduled the trial to be held in Focșani, a town of about 30,000 people, but they changed the location to the city of Turnul-Severin after students flooded Focșani with antisemitic propaganda and ignited riots. Again thousands of students descended on the city. The local population expressed support by hanging "Codreanu's portrait in their windows...[and] sporting swastikas...[T]he route he was supposed to travel to the courtroom was covered in flowers."<sup>81</sup>

On the first day of the trial, the Văcăreșteni entered the courtroom in folk outfits that matched those of the hundreds of peasants and students in attendance. The jurors wore national costumes or swastikas, signaling that they had already decided on their verdict. Codreanu was tried apart from the Văcăreșteni, referred to as *Acțiunea Românească* (Romanian Action). The defense focused on Manciu's persecution of the students and their noble goals. The prosecution focused on reconstructing the moment of the assassination. Codreanu admitted to killing Manciu, but insisted that he had committed a necessary evil to stop the prefect's abuse of students. The prosecutor general, C. G. Costa-Foru, later wrote that Adelina Manciu, Prefect Manciu's widow, was subjected to "hostile glares, offensive remarks and threatening gestures." The jury acquitted Codreanu's gang, and the students

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<sup>80</sup> Clark, 49–50 ; Nagy-Talavera, 367.

<sup>81</sup> Livezeanu, 283; Clark, 51–52.

were carried away by an enthusiastic crowd. Large demonstrations broke out in Iași, Bucharest, and other cities to celebrate the outcome, and the police were deployed around the country to protect Jewish neighborhoods.<sup>82</sup>

On the surface, these assassinations of a state official in Poland and Romania seem similar. Both involved antisemitic and right-wing fanatics who responded to domestic changes with murder. Both Codreanu and Niewiadomski claimed that they had committed murder to defend the national community. At his trial, Niewiadomski insisted that “through my deeds spoke not partisan fury, but the conscience and the offended dignity of the nation.”<sup>83</sup> Asked why Codreanu and his gang had plotted to kill politicians and Jews, Codreanu responded: “because [politicians] betrayed their country. [Jews are] enemies and corruptors.”<sup>84</sup> The Polish and Romanian nationalist communities heroized them, and Codreanu and Niewiadomski became icons. On a deeper level, however, these two cases are quite different.

In his essay “The Theater of Terror,” historian Daniel Gordon explains that during Revolutionary France’s Great Terror, the Jacobins used public executions as a way to maintain legitimacy.<sup>85</sup> The executions invoked popular sovereignty; by staging the executions before enthusiastic crowds, the Jacobins affirmed that they were carrying out the will of the people.<sup>86</sup> In Poland and Romania, Niewiadomski and Codreanu recognized the power of violence in creating a base of legitimacy and used the courtroom as a theater to canonize themselves as martyrs, as people who sacrifice something of great value and

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<sup>82</sup> Clark, 53–54; Livezeanu, 285.

<sup>83</sup> Brykczynski, 119.

<sup>84</sup> Codreanu, 183.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, Daniel. “The Theater of Terror: The Jacobin Execution in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective.” *Historical Reflections*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2003, 262.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 252–253, 260–261.

especially life itself for the sake of principle.<sup>87</sup> Niewiadomski and Codreanu invoked natural law – which maintains that man-made law can only be considered just if it is in accordance with the transcendent principles of goodness and morality – to legitimize their violence.<sup>88</sup> Niewiadomski and Codreanu sought to close the sovereign gap, the divide between rulers and ruled, by claiming that the nation was “the single source of law.”<sup>89</sup> Both murderers believed that although Romania and Poland had won recognition as states, those states were failing as ethnic nation-states. The Italian Fascists’ ascent to power in October 1922 inspired radical Romanian students to start a fascist revolution of their own.<sup>90</sup> National Democrats, however, did not normalize violence; rather, they called for peace. The Văcăreșteni adopted violence as an ethical “weapon” in their fight against a corrupt government and constitutional law.<sup>91</sup>

Constantin Iordachi writes that charismatic leadership is a common feature of “generic fascism.”<sup>92</sup> According to Max Weber, charismatic authority is “a certain quality of an individual...by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and as [a leader] endowed with...[prophetic and] exceptional powers or qualities.”<sup>93</sup> Max Weber argues that charismatic authority is found in a leader of a revolutionary movement whose mission and vision inspire others. Like fascism, charismatic authority opposes norms, tradition, and law, instead emphasizing bonds of loyalty and emotion to create communities of support.<sup>94</sup> The Legion was a charismatic community that fostered an apocalyptic worldview, according to which politicians were among its worst enemies.<sup>95</sup> National Democrats, however, were

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<sup>87</sup> “Martyr.” [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/martyr) Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/martyr>. Accessed 21 Dec. 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon, 260, 262; Clark, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon, 260; Codreanu, 392–393.

<sup>90</sup> Codreanu, 92.

<sup>91</sup> Moța, Ion & Marin, Vasile. *Under the Southern Cross: Selected Writings from Martyrs of the Spanish Civil War*. Taxiarch Press. 2019, 96.

<sup>92</sup> Iordachi, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Weber, M, 241.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 242–243.

<sup>95</sup> Iordachi, 18.



legalistic and rational, and Endecja was a typical conservative party; nationalism and antisemitism preceded its shift toward authoritarianism.<sup>96</sup> The Văcărești's ideology, compared with National Democrats' ambiguous yet legalistic response to Narutowicz's murder, explains why the two movements responded differently to vigilante violence. The Legion saw violence as a way to show that it was serious about change, whereas National Democrats maintained a more ambivalent attitude toward vigilante violence, because although it could be exploited to advance National Democratic policies, it was antithetical to their legalistic-rational approach.<sup>97</sup>

### Retributive Violence & Natural Law

Vengeance and retribution were sacred parts of the moral code of the Văcărești and Legion. Like Poland, Romania had been forced to enact a Minority Treaty in exchange for international recognition of its acquisition of Transylvania, the Bukovina, and Bessarabia after World War One. In December 1922, the Liberals drafted a constitution that granted citizenship to members of Romania's Jewish, Hungarian, Ukrainian, German, and Russian minorities, which constituted 28% of the population. A wave of ultranationalist violence erupted across universities. At the University of Iași, where Codreanu enrolled in 1920, only one-third of the students were ethnic Romanians. In all four universities, Jews constituted the largest minority and outnumbered ethnic Romanians in the field of medicine despite composing only 4% of the total population.<sup>98</sup> Moța and Codreanu demanded that the universities reduce the enrollment of national minorities to reflect their representation in the general population.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Bykczynski, 47.

<sup>97</sup> Clark, 98; Wilicki, 28.

<sup>98</sup> Livezeanu, 248, 265.

<sup>99</sup> Moța, Ion. "Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress," *Dacia Nouă*, 23 December, 1922.

When the university of Iași did not enact the demands, Codreanu's gang began to attack Jewish and Bessarabian students. Moța captured the Văcăreșteni's justification in a student newspaper: "now we have to take the whip and follow the second example of Christ. We are duty-bound to defend the weak and defenseless...If we didn't, we would be deserters."<sup>100</sup> In the students' eyes, violence was justified if it protected the national community.<sup>101</sup> The Văcăreșteni shared a concern that ethnic minorities, who made up almost the entire middle class, were growing more powerful. The Văcăreșteni incited so much chaos that the University of Iași declared the entire school year of 1922–1923 lost for educational purposes.<sup>102</sup> Since Romania's leadership had seemingly abandoned the national community, the Văcășteni took up arms to defend the nation and punish politicians who had "betrayed Romanian interests."<sup>103</sup>

Văcăreșteni invoked the nation to justify their violence and gain support.<sup>104</sup> Codreanu believed that the nation was an immortal "historical entity," composed of all Romanians, living, dead, and not yet alive.<sup>105</sup> The Văcăreșteni believed that natural law, like the nation, was timeless and that it transcended man-made law; they argued that anybody with "common sense" could apply it.<sup>106</sup> Codreanu used courtrooms as stages to depict his fellow students as morally superior to their enemies. He admitted to murdering Manciu, but claimed that Manciu had tortured innocent students; Codreanu had wanted to put an end to the prefect's abuse of power. On the last day of the trial, he declared that "everything we have fought for was out of faith and love for our country and the Romanian people. We

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Ioanid, 111.

<sup>102</sup> Livezeanu, 271.

<sup>103</sup> Codreanu, 179.

<sup>104</sup> Ioanid, 109. As Ioanid writes, fascist ideology has a "ethnocentric character" that claims one's ethnic group is the only source of truth, of wisdom and of all human virtues joined together.

<sup>105</sup> Codreanu, 4, 392.

<sup>106</sup> Reporter Paul Iliescu as cited in Clark, 52.

assume the obligation to fight to the end.”<sup>107</sup> Claiming to defend a people abandoned by the political elite, Codreanu framed himself as a voice of the nation and appealed to politically disillusioned Romanians.<sup>108</sup> One newspaper wrote that “the students were determined to die to give us life. And they gave us, without dying, proof that Christ is with us.”<sup>109</sup> Ultranationalists also distinguished between justice as fair recompense for moral actions and justice as a product of the legal system. A Romanian newspaper wrote that it was the state on trial, not Codreanu: “it will not be the students who will be judged, but current and past governments, all of whom have collaborated with the Yids...Through the verdict which it gives, the judiciary will decide if it is with us or with them.”<sup>110</sup> On May 25, 1925, the French minister to Bucharest wrote that the liberal government had tried to subject Codreanu to a fair trial but public opinion had forced acquittal.<sup>111</sup>

Sima later recalled that “the government wanted at whatever cost to secure the conviction of Codreanu.”<sup>112</sup> Liberal politicians had changed the trial venue from Iași to Focșani and then to Turnul-Severin. But nationalists still descended. The main prosecutor C.G. Costa-Foru warned that “we should not spread the idea that assassination leads to glory and apotheosis,” and asked “who among the parents in this room would like to see their son in the defendants’ box?” But the room filled with cheers of “All of us! All of us!”<sup>113</sup> Such accounts capture the political capital of the Văcăreșteni and organizations to which they belonged – A.C. Cuza’s League of National Christian Defense and later the Legion. They later used that capital to recruit and gain broader societal support.<sup>114</sup> Nicholas

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<sup>107</sup> Codreanu, 246.

<sup>108</sup> Hitchins, Keith. *Rumania: 1866-1947*. Clarendon Press, 2007, 378.

<sup>109</sup> Clark, 47, 53.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48, 54.

<sup>111</sup> Livezeanu, 286.

<sup>112</sup> Horia Sima as cited in *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>113</sup> Clark, 54.

<sup>114</sup> Livezeanu, 286–287.

Nagy-Talavera writes that in the 1920s, Codreanu's murder of a prefect, the right arm of an unpopular government, was considered an act of heroism.<sup>115</sup> The students' acquittal by a jury and the reaction of the general public seemed to confirm that the nation was on their side and that vigilante violence was acceptable and even admired.

As in the Romanian case, Niewiadomski's trial in Poland allowed him to propagate a self-serving narrative. At first, Niewiadomski did not seize the opportunity to martyrize himself. His actions indicated that he did not regret his crime and was content to die largely unrecognized.<sup>116</sup> Here, Kijeński played a crucial role in tying the National Democrats more tightly to Niewiadomski by persuading him to tell his story. Niewiadomski explained that "I believe that as a human being, as a professor, as a husband, and as a father, Narutowicz was a good, noble, admirable person...For me he existed not as a human being but as the symbol of a certain political situation...He was a symbol of shame. My shots removed this badge of shame from the forehead of Poland."<sup>117</sup> By claiming to have protected Poland's honor, Niewiadomski framed himself as a Polish patriot.

When Niewiadomski killed Narutowicz, he believed that he had destroyed the progress of progressive currents – which advocated for a multicultural civic nation – in Poland. At his trial, Niewiadomski claimed that he had wanted to wake up "those who [were] bewitched" by liberal reforms.<sup>118</sup> Piłsudski and Narutowicz represented leftist and liberal ideas and ambitions to him. Niewiadomski blamed Piłsudski for creating a "Judeo-Poland," but admitted that to have killed Piłsudski after he had given up power would have "weaken[ed] the nationalist idea."<sup>119</sup> Kijeński argued that "Narutowicz was

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<sup>115</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 368.

<sup>116</sup> Brykczyński, 114.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 120.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

the...victim of his own lack of knowledge of national life.”<sup>120</sup> He argued that retaliation had been inevitable because Polish interests had been threatened, blaming Narutowicz for his own murder; Niewiadomski had acted to prevent Poland from “being turned into a Judeo-Poland.”<sup>121</sup> By blaming the leftist government for the assassination of Narutowicz, Kijeński gave coherence to the National Democratic theory of a Jewish takeover and tied Niewiadomski closer to Endecja.<sup>122</sup>

At first, National Democrats were horrified by the President’s assassination and disavowed the assassin’s sympathies for their party. National Democratic leaders begged other parties not to let Niewiadomski represent Endecja.<sup>123</sup> During Niewiadomski's trial, however, National Democrats realized that they could use him to develop their Judeo-Bolshevik myth. They greeted Niewiadomski’s remarks at the trial favorably. *Gazeta Warszawska* reprinted Niewiadomski’s speech, which linked Piłsudski with a Jewish conspiracy, and claimed that Niewiadomski reflected the views “of the Polish people.”<sup>124</sup> The National Democrat Władysław Rabski claimed that “10 million Poles” shared Niewiadomski’s views.<sup>125</sup> As in the Romanian case, National Democrats distinguished between legal justice and justice as recompense for moral actions: “Blood. The law has been satisfied and so is the law-abiding sense of a civilized society. The accused himself respected this sentiment by asking for the death penalty. But the dramas of national life do not die in the archives. They live in the minds of contemporaries.”<sup>126</sup> Respecting the decision of the court, National Democrats wrote that the murder was a “tragic and

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

incorrect” application of legitimate and praiseworthy principles. They emphasized the righteousness of Niewiadomski’s motives to bolster the National Democratic cause.<sup>127</sup>

Although both Codreanu and Niewiadomski appealed to the nation as a source of authority to legitimize their violence, National Democrats embraced violence less enthusiastically than the Văcăreșteni. Endecja had opposed the election of Narutowicz on spurious legal grounds by claiming that the “Polish Nation” had not elected him and that as a friend of national minorities, he could not “defend” or “serve...the general good of the [Polish] nation.”<sup>128</sup> The National Democratic leader Stanisław Grabski stated that National Democrats “cannot take responsibility in this unhealthy state of affairs and we refuse any kind of support for a government nominated by a president imposed by foreign nationalities – Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians.” Doing so would have been to violate the Doctrine of the Polish Majority.<sup>129</sup> National Democrats hoped that the murder would persuade more Piłsudskiites to accept the National Democratic interpretation of Poland, which was conceived by and for *ethnic* Poles, and to exclude national minorities from important spheres of Polish life.<sup>130</sup> Framing Narutowicz’s murder as a consequence of minorities’ participation in politics, National Democrats argued that minorities had to be disenfranchised to prevent such tragedies. For Endecja, Niewiadomski was a means to an end.

Unlike the National Democrats, Codreanu rejected all forms of authority – the law, the courts, and elected officials. He used the courtroom to depict himself as an alternative to the rational legality of the new parliamentary system.<sup>131</sup> The lack of democratic experience

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>128</sup> Article 54, Constitution of the Republic of Poland, March 17, 1921 <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1921.html> ; Brykczyński, 46.

<sup>129</sup> Brykczyński, 24.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 123–124.

<sup>131</sup> Weber, M, 244.

in Romania and the anxiety triggered by socioeconomic upheaval favored the emergence of charismatic types of authority. Unlike the Polish Piast Party, which quickly became an important political party after World War One, an influential Romanian peasant party did not emerge until 1926.<sup>132</sup> Peasants wanted a messianic leader who could save them from the disorienting effects of modernization.<sup>133</sup> Exploiting the nationalist community's heroization of him as a modern day *haiduc*, a romanticized Romanian freedom fighter, Codreanu asserted a new base of legitimacy that derived entirely from the belief that he was "the greatest prophet of [the] nation."<sup>134</sup> Codreanu's vigilante violence resonated with rural Romanians, to whom constitutional law and the reasoning of judges were incomprehensible.

The French Marxist philosopher Georges Sorel suggested in 1908 that violence could be moral if it was committed for the betterment of society: "to be able to defend [the] dignity [of man] in every circumstance with energy, and if necessary against oneself: therein lies *justice*."<sup>135</sup> In other words, violence could be considered just if it protected the dignity of society. Sorel's interpretation of violence had a massive influence on Benito Mussolini, who used it to justify the blood spilled by Italian Fascists during their rise to power in 1921 and 1922.<sup>136</sup> As an admirer of Mussolini, Codreanu used it to justify his violence. When the Liberals implemented the Minority Treaty in 1922, Codreanu claimed that the legal system had insulted the "honor" of the nation; considering it imperative that somebody defend its honor, he turned to violence.<sup>137</sup> Claiming to act for the nation,

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<sup>132</sup> Hitchins, 394. In 1926, Romania's two agrarian parties, the National Party and the Peasant Party joined forces to create the National Peasants' Party. In the 1928 general election, National Peasants defeated the Liberals and Iuliu Maniu became Prime Minister.

<sup>133</sup> Iordachi, 31 See more from Iordachi regarding the effect of charisma on politics in Interwar Romania (31–34).

<sup>134</sup> Mircea Eliade as cited in Ioanid, 138; Gordon, 262; Weber, M, 243–244.

<sup>135</sup> Sorel, Georges. *Reflections on Violence*. Edited by Jeremy Jennings, Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1908]. 205.

<sup>136</sup> Paxton, 33, 136.

<sup>137</sup> Codreanu, 215.

Codreanu exploited society's lack of familiarity with law to cast himself as Romania's messiah and applier of justice.

### Democracy & Constitutionalism

In 1928, in a commemorative speech, Moța, Codreanu's second-in-command, defined the student movement as the "spasm of a sick nation."<sup>138</sup> In his 1966 essay "The Men of the Archangel," Eugen Weber argues that the Legion, like the student movement, emerged as a reaction to Romanian political corruption.<sup>139</sup> The enactment of universal male suffrage in 1917 had planted hope that government by oligarchy would soon be a relic of the past. But politicians continued with corrupt practices. After World War One, the National Liberal Party emerged as all-powerful, using intimidation in elections. Together with King Ferdinand and oligarchs, the Liberals dominated politics and the economy and discouraged broad participation in public affairs to maintain the traditional master-servant relationship between the bureaucracy and the citizenry.<sup>140</sup>

A massive disparity emerged between cities and the countryside, where over 80% of the population lived. The post-war years were marked by economic crisis, unemployment and a dramatic worsening of conditions among the working class and peasantry as monopolies became more powerful.<sup>141</sup> Radu Ioanid writes that "in Romania...[the liberal system] never really functioned [and] the fine post-war democratic constitutions remained purely formal entities."<sup>142</sup> Even as Romanian politicians claimed to support democratic change and liberal values, the Liberals thwarted communists "and other working masses in Romania [in their struggle for] democratic rights and freedoms."<sup>143</sup> This resulted in crises of

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<sup>138</sup> Moța, Ion, "Spasmul și Concluzia Lui [Its Spasm and Conclusion]," Petru Maior Student Center, 1928.

<sup>139</sup> Weber, E. 104–106.

<sup>140</sup> Ioanid, 26; Hitchins, 381.

<sup>141</sup> Ioanid, 26–27 By 1929, 70% of rural homes were made of wood and clay and had dirt floors.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>143</sup> Livezeanu, 286.



the parliamentary system and liberal ideology and provoked widespread discontent among peasants, who were almost completely excluded from the political process.<sup>144</sup> Amidst these crises Romanian fascism found space to sprout and grow.

The Văcăreșteni all came from rural backgrounds and were horrified by the disunity, corruption, and elitism of city life.<sup>145</sup> These issues exacerbated students' fears that their diploma would not help them climb the social ladder. After World War One, the Liberals had launched a targeted effort to make universities more ethnically Romanian to produce a Romanian middle-class and cultural elite. They had expanded university enrollments, which fostered expectations for prestigious jobs and turned universities into battlegrounds for public employment.<sup>146</sup> The Văcăreșteni had enrolled in law, the most popular field of study, because "law [was] the only profession for which one could prepare without full-time university attendance."<sup>147</sup> When the Liberals drafted a new constitution in 1922 that accorded citizenship to Jews and thus eligibility for state positions, radical student organizations decided that the ruling elite had sold out and unleashed a wave of protests across universities.<sup>148</sup> Although the corrupt oligarchic practices of the political elite had fueled the Văcăreșteni's resentment, they saw all their problems as consequences of democracy.<sup>149</sup> As Codreanu wrote, "we live in the clothing of democracy. Are they, I wonder, good? We do not know yet. But...we know precisely that part of the greater and more civilized European nations discarded these clothes and put on new ones."<sup>150</sup> Codreanu recognized the fraud of Romanian democracy because it never departed from its old

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<sup>144</sup> Livezeanu, 286; Nagy-Talavera, 356.

<sup>145</sup> Weber, E. 123. As Weber writes "in a country like Romania, where official education was highly moralistic and patriotic, the difference between lessons learnt at school and the corruption and opportunism of urban or public life would be extraordinarily shocking."

<sup>146</sup> Livezeanu, 218.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>148</sup> Iordachi, 22–23; Weber, E. 107.

<sup>149</sup> Weber, E. 104.

<sup>150</sup> Codreanu, 383. Here, Codreanu is referring to the Italian Fascists' ascent to power in 1922.

oligarchic ways. Breaking with the older generation of nationalists, Codreanu's generation directed its resentment at compromising and often corrupt older politicians.<sup>151</sup>

The Văcăreșteni identified all the problems of a corrupt society with democracy and rejected it for supposedly destroying the nation. "Not only does democracy remove the national elite," Codreanu determined, "but it replaces it with the worst within a nation."<sup>152</sup> In Codreanu's perspective, political parties divided people, which left them vulnerable to enemy attacks: "'democracy'...has but one advantage, and that is one for the nation's enemy. For democracy will break up the unity and the spirit of a people, which...once divided into democratic parties, thus fragmented, will be defeated."<sup>153</sup> Observing the rampant political corruption, Codreanu deduced that democracy ensured the election not of "moral leadership" but more frequently of demagogues who served only themselves; economically powerful people could manipulate democracy, and it did not guarantee responsibility because of constant changes in leadership.<sup>154</sup> The Văcăreșteni rejected human rights as "recognizing and showing an interest in only...the individual," and as denying the historic nation and its mission.<sup>155</sup> Like their counterparts in Italy, the Văcăreșteni believed in the subordination of the individual to the national interest to unify society. In the Văcăreșteni's perspective, *all* politicians who supported the current system were guilty of steering Romania toward death. By taking down corrupt officials, the Văcăreșteni claimed to protect Romania and ransom the nation of its sins.

The Văcăreșteni believed that Romania could achieve salvation only if it was governed by a moral national elite. Like the Italian Fascists, the Văcăreșteni's calls for

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<sup>151</sup> Livezeanu, 247.

<sup>152</sup> Codreanu, 384, 388.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 388, 392.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

revolution were not merely political, but also ethical and spiritual; they wanted to place the country in the hands of a new spiritual and moral elite.<sup>156</sup> Codreanu proposed the introduction of “a category of people endowed with certain qualities,” based upon the romanticized qualities of the peasantry, “which is permanently bound to the land and country.”<sup>157</sup> A real leader had to possess spiritual purity, inspiration, courage, a Spartan way of life, voluntary poverty, faith in God, and love.<sup>158</sup> To the Văcăreșteni, peasants better represented Romanian virtues, ethics, and culture than the political elite, who turned their noses up at Orthodox Christianity and dressed in the latest Parisian fashion.<sup>159</sup> At the same time, Codreanu declared that a nation could not be run by ordinary people because “soldiers don’t choose their best general.”<sup>160</sup> As was typical of fascists, the Văcăreșteni believed that only a selected few could truly understand the interests of the nation.<sup>161</sup> Endorsing elitism, the Văcăreșteni argued that only a divine few were capable of following the “lifeline” of the Romanian nation and fulfilling its destiny.<sup>162</sup> Before a new elite could be established, however, the Văcăreșteni had to blow up the existing system.

Who would create this national moral elite? The Văcăreșteni’s answer was their charismatic organization, which was to provide a “new Romanian aristocracy,” not of material goods or of birth, “but of spiritual qualities; an aristocracy of virtue.”<sup>163</sup> Legionaries spoke about their movement as a school for creating a new “great type of Romanian.”<sup>164</sup> In the Legion, Legionaries learned how to spiritually purify and transform themselves through rituals and activities.<sup>165</sup> Legionaries participated in collective praying,

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<sup>156</sup> Griffin, 85.

<sup>157</sup> Codreanu, 389.

<sup>158</sup> Weber, E, 105–106, 118; Nagy-Talavera, 377.

<sup>159</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 349–350.

<sup>160</sup> Codreanu as cited in Ioanid, 134.

<sup>161</sup> Paxton, 141.

<sup>162</sup> Horia Sima as cited in Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>164</sup> Codreanu, 296.

<sup>165</sup> Codreanu, 294; Clark, 111–112; Ioanid, 95.

singing, and oath taking. When Legionaries went to the peasantry, they arrived on foot or on horseback wearing peasant clothes; they baptized newborns; they helped in the fields; they organized festivals; they slept and ate in the houses of peasants and campaigned all year to show that the Legion better represented the nation than others.<sup>166</sup> Legionaries' cultural authenticity – antisemitism, Orthodox Christianity, and veneration of peasants as a symbol of purity – appealed to many alienated by the regime.<sup>167</sup> But Codreanu declared that only a small number, those who endured the greatest suffering and showed the greatest merit, could become recognized as *true* Legionaries eligible to lead the country.<sup>168</sup> The Legionary philosopher Constantin Noica argued that “[s]ince within the Legion education has taken place through elites, it follows that the Romanian world too will be transformed by [their] influence.”<sup>169</sup> By creating a moral and pure society, the Legion strove to bring the country closer to God and salvation. Whereas Codreanu tried to use charisma to change Romanians' relationship with the world from *within*, hence society, National Democrats sought to use politics to reshape Poles' values and worldview.<sup>170</sup>

Although National Democrats celebrated the resurrection of Poland, their excitement was dampened by the country's internal division and the lack of cohesion. The March Constitution recognized Poland as an ethnic democracy, Polish as the official language, and Roman Catholicism as the national faith. But the Minority Treaty dealt a massive blow to National Democrat's vision of Poland as a nation-state.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, Polish liberals and socialists had come to power; the antagonism between the Left and the Right had intensified; Poland was stuck between two hostile powers; the middle class, the

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<sup>166</sup> Clark, 80; Ioanid, 95–96. Unlike traditional parties, the Legion did not cease their campaign efforts in intervals between the elections.

<sup>167</sup> Hitchins, 404; Iordachi, 31.

<sup>168</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>169</sup> Ioanid, 135.

<sup>170</sup> Iordachi, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Peled, Yoav. *The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy: the State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland*. Routledge, 2018, 66.

economy, and certain professions were supposedly dominated not by Poles but Jews, and Poland was completely heterogeneous.<sup>172</sup> These realities persuaded National Democrats to advocate for an aggressive nationalizing policy. Endecja advocated for the assimilation of Slavic minorities, the emigration of Jews and Germans, and the Polonization of cities, towns, and the economy.<sup>173</sup> As in Romania, the Minority Treaty was largely ignored by nationalists, who dragged their feet in naturalizing non-Poles and in 1921 dismissed Jews from their public sector positions in the formerly Austrian territories.<sup>174</sup> Unlike Romanian students, however, National Democrats did not blow up the existing system that they had in part created.

Unlike the Văcăreșteni, National Democrats were pioneers of the nationalizing process and a massive force in Polish politics.<sup>175</sup> In 1919, Endecja emerged as the largest Polish political party in the Sejm; its coalition held 211 out of the 444 seats, and its founder, Dmowski, was hailed as the father of ethnic Polish nationalism and as one of the few men responsible for Poland's resurrection.<sup>176</sup> Endecja had been created in 1893 by Dmowski and Zygmunt Balicki in Warsaw to protect Polish identity against the repressive imperial regimes of Germany and Russia. But by 1919, Endecja had passed its revolutionary phase and now more closely resembled a conservative-nationalist political party than an insurrectionary underground movement.<sup>177</sup> By 1922, Endecja boasted some of Poland's most well-known figures, like the war hero Józef Haller, as well as intellectuals responsible for laying the groundwork for Polish economic, political, and philosophical theories. Compared with the marginalized, resentful youths of the Legion, leading National

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<sup>172</sup> Section V, Constitution of the Republic of Poland, March 17, 1921 <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1921.html> .

<sup>173</sup> Peled, 65, 68.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 68.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 66–67.

<sup>176</sup> Brykczyński, 11, 46; Porter, 2002, 9.

<sup>177</sup> Porter, 2002, 11–12.

Democrats were old-school, successful, and respected statesmen.<sup>178</sup> Several counted as authors of the 1921 March Constitution. When National Democratic youth wreaked havoc and threw Italian fascist-inspired Roman salutes, many National Democrat leaders were horrified. They were “embarrassed by the demonstrations and wanted nothing to do with them,” reflecting National Democrats’ preference for legality and order.<sup>179</sup> Although National Democrats called on the protestors to respect the rule of law, they exploited the event to advocate their exclusionary program and Social Darwinian worldview.



Roman Dmowski, one of the founders of Endecja and the father of Polish ethnic nationalism.<sup>180</sup>

Since the 1890s, National Democrats had claimed the mantle of democracy, but they did so by subjugating individual interests to those of the nation.<sup>181</sup> National Democrats considered democracy the most effective means to organize politics and to discipline the desires of the masses. In order to align individual interests with national ones, Balicki and

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<sup>178</sup> Weber, E. 109; Brykczynski, 46 .

<sup>179</sup> Brykczynski, 42; Porter, 2002, 138.

<sup>180</sup> Brykczynski, 8.

<sup>181</sup> Porter, 2002, 148.

Dmowski advocated a policy of national egoism that commanded Poles to prioritize the needs of the nation above all else.<sup>182</sup> Whereas Polish Romantics saw Poland as a victim and fount of superior values in a Manichean struggle between good and evil, National Democrats believed in a perpetual war-of-all-against-all.<sup>183</sup> Dmowski described his worldview as a “philosophy of national struggle and oppression” in which conquest was justified.<sup>184</sup> National Democrats saw Poland as an agent of struggle against other states, especially Germany, that wanted to conquer it. Therefore, national unity was necessary, as a means of mediating conflict within society. Poland had to speak to its enemies with a single voice.<sup>185</sup>

Heterogeneity exacerbated National Democrats’ anxieties about the security of the Polish state. Believing that ethnic minorities could not support Polish interests, National Democrats saw minority participation in politics and the economy as a critical weakness that hampered national unity and left Poland vulnerable. Therefore, *Endecja* drafted restrictions on minorities’ political participation and businesses.<sup>186</sup> Addressing Poland’s economic and social crises, National Democrats claimed that the removal of Jews from Polish national life would solve the vast majority of the country’s problems.<sup>187</sup> The Left, with its civic nationalist vision of Poland, provided a strong alternative to National Democratic policies. Unlike Codreanu, Dmowski separated his “fair national struggle” from fascist emotions like blinding ethnic pride and hatred by superficially rooting them in science and rationalism.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 149, 191.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>184</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 56, 82.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–57.

<sup>186</sup> Peled, 71; Dmowski, 1902, 86; Porter, 2002, 178–179.

<sup>187</sup> Brykczyński, 79–80.

<sup>188</sup> Wilicki, 18.

What National Democrats longed for in the early 1920s was something akin to an ethnocracy, in which ethnic Poles dominated all spheres of life.<sup>189</sup> National Democrats supported an ethnically Polish participatory democracy and strict political and social hierarchies that prioritized ethnic Poles. Whereas in Codreanu's ideal society, the peasantry would only be represented in spirit, Dmowski saw peasants as a vital part of the political process: "one must agree that in our times only the masses can achieve great things."<sup>190</sup> It is important to note that although National Democrats enjoyed support from the Polish peasantry, a majority of the party's voters came from the urban lower middle class and the ethnically Polish intelligentsia and youth.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, Dmowski's nationalism was intended to modernize ordinary Poles and address their issues, not return them to a nostalgic past. In his 1902 publication *National Egoism and Ethics*, Balicki used Dmowski's new definition of the nation – an agent of struggle – to argue that in judging the actions of nations and those in its service there was only one standard: success in the struggle for survival.<sup>192</sup> Niewiadomski was an agent in Poland's fight for survival and had protected Polish hegemony. National Democrats hailed him as "a noble soul" for protecting the national idea.<sup>193</sup> National Democrats framed the election and murder of President Narutowicz as an example of the war-of-all-against-all, to advocate for their version of democracy.

Dmowski, Niewiadomski, and Codreanu tried to close a sovereignty gap between the people and their rulers. Dmowski and Niewiadomski wanted a government that worked for *only* ethnic Poles, whereas Codreanu wanted a government that worked for *all* ethnic

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<sup>189</sup> Peled, 68–69.

<sup>190</sup> Dmowski as cited in Porter, 2002, 138, 149; Ioanid, 135.

<sup>191</sup> Peled, 67.

<sup>192</sup> Porter, 2002, 217.

<sup>193</sup> National Democrat Adolf Nowaczynski as cited in Brykczynski, 122–123.



Romanians. But whereas National Democrats rallied predominantly against ethnic minorities, the Văcăreșteni battled against the elite.<sup>194</sup> Since the Liberals had repressed all working-class movements, and the Văcăreșteni lacked state power, they turned to violence to gain support and prove that they were serious about change.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, the roots of the Legion were in social justice for the peasantry. In 1908, Sorel distinguished the violence of working class people from the force of the state: if the state imposed a social order based upon inequality and exploitation, then working-class violence was justified to destroy that system.<sup>196</sup> The Văcăreșteni and Niewiadomski claimed that because the state was treasonous, they had resorted to altruistic and defensive violence. Niewiadomski used violence to support Endecja because he lacked state power, whereas National Democrats used such power to promote their agenda. Right before the shots went off at Niewiadomski's execution, he cried "I die for Poland, which is being destroyed by Piłsudski!"<sup>197</sup> Both Niewiadomski and Codreanu tried to portray their actions as justice for the national community. Niewiadomski's death, however, left his legacy to be exploited by Endecja.

National Democrats, however, did not accept Niewiadomski's violence because it went against their preference for rationality.<sup>198</sup> National Democrats tried to root the disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities in legal logic and reason, whereas the Văcăreșteni advocated a salvational formula based upon Christianity, which claimed that a religious revival would cleanse the country.<sup>199</sup> Since they committed violence to defend the dignity of the nation, the Văcăreșteni believed it was just.<sup>200</sup> The Văcăreșteni were young and

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<sup>194</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 402. As Nagy-Talavera writes, most legionaries came from "abysmally poor regions."

<sup>195</sup> Clark, 96; Livezeanu, 286.

<sup>196</sup> Sorel, xviii, 17–18.

<sup>197</sup> Brykczyński, 125.

<sup>198</sup> Brykczyński, 46; Weber, M, 243.

<sup>199</sup> Iordachi, 28, 34.

<sup>200</sup> Sorel, 157.

disgusted with the existing order, which made them available for radical visions and change: “it has always been traitors that sapped the nation’s strength, but we Romanians had never turned our weapons on the traitors; that is why treason took root.”<sup>201</sup> Legionaries wanted to be revolutionaries, while National Democrats did not.<sup>202</sup> National Democrats believed that Poland was condemned to eternal struggle. However, both organizations exploited trials to advocate certain changes to, or the destruction of, the existing system.

Gordon writes that during the Terror in Revolutionary France, the Jacobins required a mystification to maintain the illusion of popular rule.<sup>203</sup> Public executions became a theatrical symbol of the people’s will based on the myth that the nation – the French citizenry – was the true source of justice. Charismatic leaders like Adolf Hitler, Mussolini, and Codreanu claimed legitimacy based on charisma and their rapport with the people. Their legitimacy rested not on laws, but on their claim to be the incarnation of the people’s will and the bearer of the people’s destiny.<sup>204</sup> Codreanu used his trials to depict himself as a divine leader of the Romanian nation chosen by God.<sup>205</sup> Legionaries referred to him as *Căpitan*, a title that linked Codreanu with the heroic *haiduci*.<sup>206</sup> Codreanu used his charisma to aestheticize the violence of the Legion and to manipulate peasants. Nagy-Talavera met Codreanu as a child in 1937 in Transylvania and recalled the mystic aura around the leader:

There was suddenly a hush in the crowd. A tall, darkly handsome man dressed in the white costume of a Romanian peasant rode into the yard on a white horse. He halted close to me, and I could see nothing monstrous or evil in him. On the contrary. His childlike, sincere smile radiated over the miserable crowd, and he seemed to be with it yet mysteriously apart from it. Charisma is an inadequate word to define the strange force that emanated from this man. He was more aptly simply part of the forests, of the

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<sup>201</sup> Codreanu, 198.

<sup>202</sup> Weber, E, 104, 109–110. As Weber writes, a survey in 1940 recorded that of all the legionaries who had fled to Germany, 40% were under thirty. This made them available “for radical visions and enterprises before which their elders might be inclined to hesitate.”

<sup>203</sup> Gordon, 262.

<sup>204</sup> Paxton, 126.

<sup>205</sup> Gordon, 262; Clark, 56.

<sup>206</sup> Ioanid, 96.

mountains, of the storms on the snow-covered peaks of the Carpathians, and of the lakes and rivers. And so he stood amid the crowd, silently. He had no need to speak. His silence was eloquent; it seemed to be stronger than we, stronger than the order of the prefect who denied him speech. An old, white-haired peasant woman made the sign of the cross on her breast and whispered to us, “The emissary of the Archangel Michael!” Then the sad little church bell began to toll, and the service which invariably preceded Legionary meetings began. Deep impressions created in the soul of a child die hard. In more than a half of a century I have never forgotten my meeting with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.<sup>207</sup>

Such an account contrasts with the uncharismatic presentation of National Democrats. Dmowski, the recognized leader, preferred to work behind the scenes as the main ideologue. Upon Poland’s restoration, Dmowski did not seek a spot in Parliament and wrote in 1920 that “essentially there is no place for me presently in Poland. There is a need to wait.”<sup>208</sup> Having retreated from politics, Dmowski did not appear in Warsaw or comment on the presidential crisis in 1922.<sup>209</sup> National Democrats called for order during the riots and respected the outcome of Niewiadomski’s trial. Yet they worked to gain support by accusing other parties of working against the country. Unlike the Italian fascists, who had launched a bloody revolt against the state in 1920, National Democrats did not want to ruin the newly laid foundations of Poland.<sup>210</sup> Rather, they wanted to realign the foundations with their vision.

The trials of Codreanu and Niewiadomski allowed them to canonize themselves as heroes and to frame the Văcărești and National Democrats as better alternatives to the existing system.<sup>211</sup> Unlike the Legionaries, however, National Democrats did not frame themselves as the *only* legitimate leaders of Poland; they did not protest the election of Narutowicz’s successor Stanisław Wojciechowski, a Piast member.<sup>212</sup> At this point,

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<sup>207</sup> Nagy–Talavera, 345.

<sup>208</sup> Porter, 2014, 78.

<sup>209</sup> Brykczyński, 22.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 76.

<sup>211</sup> Ioanid, 142.

<sup>212</sup> Brykczyński, 22.

National Democrats still lacked fascists' elitism and thirst for radical ethical and political change. To Endecja, it was most important that Poland remain an ethnically Polish society in which Jews had no influence. Meanwhile, Legionaries believed that a better future could be achieved only through the Legion since they claimed to represent the true interests of the nation.<sup>213</sup> As the Legionary Traian Herseni said in 1929: "In Romania today no one, except for the Legion, represents a political position that is valid and capable of electrifying the people. Beyond the Legion there is only a return to darkness and chaos."<sup>214</sup> As long as Poland's leaders were ethnically Polish and supported by a majority of Poles, National Democrats claimed that Poland could remain a Polish state. But there was no alternative in Romania to the Legion since only an elite few could fulfill the destiny of the nation. Romanians could either accept Codreanu as their messiah or face damnation.

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<sup>213</sup> Moța quoted in Iordachi, 28.

<sup>214</sup> Traian Herseni quoted in Ioanid, 101.

## Chapter II: Apocalypse: Antisemitism & The Impact of the Minority Treaties

*“Whether through violence or not. . . . The state will always and everywhere, more or less consciously, aspire to create cultural unity.”*

— Roman Dmowski<sup>215</sup>

The victory of creating Greater Romania and resurrecting Poland at the end of WWI failed to drown out the distress calls of Romanian and Polish nationalists. All was not quiet on the Eastern Front in 1919; Codreanu and Dmowski watched in horror as the Bolshevik Revolution destroyed the traditional order across Romania and Poland’s borders. The terms of the Treaties of Versailles frustrated Dmowski; he saw them as damaging Polish interests by requiring civil rights for ethnic minorities in exchange for diplomatic recognition.<sup>216</sup> Violence among Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians during the Polish-Soviet War (1919–1920) exacerbated Dmowski’s anxieties.<sup>217</sup> As the Bolsheviks rose to power across the Dniester, Codreanu and his military school friends gathered in the Dobrina forest to take an oath to defend Romania against agents of “anti-Romanian revolutionary ideas.”<sup>218</sup> Although communism was confined to Soviet Russia by 1921, the Bolshevik promise of global revolution fueled nationalists’ anxieties; the specter of communism continued to loom over Europe.<sup>219</sup> Nationalists attempted to exorcise their countries of the “red devil” and its agents.<sup>220</sup> In Poland and Romania, the witch hunt targeted Jewish communities.

In Romania and Poland, fears triggered by the chaos of World War One and the Bolshevik Revolution crystallized in the myth of Jews as an ultimate evil.<sup>221</sup> National Democrats and Legionaries saw Jews as the source of crisis and argued that their removal

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<sup>215</sup> Dmowski as cited in Porter, 2002, 10.

<sup>216</sup> Wilicki, 27.

<sup>217</sup> Porter, 2014, 97.

<sup>218</sup> Codreanu, 57–58.

<sup>219</sup> Hanebrink, Paul A. *A Specter Haunting Europe: the Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018, p. 5–7.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–7.

<sup>221</sup> Volovici, Leon. *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, by, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1991, 12.

from society would solve many of Poland and Romania's problems.<sup>222</sup> The two movements saw Jews as an evil against whom violence was justified. Antisemitism was at the core of both the Legion and Endecja, but the movements were not identical.<sup>223</sup> During the first half of the 1920s, the radicalization of National Democrats' antisemitism generally did not result in violence against Jews.<sup>224</sup> National Democrats had access to state power, whereas Legionaries lacked it. The Legion's lack of state power combined with its increasingly apocalyptic Christian Orthodox and antisemitic worldview to radicalize members and frame violence as a Christian duty. Since Legionaries could not create change through traditional politics, they turned to direct action.<sup>225</sup>

### Economic and Cultural Antisemitism

Legionary antisemitism, like Romanian antisemitism in general, took on a sharp postcolonial and economic edge because Legionaries accused Jews of benefiting from Romanians' history of oppression.<sup>226</sup> Before Romania gained independence in 1866 from the Ottoman Empire, ethnic Romanians had been exploited and treated as second or third-class subjects. Jews in the Romanian territories lacked rights but served as intermediaries between often foreign noble landowners and Romanian-speaking peasants. In economic centers such as Iași and Bucharest, Jews were overwhelmingly engaged in commerce.<sup>227</sup> Romanian antisemites believed that Jews' role in the economy was part of a vast plot to keep ethnic Romanians in an inferior position, which fostered economic antisemitism and postcolonial nationalism. After Romania gained independence, Jews continued to dominate certain industries. Legionary propaganda often denounced Jews as

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<sup>222</sup> Brykczynski, 79–80; Moța, Ion. "Numerus Clausus?" *Pământul Strămoșesc*, January 1, 1928.

<sup>223</sup> Brykczynski, 159.

<sup>224</sup> Hanebrink, 27, 31.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 31.

<sup>226</sup> Clark, 14.

<sup>227</sup> Brustein, W. I., and R. D. King. "Anti-Semitism As a Response to Perceived Jewish Power: The Cases of Bulgaria and Romania before the Holocaust." *Social Forces*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2004, pp. 691–708., doi:10.1353/sof.2005.0007, 695.

greedy capitalists and “blood suckers of the peasantry.”<sup>228</sup> William Brustein argues that during the interwar years antisemitism was especially intense in Moldavia, Codreanu’s birthplace, because the emerging Moldavian bourgeoisie had to compete with an already existing Jewish middle class. To students like Codreanu, Jews’ position in the economy threatened ethnic Romanians’ social mobility and hegemony.<sup>229</sup>

Legionaries tied cultural purity, or “autochthony,” to national sovereignty, drawing on Romanian cultural antisemitism. For centuries, Romanian-speaking peasants and Jews had coexisted but remained separated by social boundaries and cultural differences.<sup>230</sup> While Romanian-speaking territory had been politically divided, Romanian culture had been one of the few things connecting the nation. Therefore, Romanian state builders emphasized the importance of preserving and developing Romanian culture, as a precondition for national sovereignty.<sup>231</sup> Romanian nationalists and antisemites saw Jews, who had their own culture, as a threat to the preservation and hegemony of their own. When France and Germany made recognition of Romania’s independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 contingent on the emancipation of Romanian Jewry, the Romanian government refused. Politicians believed that excluding Jews from citizenship protected Romanians and their culture from “moral degradation” and exploitation.<sup>232</sup> Article 7 of the 1866 Romanian Constitution resolved this threat by restricting naturalization to “foreigners of Christian faith.”<sup>233</sup> During World War One, however, Moldavia experienced a massive influx of Jews from Ukraine and Russia; its Jewish population grew to 23.6% by 1919.

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<sup>228</sup> Codreanu, 117.

<sup>229</sup> Brustein, 695–696.

<sup>230</sup> Weber, E 115.

<sup>231</sup> Volovici, 7.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6–7. As Volovici writes, the myth of “moral degradation” and “outside influence” stemmed from the powerful “myth of the Phanariots,” former Greek rulers of Romania. Their “evil” Greek influences were said to cause national, moral, and social degradation. This myth was eventually adopted by various nationalists to create the myth of the “Jewish threat.”

<sup>233</sup> Article 7, 1866 Constitution of Romania <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1866.htm>.

Only one-third of Codreanu's freshman class in 1920 was ethnically Romanian.<sup>234</sup> For Romanian nationalists, the influx of Jews and Ukrainians to eastern Romania and the increase in Jewish enrollment at institutions of higher education amounted to an attack on Romanian culture's rightfully dominant position.

As in the Romanian case, National Democratic antisemites attacked Jews for their position in the economy and their perceived relationship with the partitioning powers. Russia and Germany's brutal denationalization campaigns between 1864 and the 1880s reinforced among National Democrats the idea that all social groups were locked in a struggle for survival.<sup>235</sup> Survival demanded social, economic, and cultural unity. Yet, as in Romania, Polish Jews constituted a significant portion of the middle class and served as middlemen between Polish nobles and peasants. Additionally, Jews had historically paid the most powerful authority in the region for protection against violence. During the partition era, many Polish Jews had allied themselves with Moscow, Vienna, and Berlin. Although Jews experienced pervasive discrimination, especially in the Russian partition, National Democrats believed that Jews benefited from Poles' oppression.<sup>236</sup> National Democrats attacked Jewish businesses as "instruments" of "Russian rule."<sup>237</sup> During World War One, some Polish Jews allied with the occupying powers, rather than with Poles, which the latter read as disloyalty. If Jews could not support Polish interests, then they could only undermine them.

Cultural antisemitism reinforced National Democrats' economic antisemitism, because Jews' distinctive culture highlighted the lack of Polish hegemony in the economy.

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<sup>234</sup> Livezeanu, 195. Jews represented 13.6% of the urban population, making it the second biggest population after ethnic Romanians. According to Livezeanu, 99.4% of Jews congregated in towns and cities.

<sup>235</sup> Porter, 2002, 15.

<sup>236</sup> Dmowski, Roman. *Separatyzm Żydów i jego źródła [Jewish Separatism and its Sources]*, University of Illinois, 2012 [1909], 22. Dmowski believed that it was because of the lack of unity and lack of Jewish loyalty that Poland had been dragged deeper into the Russian sphere after the 1863 Uprising.

<sup>237</sup> Bujak, Franciszek. *The Jewish Question in Poland*. Impr. Levé, 1919, p. 9, 24.



National Democrats saw Jews' lack of assimilation as further proof of disloyalty to Poland and as a critical threat to the preservation of Polish traits. As in the Romanian case, to some extent, cultural purity was linked to survival. National Democrats attacked Jews as "agents of Russification" and as a "separate civilization."<sup>238</sup> Although Poland regained its independence after World War One and was constructed as a nation-state, it lacked uniformity. In 1920, approximately one-third of the urban population of Poland was Jewish, although Jews constituted only 8% of Poland's population.<sup>239</sup> National Democrats exploited the visibility of Jews in cities to argue that Jews threatened ethnically Polish hegemony.

Cultural and economic antisemitism underpinned both the Legion and Endecja. Both Porter and Eugen Weber argue that Polish and Romanian Jews' perceived foreignness emphasized their visibility in the economy as foreigners exploiting local resources.<sup>240</sup> It is important to note that Romanian and Polish Jews were not culturally homogenous. Some urban Jews were assimilated and spoke Romanian or Polish alongside their native Yiddish or Hebrew.<sup>241</sup> Many, however, especially in small towns, did not speak Romanian or Polish; a majority of Polish and Romanian Jews, as was common of Eastern European Jews, talked differently, dressed differently, and worshipped differently, which set them apart from Western Jews and even more so from Christians.<sup>242</sup> The presence of a perceived foreign populace became a point of resentment for National Democrats and Legionaries. But National Democrats considered unity a requirement for a strong nation-state, whereas Legionaries saw Jews' presence as the continuation of foreign colonization and a threat to the very existence of the nation.<sup>243</sup> Brustein argues that "foreign minority groups with high

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<sup>238</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 31.

<sup>239</sup> Porter, 2014, 131.

<sup>240</sup> Weber, E. 115; Porter, 2014, 134.

<sup>241</sup> Weber, E. 115; Porter, 2014, 131.

<sup>242</sup> Porter, 2014, 134.

<sup>243</sup> Moța, Ion. "Liga Națiunilor [The League of Nations]." *Pământul Strămosesc*, 1 November, 1932.

economic status....filling a middleman role between the dominant elites and impoverished masses, particularly in times of intense stress, are likely to become ideal scapegoats.”<sup>244</sup> Indeed, Codreanu and Dmowski blamed Jews for all individual and national issues throughout the interwar era. The spread of communism at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, gave rise to a new and apocalyptic antisemitic myth.

### The Judeo-Bolshevik Myth

The Judeo-Bolshevik myth, the belief that communism was a Jewish creation supported by all Jews, fostered a life-or-death worldview in the Legion and Endecja. Political antisemitism, a belief that Jews sought to use politics to usurp power, was a relatively new development in Romania and Poland.<sup>245</sup> In the early 1900s, both Polish and Romanian antisemites had feared that Jews would usurp control and turn Romania and Poland into Jewish states if given access to politics; the growth of Zionism, which advocated for an autonomous Jewish state, reinforced belief in this conspiracy. By 1902, National Democrats had become convinced that a Zionist movement was working to turn Poland into a Jewish state, because Poland hosted one of the largest Jewish populations in the world. As Dmowski warned:

Not waiting on the future promised land, it is necessary here [in Poland] to organize the Jews into a nation, to build here the main corps of that great world army...In the future the Jewish element will obtain dominance in our country and turn Poland into a Jewish nation.<sup>246</sup>

The rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 reinforced belief in an international Jewish conspiracy. Paul Hanebrink writes that the Bolsheviks were often accused of being Jews and representing Jewish interests. The Bolsheviks promised an international revolution that would liberate all oppressed people, which terrified nationalists; they

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<sup>244</sup> Brustein, 693.

<sup>245</sup> Brykczynski, 25.

<sup>246</sup> Dmowski quoted in Porter, 2002, 229–230.

assumed that the Bolsheviks wanted to liberate the Jewish community.<sup>247</sup> As communism spread among a small minority of Polish Jews, National Democrats feared that Poland's internal and external enemies were working together to undermine Polish sovereignty. As one catechism published in 1921 explained, "Q – 'What do the communists want from Poland?' A – 'To turn her into a Russian province ruled by Jews appointed by Moscow.'"<sup>248</sup>

Soviet Russian irredentism and an upsurge of communist activity in Moldavia after World War One intensified Romanian nationalists' fears.<sup>249</sup> For the three years after 1917, socialist organizations sprang up across Eastern Romania. The goal of some of these organizations was to help the Soviet Red Army retake Bessarabia.<sup>250</sup> Codreanu identified Bolshevism as a threat to Greater Romania's territorial integrity. He recalled that in 1919, "every three or four days on the streets of Iași there were huge communist demonstrations. Those 10–15,000 starved workers, maneuvered by Judaic criminal hands from Moscow, paraded the streets while singing the Internationale."<sup>251</sup> The Romanian government did little to suppress these organizations, which planted in Codreanu's mind the idea that public authorities were complicit in an international Jewish conspiracy. In Romania, there was a long history of linking governmental corruption with a small Jewish elite.<sup>252</sup> Amidst Romania's brief red years, Romanian fascism and the Legionary cause were born.

The rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 inspired fear across the western hemisphere, but Romania and Poland's shared border with Soviet Russia compounded nationalists' fears. During the Russian Civil War, tens of thousands of Jewish refugees fled

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<sup>247</sup> Hanebrink, 53.

<sup>248</sup> Peled, 80.

<sup>249</sup> Brustein, 697.

<sup>250</sup> Livezeanu, 249 Before World War One, Bessarabia had been part of the Russian Empire. Romanians made up the largest ethnic group in the province.

<sup>251</sup> Codreanu, 65.

<sup>252</sup> Codreanu, 195; Clark, 20–21.

from the violence to Romania and Poland.<sup>253</sup> Although Romania annexed Bessarabia in 1918, throughout the interwar period the Soviet government refused to recognize Romania's claim to the territory.<sup>254</sup> Bessarabian cities were culturally Russian, and border cities like Iași seethed as socialists and nationalists clashed.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, in both Romania and Poland, the origins of the Communist Party were closely connected with Jews.<sup>256</sup> After World War One, the Liberals forced the Romanian Communist Party underground. In Poland, however, there was a strong socialist movement before and after Poland's independence. Until 1922, Józef Piłsudski led the Polish Socialist Party. National Democrats attacked him as an instrument of international Jewry.<sup>257</sup> Given Poland and Romania's proximity to Soviet Russia, many nationalists feared that their nations had become especially susceptible to the spread of communism and irredentist ambitions.

National Democrats and Legionaries considered antisemitism healthy for the preservation of the Polish and Romanian nation. If international Jewry was supposedly a unified people, then Romanians and Poles, too, had to unite and protect themselves.<sup>258</sup> Romanians' and Poles' histories as oppressed and divided people helped to institutionalize antisemitism. Striving to realize their interests and gain national sovereignty, Romanian and Polish nationalists and antisemites began to view Jews as a rival. Stereotypes of Jews as sly and manipulative reinforced antisemites' fears that Jews would undermine Polish and Romanian interests, such as national sovereignty, to advance their own.<sup>259</sup> Cultural and economic antisemitism were not the only strands that dominated Endecja and the Legion.

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<sup>253</sup> Porter, 2014, 47; Hanebrink, 63.

<sup>254</sup> Brustein, 697.

<sup>255</sup> Hanebrink, 63.

<sup>256</sup> Brustein, 697. However, Porter writes that before World War Two the Communist Party had almost no Jewish support, never achieving more than 7% of the vote in Jewish districts (Porter, 2014, 135).

<sup>257</sup> Dabrowski, Patrice M. "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Jozef Pilsudski and Roman Dmowski." *The Polish Review*, vol. 56, no. 1/2, 2011, pp. 73–109, 75.

<sup>258</sup> Porter, 2002, 167.

<sup>259</sup> Volovici, 26.

We turn now to examine how National Democrats' racial-ideological antisemitism and Legionaries' religious antisemitism played fundamental roles in their response to the implementation of the Minority Treaties. Their implementation sparked a radicalization toward antisemitic violence and fascism.

### The Minority Treaties

The Polish and Romanian Minority Treaties of 1921 and 1923 were supposed to resolve ethnic conflict in the new or enlarged Eastern European states. In Romania and Poland, however, the Treaties became a source of resentment because of the perception that they infringed on national sovereignty.<sup>260</sup> During World War One, Eastern Europe had been consumed by inter-ethnic and antisemitic violence. The Minority Treaties, designed by Western states and Jewish civil rights advocates, featured legal protections for religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>261</sup> Yet Romania and Poland, concerned that Jewish advancement would obstruct Romanian and Polish hegemony, did not want to emancipate their Jewish communities.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, as a result of World War One, over 300,000 Romanian and 450,000 Polish soldiers had died to secure Romania's territorial expansion and Poland's independence. Although many Polish and Romanian Jews had fought for Poland and Romania during the war, prevailing stereotypes of Jews as cowards and traitors largely excluded their efforts from collective memory.<sup>263</sup> As Moța wrote in 1922, "Jews only got fat from the exploits of war as Romanian soldiers alone suffered the enemy's wrath!"<sup>264</sup> Antisemites saw the Minority Treaties as an insult to the Romanian and Polish armies' sacrifices and denounced them. Therefore, the Treaties were dictated: "the imposed clauses

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<sup>260</sup> Fink, Carole. *Defending the Rights of Others: the Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, 154.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>262</sup> Volovici, 16.

<sup>263</sup> Porter, 2014, 50; Volovici, 21.

<sup>264</sup> Moța, Ion. "Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress" *Dacia Nouă*, 23 December, 1922.

on minority rights became requirements not only for recognition but were also, as in [the case of] Romania, conditions for receiving specific grants of territory.”<sup>265</sup> From an antisemitic and nationalist perspective, international Jewry had taken Romania and Poland hostage and forced them to place Jewish interests before native ones.<sup>266</sup>

Romania and Poland had to acknowledge the Treaty clauses as “fundamental laws, which no law or action shall take precedence over.”<sup>267</sup> Although Poland and Romania’s Minority Treaties were not identical, they shared several of the same terms. Poland and Romania had to grant citizenship to Jews; Article 7 of the Polish Treaty and Article 8 of the Romanian one guaranteed that “all Polish [or Romanian] nationals shall be equal before the law and shall enjoy the same civil and political rights without distinction as to race, language, and religion.”<sup>268</sup> Romanian and Polish Jews were guaranteed full political and civil equality before the law, which infuriated nationalists. Other articles protected Romanian and Polish Jews’ right to establish their own cultural institutions and schools.<sup>269</sup> But there were also differences between the treaties. The Polish Minority Treaty forbade Poland from holding national elections or events on Saturday, so that “Jews shall not be compelled to perform any act which constitutes a violation of their Sabbath.”<sup>270</sup> The Romanian Treaty forbade Romania from denying Jews “admission to public services...[or] various professions and industries,” including education.<sup>271</sup> One of the most contentious articles of both treaties was Article 12: it allowed Jews and other minorities to appeal

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<sup>265</sup> Fink, 37.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>267</sup> “Tratatul Privind Minoritățile. 9 Dec 1919 [Treaty on Minorities, Dec 9, 1919]” *ISTORIA ROMÂNILOR ÎNTRE ANII 1918–1940* ebooks.unibuc.ro/istorie/istorie1918-1940/10-3.htm .

<sup>268</sup> Article 8, “[Treaty on Minorities, Dec 9, 1919]” ; “3. Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, Signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919.” *PAPERS RELATING TO THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE, 1919*, U.S. Department of State, history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch29 .

<sup>269</sup> Article 9, “Tratatul Privind Minoritățile. 9 Dec 1919 [Treaty on Minorities, Dec 9, 1919]”; Article 9 “3. Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, Signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919.”

<sup>270</sup> Article 11, “3. Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, Signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919”

<sup>271</sup> Article 8, “Tratatul Privind Minoritățile. 9 Dec 1919 [Treaty on Minorities, Dec 9, 1919].”

directly to the League of Nations if their rights were violated or threatened:

Any Member of the Council of the League of Nations shall have the right to bring to the attention of the Council any infraction, or any danger of infraction, of any of these obligations, and...the Council may thereupon take such action and give such direction as it may deem proper and effective in the circumstances.<sup>272</sup>

By subjugating Romania and Poland to international law, the Treaties infringed upon Romanian and Polish national sovereignty; Jews could bypass the national governments; international organizations could intervene in domestic issues.<sup>273</sup> Romanian nationalists in particular saw the Treaties as the continuation of foreign rule. Through Codreanu and Dmowski's eyes, the Treaties gave primacy to Jews at the expense of the native population for whom the state had been made.

Both Romania and Poland were conceived as ethnic nation-states. Their constitutions – even after amended by the Minority Treaties – highlighted that Romania and Poland were spaces for the core nation. Although Poland's 1921 Constitution acknowledged the equal rights of Jews, it enshrined Catholicism as the national religion, established Polish as the national language, and proclaimed that "sovereignty in the Polish Republic belongs to the [Polish] nation."<sup>274</sup> As Rogers Brubaker writes, the Constitution drew "a clear distinction...between this Polish nation and the total citizenry of the state."<sup>275</sup> Similarly, although Romania's 1923 Constitution recognized the rights of Jews, it declared Romania "a nation-state" and proclaimed that Eastern Orthodoxy "has primacy before other faiths."<sup>276</sup> Despite the implementation of the Minority Treaties, Romanian and Polish Jews continued to be perceived as a threatening other. Carol Fink writes that the Minority

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<sup>272</sup> Article 12, "3. Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, Signed at Versailles, June 28, 19191."

<sup>273</sup> Fink, 268.

<sup>274</sup> Article 2, Article 110 Constitution of the Republic of Poland, March 17 1921 <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1921.html> .

<sup>275</sup> Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External Homelands in the New Europe*. Collegium Budapest/Inst. for Advanced Study, 1995, 85.

<sup>276</sup> Article 1, Article 22 of the 1923 Constitution of Romania <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1923.htm> .

Treaties were generally ignored by the native governments and not enforced. But that does not mean that they had no effect. Rather, they radicalized the antisemitic worldview of the European nationalist right.<sup>277</sup> The Treaties solidified the belief of National Democrats and radical Romanian students in an international Jewish conspiracy.

### Reaction to The Minority Treaties

Dmowski's experience at the Paris Peace Talks and the implementation of the Polish Minority Treaty confirmed his belief in an "international conspiracy" against Poland.<sup>278</sup> During the war, he had worked with the Entente for Poland's independence, but American and British Jewish civil rights groups condemned Dmowski for his antisemitism. Piłsudski, Dmowski's chief rival, was recognized as the provisional president of Poland.<sup>279</sup> Dmowski called American President Woodrow Wilson and British Prime Minister George Lloyd agents of Jewish interests. He considered a Minority Treaty harmful to Polish hegemony, which was a prerequisite for a strong state, but failed to convince the Entente not to impose one. Dmowski and National Democrats were outraged. Stanisław Głąbiński accused the League of prioritizing Jews: "there were terms that...constitute a privilege for Jews inconsistent with the citizenry and public interests."<sup>280</sup> In other words, Głąbiński did not think of Jews as legitimate citizens. In short, National Democrats saw the imposition of the Minority Treaty as international Jewry punishing National Democratic Poland for placing Polish issues before Jewish ones.

National Democrats' ideological and racial antisemitism exacerbated their concerns regarding the Minority Treaty; coexistence would destroy Poles in a war-of-all-against-all.

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<sup>277</sup> Fink, 38.

<sup>278</sup> Brykczyński, 45.

<sup>279</sup> Fink, 143. Until the end of World War One, the Entente had recognized Dmowski's Polish National Committee as the legitimate representative of the Polish nation. After the war, however, Piłsudski also claimed to be a legitimate Polish government despite having fought alongside the Central Powers. Pressure from western Jewish civil rights advocates persuaded the Entente to recognize Piłsudski.

<sup>280</sup> Bergmann, Olaf. *Narodowa Demokracja Wobec Problematyki żydowskiej w Latach 1918-1929 [National Democracy Faced with The Jewish Problem, 1918-1929]*. Wyd. Poznańskie, 1998, 31.



National Democrats perceived Jews as a doomed race because they were an anachronism.<sup>281</sup> Social Darwinism required races to adapt and modernize, but Jews seemed to be culturally static; they were “a parasite on the social body” of Poland.<sup>282</sup> In order to make Poland stronger, National Democrats argued, Poles had to get rid of the Jewish element or it would weaken them.

National Democrats also claimed that Jews were ideologically incompatible with Poles because each social group had its own interests. National Democratic propaganda deployed several ideological stereotypes of Jews: “Judeo-Bolshevik” or “Jewish progressive,” “crooks” and “unhygienic.”<sup>283</sup> But what National Democrats feared most was the supposedly “very well-developed internal organization” of international Jewry.<sup>284</sup> Taking Jews’ nefarious ambitions for granted, National Democrats worried that Jews would usurp power now that they had been given a voice in politics. In May 1921, one of the heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that all Jews “welcomed” the Minority Treaty as “the ‘first step’ on the path to Jewish national autonomy.”<sup>285</sup> National Democrats claimed that Jews could only bring destruction to Polish society, whether by weakening it or by conquering it for themselves.

As a sovereign state, Poland had a right to defend itself against attacks. In 1921, National Democrats launched a massive nationalization campaign against Jews. Although Polish Liberals had come to power, National Democrats and hard-line nationalists occupied key governmental positions.<sup>286</sup> National Democrats also made Jews a scapegoat for the postwar collapse of the Polish economy. As a consequence of Poland’s independence,

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<sup>281</sup> Porter, 2002, 179; Krzywiec, 300.

<sup>282</sup> Dmowski as cited in Porter, 2002, 228.

<sup>283</sup> Bergmann, 346.

<sup>284</sup> Krzywiec, Grzegorz. *Chauvinism, Polish Style the Case of Roman Dmowski (Beginnings: 1886-1905)*. Peter Lang Edition, 2016, 65.

<sup>285</sup> Bergmann, 32.

<sup>286</sup> Peled, 66.

Germany and Russia, big buyers of Polish agricultural products, imposed tariffs. Poland's agricultural sector suffered.<sup>287</sup> Jews were less affected by this crisis than Poles since they were less rural and less directly engaged in agriculture. As Poland's economy shrank, Poles and Jews began to compete for jobs in industries where Jews were already entrenched. National Democrats introduced a number of discriminatory measures: tax policy and state-owned banks targeted Jewish small businesses; authorities refused licenses and toughened health and safety regulations to limit the economic opportunities for Jews.<sup>288</sup> National Democrats used state power to promote Polish control of the economy, which they perceived as decreasing the Jewish threat.<sup>289</sup>

National Democrats used all available means to decrease Jews' role in economic and political life. In 1922, the election of Gabriel Narutowicz as President provided National Democrats with an opportunity to advocate for Jews' political disenfranchisement, because they believed that Jewry had seized "the highest office in Poland."<sup>290</sup> National Democratic students rioted in the streets of Warsaw, demanding Narutowicz's resignation, as National Democratic leaders refused to recognize him as a legitimate Polish president.<sup>291</sup> In fact, Narutowicz was not Jewish. But he was voted into office through a joint session of the Sejm and the Senate by the Polish Left, Piast – a centrist and agrarian party – and ethnic minorities. The Polish Minority Treaty had been implemented only one year prior and barely a month had passed since the November legislative elections had split the Sejm almost exactly between the center-left and nationalist right.<sup>292</sup> National Democrats seized upon tensions and Narutowicz's victory to deploy the Judeo-Bolshevik myth, painting the

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<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

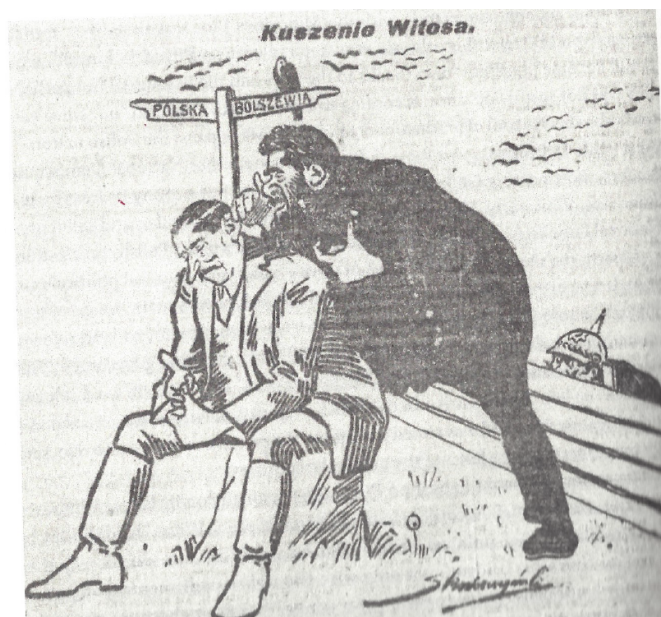
<sup>289</sup> Brubaker, 79, 86.

<sup>290</sup> Brykczyński, 25.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

election as a Jewish seizure of power. *Rozwój* called on politicians “to turn back from the path which ultimately leads to giving up Poland to the feeding frenzy of the international secret Jewish-Masonic great power,” and urged readers to liberate Poland “from Jewish-Masonic influences.”<sup>293</sup> It is important to note that although only a small number of Polish Jews were Zionists, Zionists were the dominant Jewish party in Polish politics. Endecja exploited that dominance to characterize all Jews as Zionists seeking to Judaize the state.<sup>294</sup> After the assassination of Narutowicz in December, National Democrats exploited the event to advocate the exclusion of Jews from political life and to refashion Endecja as a protector of Poland against the Jewish threat. These events of late 1922 poisoned Polish-Jewish relations and the political atmosphere for years.<sup>295</sup>



“The Temptation of Witos.” Zionist leader Yitzhak Grünbaum plays the role of the Devil, trying to trick the Piast leader onto the path leading away from Poland and toward Bolshevism as a German soldier watches in the background. *Gazetta Poranna*, November 23, 1922.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>294</sup> Peled, 78.

<sup>295</sup> Porter, 2014, 94.

<sup>296</sup> As cited in Brykczynski, 92.

At almost exactly the same moment, in Romania, Romanian Liberals drafted a constitution that granted citizenship to Jews. To comply with the terms of the Romanian Minority Treaty, Liberals planned to annul Article 7.<sup>297</sup> A wave of antisemitic violence ensued across Romanian universities. Radical Romanian students viewed the annulment in apocalyptic terms as the end of the Romanian nation. “Up to now,” Codreanu wrote, “this article...constituted a real defense shield against the invasion and meddling of the Jews in the administration.”<sup>298</sup> Like National Democrats, Codreanu took Jews’ evil and imperialist intentions for granted. In Cluj, Moța called on student nationalists to rally behind the *numerus clausus*, a limit on Jews’ enrollment in institutions of higher education to reflect their share of the general population: “with Christian resignation we have tolerated being slapped...Now it is too much...Our *numerus clausus* is just and serves the development of Romanian society.”<sup>299</sup> Irina Livezeanu explains that there was a close connection between higher education and administrative jobs. From the radical students’ perspective, the Liberals’ decision to annul Article 7 had cheated them out of their futures and jeopardized Romanian interests.<sup>300</sup> In their eyes, the Liberals had made a Jewish takeover inevitable. Iași refused demands for a *numerus clausus*, which only reinforced belief in a Jewish and elitist conspiracy to oppress rural Romanians.<sup>301</sup>

In December 1922, Moța sent out a warning: “Jews around the world...[have] the same program...They covet for one purpose: to rule the whole world by enslaving Christians.”<sup>302</sup> Hanebrink writes that, for centuries, the paranoid belief that Jews “performed

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<sup>297</sup> Livezeanu, 248.

<sup>298</sup> Codreanu, 147.

<sup>299</sup> Moța, Ion. “Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress” *Dacia Nouă*, 23 December, 1922. Moța is referencing Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus advises Christians to respond to persecution not with revenge but more injury. He applies it to Romanians’ history of oppression.

<sup>300</sup> Codreanu, 147.

<sup>301</sup> Ioanid, 24.

<sup>302</sup> Moța, Ion. “Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress,” *Dacia Nouă*, December 23, 1922.

blood rituals,” “had murdered Christ,” and “sacrificed Christian children” had resurfaced periodically across Europe and was still present among some circles in the 1920s.<sup>303</sup> This version of religious antisemitism was powerful in the Romanian countryside, where religion was a philosophy of life.<sup>304</sup> Codreanu and Moța saw rural Romanians as everything good, whereas they saw Jews as everything bad; “a doctrine of greed and hate” supposedly constituted the core of their religious beliefs.<sup>305</sup> The Minority Treaty protected Romanian Jews’ right to preserve and develop their culture, which, to antisemites, allowed them to ruin Romanians’ Christian culture. This deterioration would ruin Romanians’ connection with God.

The convergence of religious antisemitism and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth fostered an apocalyptic worldview, according to which the imposition of the Minority Treaty signaled the advancement of evil. This worldview was further radicalized by Moța’s 1923 translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an antisemitic fabrication from imperial Russia that detailed “Jews’ concrete plans...[to conquer] the world.”<sup>306</sup> Codreanu feared not only Soviet irredentism, but also the “atheist[ic]” and “anti-family” characteristics of communism that he understood to contradict core components of Romanian culture.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, in interwar Romania, communism was seen as a concrete form of the Jewish danger and was commonly referred to as “the work of Lucifer.”<sup>308</sup> Since communism and Judaism both threatened Romanian culture, Codreanu defined them as the same: “when I say ‘communists’ I mean Jews.”<sup>309</sup> The evil influence of Jews and the atheism of communism, for Codreanu, went hand in hand.

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<sup>303</sup> Hanebrink, 30.

<sup>304</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 387.

<sup>305</sup> A.C. Cuza as cited in Clark, 25.

<sup>306</sup> Iordachi, 28.

<sup>307</sup> Ioanid, 102.

<sup>308</sup> Iordachi, 28.

<sup>309</sup> Codreanu, 354.

The Văcăresteni interpreted *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* through an Eastern Orthodox lens. They concluded that *The Protocols* mirrored the scripture of *The Book of Revelations* and that Jews were working to destroy Christendom.<sup>310</sup> In this perspective, Jews became a physical representation of evil. Codreanu believed that Jews were “breaking [Romanians’] ties with *heaven* and *land*...[by] promoting immorality and licentiousness,” damning the nation in the eyes of God.<sup>311</sup> By emancipating the Romanian Jewish community, through antisemitic and religious eyes, the Liberals had made the advancement of evil influences in Romania inevitable; without spiritual life, Codreanu feared, the nation would spiral into chaos. In Codreanu’s worldview, Romanians had been “betrayed” and “abandoned” by their political leaders. Without Article 7, they had been rendered defenseless against the “power [of] the Jewish community.”<sup>312</sup> Unlike Endecja, the radical Romanian students lacked political power, which only intensified their resentment of the inactive state and exacerbated their concerns. Since the state seemed indifferent to the impending Apocalypse and Romania’s re-enslavement to foreign powers, Romanian students resorted to direct action to create change.

In response to the imminent Minority Treaty, radical Romanian students turned to violence. Violence and intimidation became the students’ means of defense. In the spring of 1922, Codreanu rallied his followers to attack Jews, disrupt university lectures, and destroy Jewish property.<sup>313</sup> The following March, Romania officially adopted the Minority Treaty and modified its constitution. Devastated, Codreanu was also strengthened in his resolve. As he wrote, “Liberals...sealed a tombstone over the future of [the Romanian

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<sup>310</sup> Iordachi, 28.

<sup>311</sup> Codreanu, 166–167.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>313</sup> Clark, 43.

people]....[and] committed an act of national betrayal” by selling the country to Jews.<sup>314</sup> In August, Codreanu met Moța for the first time, who introduced the idea of killing traitorous politicians and wealthy Jews. They based their ethics on the dual role of the Archangel Michael “– the one with the fiery sword!”<sup>315</sup> Chapter 1 established that the Văcăreșteni manipulated trials to showcase themselves as heroes and win support, which Codreanu used to establish a new basis of legitimacy. The heroization of the Văcăreșteni as modern day *haiduci* and protectors of Christianity encouraged their violence.<sup>316</sup>

In 1927, the Văcăreșteni established the Legion of the Archangel Michael as a crusade of God’s chosen soldiers with the holy mission of defending Romania.<sup>317</sup> Codreanu established the Legion as a radical, apolitical, and fascist organization devoted above all to action, which included violence, to protect Romanians. Brustein argues that modernization fueled antisemitism in places where Jews were entrenched in the middle class: “in Bucharest alone, Jews were believed to comprise nearly 80% of employees of banks and commercial enterprises.”<sup>318</sup> Growing economic disparities between the cities and the countryside further radicalized Legionaries’ antisemitism. As production in the cities grew throughout the 1920s, peasants suffered from an inadequate sanitation system and widespread shortages.<sup>319</sup> Legionaries devoted themselves to helping peasants with chores, building houses, and raising money, but also encouraged peasants to carry out pogroms against their Jewish neighbors.<sup>320</sup> Although the Romanian government largely ignored the Minority Treaty, its imposition planted in radical students’ antisemitic minds the idea that Jews were all powerful, united, and devoted to destroying Romania, and, by extension,

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<sup>314</sup> Codreanu, 148.

<sup>315</sup> Codreanu as cited in Iordachi, 24.

<sup>316</sup> Livezeanu, 286.

<sup>317</sup> Rusu, 264.

<sup>318</sup> Brustein, 696.

<sup>319</sup> Ioanid, 27.

<sup>320</sup> Clark, 85–86.

Christendom.<sup>321</sup>

In both Romania and Poland, radical Romanian students and National Democrats became radicalized as a response to perceived Jewish power. Brustein argues that during the interwar years, antisemitism increased in areas where Jews were overrepresented in the middle class, where Judaism was connected with communism, and where economic deterioration occurred.<sup>322</sup> In Romania and Poland, Jews continued to be overrepresented in certain professions. After World War One, both Romania and Poland's rural population suffered; Brustein argues that "the losers in the process of modernization" – such as young university students – "tended to harbor the strongest anti-Semitic beliefs."<sup>323</sup> Jewish social mobility and participation in politics exacerbated antisemites' fears, which reinforced their antisemitism. The Minority Treaties, from the antisemitic perspective, had given primacy to Jews, rendered Romania and Poland "'unrealized' nation-states," and thus made them vulnerable to more powerful and revisionist neighbors.<sup>324</sup>

Furthermore, the Legionaries' lack of state power radicalized their apocalyptic, religious worldview. Poland and Romania's governments responded differently to the Minority Treaties. Endecja used all legal and political means to exclude Jews from society.<sup>325</sup> But in Romania, the Liberal Party was virtually all-powerful until 1927. Liberals were interested not in addressing the rural population's problems but in maintaining the traditional feudal system.<sup>326</sup> Governmental corruption and the perceived power of Jews pushed radical Romanian students toward violence and fascism. "Fascism," Codreanu wrote, meant "the elimination of the dangers threatening the Romanian people, namely, the

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<sup>321</sup> Ioanid, 143.

<sup>322</sup> Brustein, 694.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>324</sup> Brubaker, 79.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>326</sup> Hitchins, 381; Ioanid, 26.



removal of the Jewish threat and opening a free way to the life and glory to which Romanians are entitled to aspire.”<sup>327</sup> Griffin writes that fascism had a utopian and revolutionary quality; it aspired to overthrow old ideologies, perceived as corrupt and decadent, and replace it with heroism and national greatness.<sup>328</sup> Legionaries envisioned that fascism would not only cleanse Romania of Jews’ evil and Satanic influences, but also destroy its corrupt political system and reignite a moral and religious revival.

Although the threat of Jewish colonization fueled National Democrats’ anxieties, National Democrats’ access to state power slowed the party’s radicalization because they could introduce measures to limit Jews’ influence. For the first half of the 1920s, Endecja remained a large Polish political party, one of the most powerful.<sup>329</sup> Furthermore, many National Democratic politicians stood firmly behind parliamentary democracy as long as it prioritized Polish interests.<sup>330</sup> Yet when National Democratic leaders opportunistically exploited the election of Narutowicz to advance the conspiracy of a Jewish takeover, they unintentionally laid the foundations for Endecja’s radicalization. In 1922, National Democratic university students already exhibited an apocalyptic worldview more similar to Codreanu than Dmowski.<sup>331</sup> By claiming that Jews could exploit Poland’s political system, National Democratic leaders turned younger members toward fascism. If parliamentary politics could not ensure Polish interests, then it was a bad system.

But how did National Democrats and Legionaries justify their violence? Robert Paxton notes that the Legion was “the most ecstatically religious of all fascist parties and one of the readiest to murder Jews and bourgeois politicians.”<sup>332</sup> The Christian doctrines of

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<sup>327</sup> Codreanu, 110.

<sup>328</sup> Griffin, 70.

<sup>329</sup> Porter, 2014, 96.

<sup>330</sup> Brykczyński, 46.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>332</sup> Paxton, 97.

*love thy neighbor* and forgiveness, however, condemned violence. How did Legionaries reconcile their violence with Christian principles? Although National Democrats introduced antisemitic, discriminatory policies against Jews, Dmowski and senior members continued to warn against violence.<sup>333</sup> Why did National Democrats condone antisemitic violence when it did happen?

### The Myth of Self-Defense

In November 1923, Moța wrote that “we [Romanian students] cannot obey [our Christian] teachings any better than by fighting to morally uplift the nation.”<sup>334</sup> Although Legionary ideology was infused with Eastern Orthodoxy, Legionaries twisted it to justify their violence. Moța claimed that the Christian principle of “love thy neighbor” applied only to “one’s own” people.<sup>335</sup> Additionally, early on, Romanian nationalism had become identical to economic and religious antisemitism; to be a Romanian patriot meant to stand against those who exploited one’s people and God’s enemies – who, for Legionaries, were Jews.<sup>336</sup> Both Codreanu and Moța argued that Romanians had been too tolerant; a virtue, tolerance nonetheless put the fate of the nation and Christendom at risk. Therefore, radical action had to be taken.<sup>337</sup> Codreanu blended Christian forgiveness with an ethos of martial mercilessness:

Do not confuse the Christian right and duty of forgiving those who wronged you, with the right and duty of our people to punish those who have betrayed it and assumed for themselves the responsibility to oppose its destiny. Do not forget that the swords you have put on belong to the nation. You carry them in her name. In her name you will use them for punishment – unforgiving and unmerciful.<sup>338</sup>

Basing its ethics on the dual role of the Archangel Michael, the Legion fashioned

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<sup>333</sup> Wilicki, 29, 31.

<sup>334</sup> Moța, Ion, “The Need for Radical Nationalism,” *Dacia Nouă*, November 20, 1923.

<sup>335</sup> Moța, Ion. “Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress,” *Dacia Nouă*, December 23, 1922.

<sup>336</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>337</sup> Moța, Ion, “The Need for Radical Nationalism,” *Dacia Nouă*, November 20, 1923.

<sup>338</sup> Codreanu, 434.

itself as the protector of Romanian and Christian interests.<sup>339</sup> It not only promoted rural and Christian virtues, but sought actively to purify the nation of everything that threatened it. Legionaries deemed both allegedly traitorous politicians and Jews responsible for rendering rural Romanians defenseless against exploitation and degrading influences.<sup>340</sup> Legionaries' worldview was Manichean; there existed only good and evil. Whereas rural Romanians were virtuous and good, Jews and corrupt politicians were evil. The Legion claimed that politicians were traitors and excluded them from the Legionary interpretation of the nation. Excluded from the nation, they became an enemy.<sup>341</sup>

For Legionaries, violence was justifiable if it protected the nation. Shunning traditional legal authority, they appealed to the transcendent principles of natural law. They argued that they had a moral duty to disobey constitutional law because it did not promote the common good and had been imposed unfairly on Romanians.<sup>342</sup> As Moța declared, "we are duty-bound to defend our peasant mothers, children, and parents who sent us to school to do good for the country...Our morality owes us this cleansing, it even demands it of us. Heaven is with us! So our actions are morally just."<sup>343</sup> By appealing to a higher authority, Legionaries freed their violence from the constraints of man-made law. As Romanian patriots, Legionaries were duty-bound to protect the nation from enemies that sought to exploit and steal it; as Christians in the image of Archangel Michael, Legionaries were duty-bound to defend Christendom from evil and strike down its enemies.<sup>344</sup>

According to National Democrats' Social Darwinist worldview, all methods were

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<sup>339</sup> Iordachi, 26.

<sup>340</sup> Article 1, "Tratatul Privind Minoritățile. 9 Dec 1919 [Treaty on Minorities, Dec 9, 1919]."

<sup>341</sup> Ioanid, 148.

<sup>342</sup> "BRIA 22 4 c St. Thomas Aquinas Natural Law and the Common Good." *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, [www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-22-4-c-st-thomas-aquinas-natural-law-and-the-common-good](http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-22-4-c-st-thomas-aquinas-natural-law-and-the-common-good).

<sup>343</sup> Moța, Ion. "Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress," *Dacia Nouă*, December 23, 1922.

<sup>344</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 368.

just in a war-of-all-against-all because all nations acted in self-defense.<sup>345</sup> According to Balicki's *National Egoism and Ethics*, "success in the struggle for survival" was the only standard for judging actions committed in a war-of-all-against-all.<sup>346</sup> In Dmowski's view, only a "healthy, strong [nation]" could survive against other powerful civilizations.<sup>347</sup> Upon Poland's restoration, the country immediately found itself threatened by powerful neighbors, Germany and the Soviet Union. National Democrats viewed Jews as an ethnic, cultural, and ideological pollution; they prevented the consolidation of Poles and spread harmful ideologies.<sup>348</sup> In a world where international relations were defined by strength and weakness, National Democrats considered only *Poles'* survival imperative and determined that Poland had a right to defend itself. For this reason, they largely ignored the Minority Treaty and introduced antisemitic legislation to restrict Jews' opportunities. Unlike Legionaries, National Democrats appealed not to a higher morality, but to the logic of Social Darwinism.

Leading National Democrats preferred economic boycotts to antisemitic violence. Dmowski insisted that for Poles to be able to survive, they had to think strategically about their actions. Dmowski considered economic boycotts against Jewish businesses a "nonviolent, civilized means of inter-ethnic struggle."<sup>349</sup> Additionally, limiting Jews' economic opportunities undermined their position in the economy while simultaneously promoting a Polish middle class. "Our goal is not to oust the Jews altogether," explained the National Democrat Jozef Kruszyński, "but [to reduce] their number" by encouraging emigration.<sup>350</sup> National Democrats used this logic in the aftermath of President

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<sup>345</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 12.

<sup>346</sup> Porter, 2002, 217.

<sup>347</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 46.

<sup>348</sup> Krzywiec, 277.

<sup>349</sup> Wilicki, 28–29.

<sup>350</sup> Bergmann, 319.

Narutowicz's assassination; by politically disenfranchising Jews, National Democrats could ensure Polish hegemony. From this perspective, antisemitic violence was less effective in achieving Polish goals – it accomplished little on the grand scale. But National Democrats did not disavow violence completely and readily exploited it to advance their goals.

For some members of Endecja, Narutowicz's election signaled the decay of Poland. After the results were announced, National Democratic university students beat up “anyone who did not take their hat off quickly enough at the sight of the patriotic procession,” which bore a striking similarity to Codreanu's gang in Iași.<sup>351</sup> Brykczyński writes that “the youth of [Endecja], with its quasi-military organization and an apocalyptic vision of the struggle between the nation and its enemies, were not dissimilar from their fascist counterparts in Italy.”<sup>352</sup> However, young National Democrats could still ground their justification in original National Democratic theory. According to Dmowski, a Pole had a duty to stand by Poland “through greatness” and “humiliation.”<sup>353</sup> A Pole had the duty to defend Poland above all else. Like senior National Democrats, younger members rooted their justification in Balicki's theory of survival; people's actions could be measured only by their “commitment to the nation,” not by moral notions of right and wrong.<sup>354</sup> For Social Darwinists, violence, conquest, and expulsion were justifiable parts of self-defense.<sup>355</sup> In a war-of-all-against-all, there was no moral superiority, only survival.

In interwar Poland and Romania, antisemitism was intimately connected with nationalist anxieties that the nation was weak and native interests had not been realized.<sup>356</sup>

For Dmowski and Codreanu, the Minority Treaty had threatened Poles and Romanians by

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<sup>351</sup> Brykczyński, 26.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>353</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 16.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>356</sup> Clark, 15; Brubaker, 79.

giving priority to Jews. This made Romanians and Poles vulnerable to powerful and irredentist neighbors, degrading cultural influences, and a supposed international Jewish conspiracy. Therefore, Dmowski and Codreanu saw it as imperative that Poles and Romanians take up arms and protect their hegemony, nation, and existence. The response of radical Romanian students and National Democrats to the Minority Treaties was not unique, but it was not universal across the European Right. In Bulgaria, Christian Bulgarians comprised a majority of the middle class, had served as intermediaries between the elite and peasantry, and made up the backbone of the Communist Party.<sup>357</sup> Thus, economic antisemitism and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth did not become as pervasive in Bulgaria as in Romania and Poland. In Romania and Poland, Jews' vulnerable position made them ideal scapegoats and the object of violence.

Both Endecja and the Romanian student movement radicalized in reaction to the imposition of the Minority Treaty, but Endecja radicalized more gradually – for two reasons. First, senior National Democrats lacked the Văcărești's apocalyptic worldview. In the Legion, the Judeo-Bolshevik myth and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* converged in a belief that international Jewry had usurped world power and was carrying out Satan's orders.<sup>358</sup> Therefore, it was imperative that Romanians organize themselves as an army of God to fight back. Unlike Legionaries, senior National Democrats separated their nationalism from their faith. Legionaries used their faith to justify their violence, whereas National Democrats argued that conflict was a natural part of existence.<sup>359</sup> Additionally, most National Democratic leaders lacked the vision and charisma necessary for charismatic leadership roles.<sup>360</sup> Senior National Democrats were too legalistic and too rational to laud

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<sup>357</sup> Brustein, 695.

<sup>358</sup> Iordachi, 28.

<sup>359</sup> Porter, 2002, 221. See Porter for more information regarding the separation of Christian morality from nationalism and national struggle.

<sup>360</sup> Brykczyński, 43.

violence and steer the party toward fascism.

Second, National Democrats had political power, whereas the Legion did not. Without access to state power, Legionaries turned to violence as a method of self-defense and as an outlet for their frustrations.<sup>361</sup> Since they could not create change through conventional politics, they would through direct action. National Democrats, in contrast, were able to introduce some anti-Jewish legislation to limit the threat posed by the Jewish community. Therefore, they had less reason to normalize violence.<sup>362</sup> But there was a growing divide in Endecja, and not all members shared the senior leaders' perspective.

As Brykczyński writes, the different approaches of National Democratic leaders and regular members to ethnic conflict highlighted “the protesters’ fascist sympathies” and a growing “cleavage in the National Democratic movement.”<sup>363</sup> Like Codreanu, young National Democrats saw the world through a Manichean lens that justified violence. The lack of ideological unity in Endecja emphasizes the generational divide between fascists and their more conservative seniors. After World War One, the younger and older generations did not share the same worldview. This generational divide was not limited to the Romanian and Polish Right, but characterized the European Right as a whole.<sup>364</sup> Liberalism and conservatism had, in the younger generation’s perspective, failed to realize and ensure Polish and Romanian interests. Thus, young and radical Romanians and Poles turned to fascism.<sup>365</sup> Although the Minority Treaties had shattered the younger generation’s hopes of ethnic hegemony, social mobility, and prosperity, they taught young radicals that the world was ruthless; Poles and Romanians had to be just as unrelenting to protect

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<sup>361</sup> Clark, 31.

<sup>362</sup> Brykczyński, 47.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>364</sup> Paxton, 62.

<sup>365</sup> Griffin, 70.

themselves.<sup>366</sup> This perspective set a dangerous precedent for the next fifteen years, especially in Romania; Legionaries did not hold themselves to man-made law. A Legionary fought to protect the nation and Christendom. Above all, however, a Legionary fought for the sake of achieving Romania's historic destiny, the redemption of the nation before God on Judgement Day.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Iordachi, 26.

<sup>367</sup> Codreanu, 284.



### Chapter III: Tribulation: Sacrifice, Suffering & Martyrdom

*“Gods if we were descended from / A death we are still owing / It makes no difference if you die / Young men or hunch-backed old / But it is not the same to die / A lion or a chained slave.”*

– George Coșbuc<sup>368</sup>

In November 1931, National Democratic students at Stefan Batory University in Vilnius called on Poles to “defend Poland against the destruction of Jewish expansion.”<sup>369</sup> On November 8, antisemitic riots erupted. National Democratic students barred Jewish students from class, chased them, and beat them up, demanding “a numerus clausus!”<sup>370</sup> Only one student died – Stanisław Waclawski, a first-year law student and a National Democrat. The nationalist press hailed him as a martyr who had died for the “dejudaization” of Polish universities.<sup>371</sup> The antisemitic riots and calls for national defense paralleled the demands and riots that the Văcăreșteni had led at Romanian universities a decade prior. The violence of the students and rhetoric of the nationalist press also highlight a core component of fascism – the exaltation of violence and sacrifice.<sup>372</sup>

Although Endecja and the Legion both valued sacrifice, a cult of death emerged only in the Legion. Indeed, Griffin claims that Legionaries created a death cult “unparalleled in other fascist movements.”<sup>373</sup> Why did martyrdom become prevalent in the Legion, but not in Endecja? This chapter argues that Codreanu and Dmowski demanded different forms of sacrifice: whereas Dmowski demanded the sacrifice of individual interests to national ones, Codreanu demanded that Legionaries be ready to martyr

<sup>368</sup> As cited in Iordachi, 27. The Legion published this excerpt of Coșbuc’s poem, which glorifies sacrifice, in the first edition of their newspaper *Pământul Strămoșesc* in 1927.

<sup>369</sup> Aleksiun, Natalia. “Studenci z Pałkami: Rozruchy Antyżydowskie Na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie [Students with Sticks: Anti-Jewish Riots at Stefan Batory University in Vilnius].” *Pogromy Żydów Na Ziemiach Polskich w XIX i XX Wieku*, vol. 2, 2019. *Studia Przypadków (Do 1939 Roku)* pp. 327–369, 333.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>371</sup> Michlic, 127.

<sup>372</sup> Paxton, 84–85.

<sup>373</sup> Griffin, 181.

themselves.<sup>374</sup> National Democrats, as proponents of Social Darwinism, rejected Legionaries' self-sacrificial fanaticism, emphasizing instead the importance of collective struggle, national unity, and concrete goals in making Poland stronger.<sup>375</sup> Why did Codreanu demand self-sacrifice from his followers? Griffin argues that for fascists, the myth of rebirth creates a perception of living through a turning point in modern history, a moment when the old and decadent world begins to submit to the ascendance of a new and heroic one.<sup>376</sup> Fascists perceived themselves as the revolutionaries leading this revolution. They were prepared to suffer and kill because, as Griffin argues, it was not the feasibility of fascists' goals that inspired millions, but rather fascism's "*mythic power*."<sup>377</sup> Codreanu declared the Legion's goal to be a national resurrection on Judgement Day, which would usher in an era of prosperity and justice for all Romanians. The National Democrats' Social Darwinism, on the other hand, impeded the advocacy of such myths. Even after Dmowski turned Endecja into a semi-fascist party in 1926, rationalist thinking prevented National Democrats from glamorizing death and creating a mobilizing myth.<sup>378</sup> In the Legion, however, a Legionary's death became glorified as "the most sacred among sacred deaths."<sup>379</sup> Basing their interpretation of rebirth on the resurrection of Christ, Legionaries saw martyrdom as essential.<sup>380</sup>

### Social Darwinism in Endecja

National Democrats rejected Romantic nineteenth-century theories which held that Poles had a predetermined future, and that if Poles suffered enough for their country, God

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<sup>374</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 57; Codreanu, 385.

<sup>375</sup> Porter, 2002, 160.

<sup>376</sup> Griffin, 70.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>378</sup> Wilicki, 31.

<sup>379</sup> Moța, Ion, "Its Spasm and Conclusion," Petru Maior Student Center, 1928.

<sup>380</sup> Moța, Ion. "Essential? April, 1 1935" in Moța & Marin, 95.

would forgive them and Poland would be reborn.<sup>381</sup> According to this interpretation, suffering and sacrifice were preconditions for Polish independence, which inspired multiple failed insurrections against Russian and German rule. During the January Uprising of 1863, hundreds of thousands of Poles took up arms against Russian rule. But by mid-1864, Russian authorities had won, having cracked down on all forms of Polish resistance, and unleashed a brutal denationalization campaign.<sup>382</sup> The January Uprising was supposed to be the moment of salvation, the culmination of Poles' efforts for freedom, but it resulted only in disparaged ideals, beliefs, and hopes about Poles' destiny. The Polish backlash to the German and Russian denationalization campaigns, however, was so intense that they paradoxically advanced the cause of nationalism and confirmed Dmowski's belief that all social relations were defined by violent struggles to assert power.<sup>383</sup> Unlike Romantics, National Democrats rooted Poles' struggle for survival in a new, popular theory called Social Darwinism, which theorized that a struggle for survival defined all social relationships.<sup>384</sup>

Rejecting the utopian visions of their Romantic predecessors, National Democrats grounded Polish national ambitions in self-interest and political realism. They claimed that the Romantic values of international brotherhood and justice hampered Polish interests; Poles had to be unified and selfish in order to survive because in relationships among groups the collective interest took precedence over all.<sup>385</sup> By being selfish, Poles could maximize their interests and make the Polish nation stronger. As Dmowski wrote, "in relations with other nations there is neither right nor wrong, there is only strength and

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<sup>381</sup> Porter, 2002, 192.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>383</sup> Porter, 2014, 27.

<sup>384</sup> Porter, 2002, 157.

<sup>385</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 9, 20.

weakness.”<sup>386</sup> For him, survival required Poles to be practical. He argued in 1909 that “national thought, if it is to be healthy, cannot feed on fantasies but must take its nourishment from everyday experience.”<sup>387</sup> To become a strong nation, Poles could not cling to fantasies such as destiny; unity, justice, and national independence would not happen on their own. Rather, National Democrats argued, Poles had to create their future by enforcing unity and devising a concrete path to independence.<sup>388</sup> Dmowski also encouraged Poles to think pragmatically about the future, arguing that national independence would not solve all of their issues:

The role of the nation does not end with the moment of its independence – this moment is only a stage in the ongoing process of labor and battle, which all the time requires new tools and weapons. The role of an individual is not limited to fighting for freedom – his main objective becomes to widen the domain of national life, multiply its material and spiritual assets, and win for it the highest possible place in the ranks of nations.<sup>389</sup>

National Democratic ideology inhibited the spread of myths like national rebirth, because for *Endecja*, the struggle for survival was explicitly non-teleological.<sup>390</sup> For National Democrats, state independence was only one means of national development in Poles’ ongoing battle for survival – there was no end except extinction. In this ongoing fight, Poles had to be politically active, fully dedicated to the realization of Polish interests. Politically active Poles, Dmowski contended, “constitute the true power of the nation” because, by working together, they could modernize the Polish community and realize Polish interests, lifting Poles up to stand alongside great civilizations such as France and

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<sup>386</sup> Dmowski as cited in Porter, 2002, 10.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>388</sup> Dabrowski, 93.

<sup>389</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 56–57.

<sup>390</sup> Porter, 2002, 197.

England.<sup>391</sup> In 1925, Dmowski reminded his followers that “we do not have independence because somebody declared it,” but because Poles had worked together for it.<sup>392</sup>

National Democrats demanded that Poles sacrifice their individual interests because their strategy of survival depended on the unity and commitment of the entire nation.<sup>393</sup> Although National Democrats rejected past insurrectionists’ suicidal patriotism, which they saw as irrational, they equated collective struggle with patriotism. National Democrats considered it a duty to serve the nation. If Poles were not unified and committed to the national interest, Dmowski worried, the nation would become vulnerable to more robust nations: a Pole had to have “an exclusive attachment to his society, to its culture, to its spirit, and fuse them with his interests.”<sup>394</sup> Just as National Democrats believed it was necessary to create the future, they tried to enforce national unity. To accomplish this task, Dmowski tried to subjugate the individual to the nation by recasting patriotism in terms of national interests.<sup>395</sup> The subjugation of the individual created social unity, mobilized Poles, and prioritized the national interest.<sup>396</sup> Sacrificing individual interests for national ones was a way for Poles to contribute to their country’s development, greatness, and survival. As such, National Democrats argued, it was the greatest form of patriotism.

#### Sacrificial Patriotism & Fatalism in the Legion

Unlike National Democrats, Legionaries fully embraced Romanians’ history of revolt. Amidst a cycle of violence between the state and Legionaries in 1932, the Legionary Ernest Bernea declared that “the fight of the [Legion]...is nothing other than continuing the

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<sup>391</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 94.

<sup>392</sup> Dmowski, 1925, 122 This quote was simultaneously a nod toward the National Democratic approach to national independence and a jab at Piłsudski’s path. Whereas National Democrats had spent the war negotiating Poland’s independence, Piłsudski had first tried to organize an insurrection against the Russian Empire and then joined the Austrians in fighting against Russia.

<sup>393</sup> Dabrowski, 87.

<sup>394</sup> Dmowski, 1902, 56.

<sup>395</sup> Dabrowski, 105.

<sup>396</sup> Porter, 2014, 99.

good traditions and all the virtues of our people in conformity with the current historical moment.”<sup>397</sup> Romanians’ history, like that of Poles, was marked by uprisings against Ottoman and Habsburg rule. Legionaries had grown up on the stories of tragedy-fated freedom fighters like Michael the Brave, Vasile Ursu Nicola, Avram Iancu, and Tudor Vladimirescu, who had fought to unify the Romanian principalities and free them from oppressive rule. During rituals and religious ceremonies, Legionaries revered them as saints who had sacrificed themselves for the good of the nation.<sup>398</sup> As the Legionary Grigore Cristescu declared in 1928, “we are called to interpret the profound meaning of sacrifices of yesterday in order to make ourselves worthy of carrying out all the sacrifices that are required of us today.”<sup>399</sup> Cristescu’s quote highlights another fascist practice, the immortalization of the nation. During the interwar period fascists such as Codreanu claimed that the nation was an immortal “historical entity,” composed of all members of the national community, living, dead, and not yet alive.<sup>400</sup> The immortalization of the nation allowed Legionaries to affirm the supposed continuity of the nation and to place themselves in a pantheon of national heroes.<sup>401</sup>

Insurrectionary patriotism became infused with sacrificial overtones during the Romanian War of Independence (1877–1878) against the Ottoman Empire and again in World War One. As Mihai Rusu writes, Romanian soldiers’ deaths at the hands of Turkish troops were rendered as sacrifices “on the altar of Romania’s independence.”<sup>402</sup> This interpretation of a Romanian soldier’s death laid the groundwork for the emergence of palingenetic nationalism. Orthodox priests reinforced sacrificial and palingenetic patriotism

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<sup>397</sup> Ernest Bernea as cited in Clark, 195.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>400</sup> Codreanu, 4, 392.

<sup>401</sup> Clark, 196.

<sup>402</sup> Rusu, 250.

during World War One by encouraging Romanians to throw themselves into the fires of war. Orthodox priests sacralized death by insisting that soldiers had been granted salvation in the afterlife for sacrificing themselves for the good of the nation.<sup>403</sup> The claim that patriots could be rewarded in death for the defense of national ideas was particularly influential on Moța, the son of an Orthodox priest. Indeed, in Codreanu and Moța's eyes, sacrificial death was not only an old tradition and the highest form of patriotism, but also a gateway to salvation.<sup>404</sup> Drawing on the immortalization of the nation, Legionaries perceived themselves as the heirs of Romanian freedom fighters and soldiers' sacrifices and vowed to carry on their fight.



An illustration from the Legionary periodical *Buna Vestire*, 1935. It shows an angel granting fallen Legionaries the salvation of their souls. In the back, Archangel Michael holds a sword and shield with the Legionary cross.<sup>405</sup>

<sup>403</sup> Rusu, p. 250; Griffin, 181.

<sup>404</sup> Ioanid, 112.

<sup>405</sup> As cited in Mota & Marin, 63.

Legionaries intertwined sacrificial patriotism with a Christian philosophy of history to frame sacrificial violence as both a patriotic and Christian duty.<sup>406</sup> Several scholars have argued that *The Book of Revelations* provided Legionaries with an interpretive framework into which to cast their own visions of apocalypse, doctrine of salvation, and hopes of change.<sup>407</sup> Unlike National Democrats, Codreanu and Moța insisted that Romanians had a special, God-given destiny. As Codreanu described it:

There will come a time when all peoples of the earth shall be resurrected, with all their dead and all their kings and emperors, each people having its place before God's throne. This is the final moment, 'the resurrection from the dead' is the noblest and most sublime one toward which a people can rise...[T]o us Romanians, to our people, as to any other people in the world, God has given a mission, a historic destiny. The first law that a person must follow is that of going on the path of this destiny, accomplishing its entrusted mission.<sup>408</sup>

Codreanu saw Romania's destiny as a national resurrection on Judgement Day, which would result in an era of justice and prosperity for all Romanians. Yet he also warned that God would punish nations that had betrayed their purpose. As Horia Sima, Codreanu's successor, explained, "the same Divine principle gives breath" to both the nation and the individual, and so "their ultimate goals do not differ."<sup>409</sup> Like individuals, the Romanian nation had to prove its worthiness of salvation before God. For this reason, Romania's rampant political corruption and deepening economic crises fostered an increasingly apocalyptic worldview: if Romanians did not prove themselves worthy of salvation, God would damn the nation and deprive it of national sovereignty.<sup>410</sup> Although Romania's industrial sectors boomed – the country took sixth place among the world's oil producers in 1930 – the rural population suffered.<sup>411</sup> The government's fiscal and economic policies

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<sup>406</sup> Iordachi, 84.

<sup>407</sup> Rusu, 264.

<sup>408</sup> Codreanu, 395–396.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>411</sup> Hitchins, 354.



prevented many peasants from improving their living standards.<sup>412</sup> Thus, the Văcărești became convinced that Romania had entered a state of decay and moral crisis, and it could be saved only if Romanians remained true to their Orthodox traditions and the nation's rural character.<sup>413</sup> Legionaries believed that it fell to them to redeem the nation before God. By intertwining fatalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and sacrificial patriotism, Moța and Codreanu laid the groundwork for the glorification of sacrifice and martyrdom.<sup>414</sup>

National Democrats' non-teleological worldview inhibited the popularization of sacrificial death, whereas Legionaries' fatalist mindset pushed members toward it. National Democrats' pragmatism and rationalism conflicted sharply with the revolutionary and utopian myths that fascists used to retain members' intensity of commitment.<sup>415</sup> Italian fascism propagated the myth of reviving the Roman Empire; German Nazism propagated the myth of a new German empire, the Third Reich; Romanian Legionarism propagated the myth of "national resurrection in the name of Jesus Christ!"<sup>416</sup> For National Democrats, however, there was no grand myth, because a war-of-all-against-all was perpetual. Indeed, the mythic and charismatic aspect of fascism conflicted with National Democrats' rationalism.<sup>417</sup>

Furthermore, the revolutionary pulse of fascism threatened National Democrats' preference for stability, order, and unification.<sup>418</sup> They believed that it was their job to keep order and quell revolutionary elements. In 1925, Dmowski criticized Piłsudski and his followers for exposing the youth to "the cult of the insurrections," which, according to

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<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>413</sup> Hitchins, 316.

<sup>414</sup> Rusu, 256.

<sup>415</sup> Sorel, xiii Sorel argues that myths have massive power in inspiring movements. His notion of the power of the myth inspired socialists, anarchists, Marxists, and fascists.

<sup>416</sup> Codreanu as cited in Nagy-Talavera, 377; Griffin, 56, 182.

<sup>417</sup> Brykczynski, 138.

<sup>418</sup> Wilicki, 25.

Dmowski, threatened healthy national thought.<sup>419</sup> Legionaries, on the other hand, perceived themselves as revolutionaries: “We are soldiers of the revolution that is starting...We die in battle, or we emerge victorious! These are the only gates open to us.”<sup>420</sup> For Legionaries, violence was a necessary and healthy part of the regenerative process, through which society could be born anew.<sup>421</sup> The myth of an ideal future under fascism reinforced Legionaries’ worldview and commitment to Codreanu and his goals – an ethical, spiritual, and moral transformation of Romanian society.<sup>422</sup> Disgusted with the corruption and elitism of traditional politics, they wanted to overthrow the old system, and establish themselves as a new moral and spiritual elite that could pioneer this revolution.<sup>423</sup>

Although Social Darwinism inhibited the spread of palingenetic nationalism in Endecja, National Democratic ideology nevertheless laid the foundations for a shift toward fascism. For senior National Democrats, nations and civilization – like species and racial types – were subject to a cycle of circular development: birth, growth, extinction.<sup>424</sup> Grzegorz Krzywiec explains that “extinction,” according to the National Democratic perspective, “was meant to be preceded by an extended stage of crisis and degeneration.”<sup>425</sup> As *The Book of Revelations* provided Legionaries with an interpretive framework, Social Darwinism gave National Democrats a foundation for interpreting Poland’s economic, political, and social crises through a radical lens.<sup>426</sup>

Now we will examine how National Democrats and Legionaries reacted to two crises – Piłsudski’s 1926 coup against the National Democratic government and the

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<sup>419</sup> Dmowski as cited in Dabrowski, 104.

<sup>420</sup> Moța, Ion. “Un Cumplit și Scump Angajament [A Terrible and Costly Commitment].” *Cuvântul studențesc*, December 10, 1923.

<sup>421</sup> Griffin, 64.

<sup>422</sup> Sorel, 24.

<sup>423</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>424</sup> Krzywiec, 277.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>426</sup> Brykczyński, 46.

Romanian government's suppression of the Legion in 1931. The Romanian government's wave of persecution and Piłsudski's coup radicalized the Legion and Endecja. But unlike Legionaries, National Democrats still did not fully embrace violence or glamorize suffering and self-sacrifice.

### The 1926 May Coup

As a result of Piłsudski's coup against the National Democratic government in May 1926, Endecja entered a new stage of its radicalization. In 1923, Endecja had gained direct power as a member of the ruling coalition with the Piast and Christian Democrats, two center-right parties. Endecja used its power to launch a nationalization campaign to exclude Jews and other ethnic minorities from Polish society.<sup>427</sup> Piłsudski was so outraged that he resigned as Chief of the General Staff in 1923, refusing to defend "the very same people by whom our president was murdered."<sup>428</sup> The coalition reassumed power in May 1926. This time, Piłsudski refused to stand by. He launched a coup, brought down the government, ended the parliamentary system, and seized power for himself.<sup>429</sup> Although Endecja remained a legal oppositional party, it was deprived of its political power, and subsequent elections were manipulated in Piłsudski's favor.<sup>430</sup> This sudden deprivation of power radicalized National Democrats. At the end of the year, Dmowski responded to the coup by establishing the Camp of Greater Poland (OWP), a disciplined and strictly hierarchical organization based on the Italian fascist model.<sup>431</sup>

By 1926, Dmowski had grown increasingly disillusioned with liberal democracy and intrigued by Italian fascism. It is important to note that the original inspiration for

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<sup>427</sup> Peled, 66.

<sup>428</sup> Brykczyński, 142.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. Endecja remained a legal opposition party, but the Parliament was turned into the arm of Piłsudski's government.

<sup>430</sup> Porter, 2014, 92.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

National Democratic ideology was England, not Italy. At the turn of the twentieth century, Dmowski had admired England “for embodying egoism, for negating in its actions humanitarian principles, for working only for itself.”<sup>432</sup> By focusing exclusively on English interests, England had made itself one of the world’s greatest nations and strongest international powers. By 1926, however, Dmowski’s opinion had changed. He saw European civilization as in a state of crisis, with only Italy having managed to rise above it by creating a robust state.<sup>433</sup> In a letter to his acquaintance Enrico Corradini, a prominent Italian nationalist, Dmowski wrote that “it is my opinion that we are witnessing the beginning of a great crisis in European history...The turn is again coming of those nations brought up by the Catholic Church.... It is your role, the role of Italy, to stand at the head of the new Europe or rather the old Europe which is moving to establish its supremacy.”<sup>434</sup> In his perspective, liberal democracy had failed in Poland; it had not created order. Italy had shown Dmowski that for a nation to become great, political hierarchies, respect for tradition and faith, and the prioritization of the state before individuals were all necessary; a polity had to rest on lasting and stable foundations or it would be threatened with extinction.<sup>435</sup> Piłsudski’s coup only reinforced Dmowski’s belief in the Italian model.

Piłsudski’s coup, combined with National Democrats’ sudden loss of power, fueled the rise of antisemitism and fascism in Endecja. Since the early 1900s, National Democrats feared a Jewish takeover of the state; the election of President Narutowicz in December 1922 by the Polish Left and national minorities and Piłsudski’s coup against a National

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<sup>432</sup> Dmowski as cited in Porter, 2002, 195.

<sup>433</sup> Polonsky, Antony. “Roman Dmowski and Italian Fascism.” *Ideas into Politics: Aspects of European History, 1880-1950*, 1984, pp. 130–146, 136.

<sup>434</sup> Dmowski as cited in Polonsky, 136.

<sup>435</sup> Polonsky, 141; Krzywiec, 243.

Democratic government reinforced this belief.<sup>436</sup> Dmowski held international Jewry responsible for Piłsudski's coup:

We know that the goal of international Jewry...was to prevent the establishment of a Polish political system...With the creation of a governing majority capable of beginning a rapid evolution in a national direction, the democratic order lost its value. It was necessary to overthrow it.<sup>437</sup>

In other words, Dmowski believed that Jews had ordered Piłsudski to launch a coup against the National Democratic government because their nationalist program threatened Jewish interests. This belief quickly became pervasive among National Democrats and the nationalist press, which accused Piłsudski of being a “leader of Bolshevism.”<sup>438</sup> National Democrats no longer had the state power that they had in the early 1920s to limit the threat posed by Jews. Thus, from their perspective, Piłsudski had stripped Poles of their means of national defense. The only way for National Democrats to counter the perceived ascendancy of Jewish interests was to establish a Polish fascist organization.<sup>439</sup>

In December 1926, Dmowski responded to the coup by establishing the Great Poland Camp (OWP), an anti-democratic, semi-fascist, nationalist movement. OWP defined its goals: “fostering in the Polish people the attitude of respect – which they could then demand from other nations – for their religion, for Polish culture and the Polish State,” and making Poland “a grand nation in both domestic and foreign affairs.”<sup>440</sup> Although Endecja's new political ideology was not an imitation of Italian fascism, it provided a foundation for Polish fascism: it opposed liberalism, fostered national identity, subjugated the individual to the nation, and advocated for social hierarchies.<sup>441</sup> Although Dmowski had

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<sup>436</sup> Brykczyński, 80.

<sup>437</sup> Dmowski, Roman. “The May Coup” in *Pisma: Tom VIII: Przewrót* (Częstochowa: Antoni Gmachowski, 1938) 422–426 <https://history.lsa.umich.edu/331/Canvas%20Documents/ebooks/09%20Documents%20from%201926/mobile/index.html#p=1> 424.

<sup>438</sup> Bergmann, 246.

<sup>439</sup> Polonsky, 142. See Polonsky for more regarding Dmowski's interest in Italian fascism's ability to resist Free Masonry and Jewish interests.

<sup>440</sup> “The Ideological Declaration of the Great Poland Camp, 1926.” Translated by Zuzanna Ładyga. *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Anti-Modernism: Radical Revisions of Collective Identity*, IV, Central European University Press, 2014. 333.

<sup>441</sup> Griffin, 91.

originally supported an ethnically Polish participatory democracy, he had become convinced that the nation should be led by an educated few: “In every nation, the overwhelming majority is made up of people lacking any understanding of the needs and tasks of the state, people incapable even of assessing who can better understand these needs and tasks.”<sup>442</sup> OWP created the basis for a broader nationalist coalition and was spectacularly successful, claiming the allegiance of a majority of young Poles.<sup>443</sup>

Acknowledging that Endecja was becoming a “movement of the youth,” Dmowski tried to adjust his views to their expectations.<sup>444</sup> Ideological division, however, now came to plague Endecja. Older National Democrats were more hesitant than their younger colleagues to embrace the mobilizing myths and glorification of violence common to fascist movements. Even as the National Democratic youth began to drift more toward fascism, Dmowski continued to condemn the irresponsibility of fascist leaders and their contempt for law, and to restrain young National Democrats from blindly copying Italian fascism and, later, German Nazism.<sup>445</sup>

### State Repression of the Legion in 1931

In January 1931, the National Peasant government led by Gheorghe Mironescu dissolved and banned the Legion. Mironescu claimed to ban the Legion in response to an incident in December 1930, when a Legionary shot an editor of *Adevărul*, a popular center-left newspaper that had criticized the Legion.<sup>446</sup> The truth was more complicated. In 1929, the New York Stock Exchange had crashed and grain prices had collapsed, crushing Romania’s agricultural economy. Hundreds of thousands of peasants fled to cities, seeking

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<sup>442</sup> Dmowski as cited in Polonsky, 138.

<sup>443</sup> Michlic, 78.

<sup>444</sup> Dmowski as cited in Wilicki, 31.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>446</sup> Clark, 96.

employment at factories that could not accommodate them. Support for traditional parties weakened.<sup>447</sup> In Romania, there was no large communist movement. In the early 1920s, the Liberals had thwarted mass movements, banning the Romanian Communist Party in 1924.<sup>448</sup> Many desperate Romanians placed their hopes in fascists. Codreanu promised that he would make peasants and workers the leaders of their country and hold corrupt politicians responsible.<sup>449</sup> The attempted assassination of an *Adevărul* editor identified Codreanu and Legionaries as people of action who cherished deeds, not words. In a political climate characterized by empty rhetoric and broken electoral promises, many Romanians interpreted Legionaries' violence as proof that they were serious about change.<sup>450</sup> The government realized this and used the attempted murder as a justification to ban the Legion.<sup>451</sup>

Codreanu nevertheless ignored the ban and encouraged his followers to continue campaigning for the upcoming election. Unlike their political counterparts, Legionaries traveled the countryside decked out in folk costumes with religious symbolism and striking slogans.<sup>452</sup> Riding on a white horse and adorned with a cross, Codreanu presented himself to peasants as a messiah sent by Archangel Michael to bring salvation to Romanians. As was typical of fascist leaders, he had no concrete political program but promised vague reforms, unification, and salvation: "The hour of resurrection and of the Romanian's salvation is at hand. He who has faith, who struggles and suffers, he will be recompensed and blessed by his people."<sup>453</sup> Codreanu's charismatic messianism captivated not only peasants and students but also prominent intellectuals, including Mircea Eliade, Emil

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<sup>447</sup> Hitchins, 416.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>449</sup> Codreanu, 382–383.

<sup>450</sup> Clark, 96.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>452</sup> Ioanid, 95 In contrast, National Peasantist leaders often showed up to villages in suits with prearranged speeches (Clark, 62).

<sup>453</sup> Codreanu as cited in Ioanid, 32.

Cioran, and Nae Ionescu. Although the Legion did not yet threaten the power of traditional parties – it won only 1% of the votes in the June 1931 election – its dynamism and growing popularity with many strata of Romanian society indicated to the political elite that the Legion could become one.<sup>454</sup> Therefore, the government unleashed a wave of state violence against the Legion. Tens of thousands of Legionaries were attacked by gendarmes, arrested, thrown in prison, and tortured; dozens were killed.<sup>455</sup>

To the dismay of the government, the wave of state terror only strengthened Legionaries' fanaticism. In Legionaries' eyes, the brutality of the regime proved its moral bankruptcy and the righteousness of Legionary violence against corrupt politicians.<sup>456</sup> Codreanu depicted their fight as moral, writing that “we were fighting for the good of the country and were treated like enemies of the people.”<sup>457</sup> Paradoxically, the more the Legion suffered, the more committed its members became.<sup>458</sup> Unlike bureaucrats such as Dmowski, charismatic leaders such as Codreanu attempted to transform society from *within* by creating a revolutionary new man. Codreanu's envisioned revolution began with “a great rebirth of the soul,” which would inspire “a great revolution of the whole people.”<sup>459</sup> Legionaries sought to transform themselves into new men through community work, prayers, ceremonies, and rituals.<sup>460</sup> As Max Weber explains, “charisma...[can] affect a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering.”<sup>461</sup> In other words, Legionaries also believed that they could purify themselves through suffering because it proved their capacity for sacrifice – the most fundamental requirement of the new man.<sup>462</sup> Griffin argues

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<sup>454</sup> Clark, 98.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>456</sup> Ioanid, 134.

<sup>457</sup> Codreanu, 212.

<sup>458</sup> Clark, 121.

<sup>459</sup> Codreanu as cited in Iordachi, 29.

<sup>460</sup> Codreanu, 279.

<sup>461</sup> Weber, M. 243.

<sup>462</sup> Iordachi, 29.



that this mental metamorphosis had an invigorating effect on fascists because the idea that a new world could be born from the destruction of an old one had the power to turn crushing despair into exhilarating optimism.<sup>463</sup> As Moța wrote in 1929, “the seed of renewal can grow only from death and suffering.”<sup>464</sup> Legionaries believed that they could transform themselves by destroying their old selves, and thus perceived suffering as an expiatory experience.<sup>465</sup> This line of thinking encouraged Legionaries to accept suffering at the hands of the state.

Furthermore, state violence allowed Legionaries to create a culture around suffering that aestheticized torment.<sup>466</sup> Legionaries’ self-perception was two-fold. On the one hand, they saw themselves as a Christian army in perpetual combat with evil. On the other hand, they also saw themselves as martyrs modeled after the first Christians who were persecuted and killed by the Roman Empire for their beliefs.<sup>467</sup> While serving prison sentences, many Legionaries wrote poetic reflections about their persecution. In 1932, one of the Legion’s most celebrated song writers and poets, Radu Gyr, wrote a poem contrasting the darkness of Jilava prison with the purity of Legionaries: “No one mourns the humid prison. / The mould on the walls turns sour. / ...Through the bars of the dirty walls, / A blue sky floods into the prison / Pure as a legionary’s soul.”<sup>468</sup> In his poetry, Gyr affirmed not only Legionaries’ suffering, but also their innocence and purity amidst state persecution. Such songs, poetry, and prose helped suffering and sacrifice become central components of Legionary ideology

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<sup>463</sup> Griffin, 64.

<sup>464</sup> Moța, Ion “May 22, May 22 1929,” in Moța & Marin, 70.

<sup>465</sup> Rusu, 265.

<sup>466</sup> Clark, 105.

<sup>467</sup> Rusu, 268 Emilio Gentile has remarked that many fascists often compared themselves to the first Christians, traveling through pagan lands to preach their faith and accepting martyrdom.

<sup>468</sup> Clark, 105.

and their propaganda.<sup>469</sup> It was the ability to suffer and sacrifice for the sake of the people, Codreanu argued, that created a *true* Legionary.<sup>470</sup>

Although Piłsudski's coup pushed Endecja toward fascism, National Democrats as a whole still did not fully embrace fascism. More specifically, National Democrats warned that “too much radicalism” and “too much violence” could threaten social order, whereas Legionaries saw violence as a necessary part of the regenerative process.<sup>471</sup> Dmowski admired Italian fascism for its totalitarianism. He had despaired at interwar Poland's inability to enforce unity and create a singular Polish will.<sup>472</sup> He was inspired by Mussolini's plan to create a singular Italian will by subjugating the individual to the state and taming the masses.<sup>473</sup> Whereas liberal democracy had failed, in Dmowski's perspective, to cultivate a strong Polish national consciousness, Italian fascism had succeeded in Italy.<sup>474</sup> National Democrats' shift toward fascism was connected to their Social Darwinist worldview. Survival demanded adaptation and strength, and in 1926 Italy's model seemed the strongest.

Collective suffering in the Legion reinforced Legionaries' group identity and commitment to Legionary values. Vigilante justice, heroism, and sacrifice had been Legionary values since the Văcărești had stood on trial in 1923 for attempting to spark a civil war by murdering politicians, Jews, bankers, and journalists through violent self-sacrifice.<sup>475</sup> These virtues already existed in the Legion when the state unleashed its wave of persecution against members; persecution only reinforced the importance of these values and allowed Legionaries to speak about their suffering in heroic and palingenetic

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<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>470</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>471</sup> Wilicki, 31.

<sup>472</sup> Porter, 2014, 99.

<sup>473</sup> Polonsky, 139.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>475</sup> Codreanu, 149.

terms. As Moța wrote, “[We] took on the burdens...without revolt, with pain but also with elation and exaltation. So that others, the whole of our people, who come after us, will enjoy the serenity of a better lot.”<sup>476</sup> Legionaries and their supporters often compared themselves to the Christian saints and national heroes and claimed to be their heirs. Constantin Noica went as far as to declare Codreanu “the reincarnation of Joan of Arc.”<sup>477</sup> In the Legion, the veneration of suffering and sacrifice fostered a cult of death.

Although Endecja had become more similar to the Legion by 1927, a cult of death did not emerge in Endecja. Whereas Dmowski admired fascism for its totalitarianism, Codreanu was captivated by its revolutionary and messianic myths.<sup>478</sup> National Democrats’ lack of violence and sacrificial patriotism was largely due to their preference for order and rational thinking. Dmowski’s conception of politics as an “art of rational calculation” conflicted with the fundamentalism of young leaders and their preference for collective emotions before logic.<sup>479</sup> Although some National Democrats held palingenetic views, National Democratic ideology was still too tightly tied to reality to propagate a fascist myth to mobilize followers.<sup>480</sup> Legionaries, in contrast, fought to fulfill Romania’s destiny and transform society through revolution. The feasibility of Codreanu’s promises did not matter because it was “their *mythic* power” that inspired and unified Legionaries.<sup>481</sup> National Democrats lacked a charismatic leader who could lead them into battle. This does not mean, however, that National Democrats did not frame violence and death as self-sacrificial. Like the Legionary press, National Democratic media exploited violence and death to create

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<sup>476</sup> Moța, Ion. “May 22, April 1, 1929” in Moța & Marin, 71.

<sup>477</sup> As cited in Ioanid, 144.

<sup>478</sup> Polonsky, 149; Iordachi, 26.

<sup>479</sup> Moța, Ion. “May 22, April 1, 1929” in Moța & Marin, 71.

<sup>480</sup> Griffin, 158.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

self-serving narratives and mobilize support.<sup>482</sup> But whereas National Democrats called for concrete political change, Codreanu called for martyrdom to inspire others and purify the nation.

### National Martyrdom

In the aftermath of Waławski's death in November 1931 at Stefan Batory University, the press hailed the slain National Democrat as a Polish martyr and called for retribution and purification. National Democratic students demanded a *numerus clausus* as "compensation," to which the university agreed.<sup>483</sup> Although Waławski had been among the aggressors, the National Democratic press claimed that he had been killed by a "Jewish-communist militia," framing him as a victim of Jewish provocation.<sup>484</sup> The press claimed that the Polish students were part of Poles' fight to maintain control of their country.<sup>485</sup> Waławski's death incited a wave of antisemitic violence across Polish universities between 1931 and 1932, but popular National Democratic newspapers did not explicitly encourage this violence. A local newspaper, *Dziennik Wileński*, captured Endecja's true intentions, emphasizing the importance of Waławski's political aims: "the tragic death of [Waławski] will not be in vain if the goals for which Waławski fought are achieved."<sup>486</sup> Indeed, as National Democrats had used the murder of President Narutowicz in 1922 to endorse their vision of Poland, National Democrats used Waławski's death to advocate for their political program – a *numerus clausus*, social unity, Polish and Catholic

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<sup>482</sup> Zackiewicz, Grzegorz Zackiewicz. "WYDARZENIA WILEŃSKIE Z LISTOPADA 1931 ROKU W KOMENTARZACH ÓWCZESNEJ PRASY POLSKIEJ [The Vilnius Events of 1931 & the Comments of the Polish Press]." *Biuletyn Historii Pogranicza*, vol. 11, 2011, pp. 41–55, 49.

<sup>483</sup> Aleksion, 344.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 354, 356.

<sup>485</sup> Polonsky, 145.

<sup>486</sup> Zackiewicz, 49.

hegemony over society, and a singular Polish will. Wałowski's death was simply a means to an end.<sup>487</sup>

By creating a narrative that framed violent and nationalistic students as patriots and heroes, National Democrats sought to make their movement more appealing.<sup>488</sup> On November 11, a newspaper claimed that "Jewish militants backed by communist elements stoned him! The late Wałowski was hit so hard on the back of his skull with a brick that his skull cracked."<sup>489</sup> By framing Jews as aggressors, National Democrats turned the real provocateurs into victims and blamed Sanacja for the spilled blood: "[Sanacja] does not want to acknowledge the problems regarding the existence of our intelligentsia, our culture, Christian ideas, and the influx of Jewish students into universities...Sanacja does not want to acknowledge all this."<sup>490</sup> By blaming Sanacja for not limiting Jewish enrollment in Polish institutions of higher education, National Democrats tried to turn Poles against the ruling regime and solidify support behind a National Democratic program. In the case that Sanacja collapsed, National Democrats wanted to be ready to take power.<sup>491</sup>

Natalia Aleksion argues that Endecja turned Wałowski into a martyr to inspire not martyrdom but national unity.<sup>492</sup> Framed as a Christian and Polish martyr who had died for the National Democratic cause – which Endecja conflated with the national cause – Wałowski was supposed to unify all of Catholic Polish society behind Endecja. A passage from *Dziennik Wileński* regarding Wałowski's funeral in Vilnius captures this motive: "the youth and the elderly were united, all the states, the intelligentsia, all a grey mass...Yesterday was one of the many signs that the whole of Poland stands behind the

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<sup>487</sup> Brykczyński, 112, 122 ; Zackiewicz, 45.

<sup>488</sup> Michlic, 71.

<sup>489</sup> Zackiewicz, 48.

<sup>490</sup> Aleksion, 358.

<sup>491</sup> Michlic, 88.

<sup>492</sup> Aleksion, 358.

national youth.”<sup>493</sup> National Democrats’ focus on solidarity and unity reflected two of Endecja's requirements for surviving in a war-of-all-against-all: complete social unity and the prioritization of national interest.

Success in the ongoing fight for survival depended on Poles’ commitment to the nation and its superior interests.<sup>494</sup> By maximizing Polish interests, Poles could make the country stronger domestically and powerful internationally. To create this unity, National Democrats aspired to turn Wałowski into a point of national solidarity for Poles, which could turn into national loyalty.<sup>495</sup> Although most National Democrats did not encourage violence, they recognized that violence and death could create powerful narratives, which in turn could inspire political and social change. Indeed, as National Democrats had hailed President Narutowicz’s murderer as a patriot who had protected the “Polishness of Poland” to advance their political program, they turned Wałowski into a martyr to rally support for the National Democratic cause.<sup>496</sup> Like Niewiadomski, Wałowski became a tool of National Democrats’ political ambitions.<sup>497</sup>

Some young National Democrats did interpret Wałowski’s death as a battle cry for mass anti-Jewish violence, but it did not lead to a cult of death. News of Wałowski’s death quickly spread to other Polish academic centers, leading to antigovernment and anti-Jewish riots.<sup>498</sup> Students of the All Polish Youth, a student organization in Endecja, called for vengeance: “On the anniversary of Wałowski’s death, Jewish blood must flow. On that day Jewish homes and businesses acquired by wrongs done to Poles, and even by their deaths, must burn.”<sup>499</sup> Unlike their older and more conservative colleagues, many among the youth

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<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>494</sup> Porter, 2002, 157.

<sup>495</sup> “Ideological Declaration of the Great Poland Camp, Poznań, 4 December 1926,” 333; Aleksion, 358.

<sup>496</sup> Brykczyński, 119.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>498</sup> Michlic, 126.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

were more violence-minded, and more radical in terms of their political programs and actualization. Youth slogans such as “beat up the Jews and save Poland” reflected not only the growing normalization of violence among the National Democratic youth, but also the spread of the myth of rebirth. Although the National Democratic Polish youth saw themselves as defenders of Polish interests, their violence, unlike that of the Legion, was retributive, not self-sacrificial, because National Democrats’ lacked a revolutionary, fascist vision.<sup>500</sup>

In the Legion, martyrdom was intertwined with charisma and the myth of rebirth. Legionaries presented themselves as the heroic and morally superior minority that could guide the nation back toward its destiny and redeem it before God.<sup>501</sup> “We are not the creators of the desired salvation,” Moța wrote in 1927, “but...our system...is our only hope of salvation.”<sup>502</sup> While debating the establishment of the Legion that year, he explained to the Văcărești that their sacrifices would inspire the rest of society to follow their example: “It cannot be that this sacrifice of ours will not be understood by Romanians, that it would not make their souls and conscience tremble and that this will not constitute a starting point, a point of resurrection for Romanians.”<sup>503</sup> Perceiving themselves as a chosen elite, Codreanu and Moța claimed that Legionaries had to suffer on behalf of the sinful and cowardly majority of Romanians. Codreanu and Moța based their self-perception on the role of Christ, who had suffered and died for humanity and was able to find salvation in the afterlife for acting piously.<sup>504</sup> Legionary leadership expected Legionaries to suffer, kill, and die as part of a sacrilegious version of *imitatio christi*:

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<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>501</sup> Ioanid, 142.

<sup>502</sup> Moța, Ion “The Icon? August 1927” in Moța & Marin, 64.

<sup>503</sup> Moța as cited in Codreanu, 298.

<sup>504</sup> Iordachi, 28.

The seed of renewal can grow only from death and suffering. Someone has to pay, with agony, for the sins that have fallen over the nation, someone has to redeem with agony the salvation of tomorrow (not out of a desire to suffer God's wrath, but perhaps prove to Him that there is still fruitfulness in this condemned world). The Savior could not overcome without suffering and sacrifice...How can the Legionary overcome with a life in which he knows only serene days?<sup>505</sup>

Self-sacrifice had been at the core of the Legion since Moța introduced the idea of killing their enemies and themselves to save the nation in 1923, but now it took on a more sacrilegious meaning. Spiritually purified Legionaries could offer their souls through sacrilegious martyrdom and ransom Romania of its sins, redeeming the nation in the eyes of God.<sup>506</sup> For Legionaries, sacrifice was absolutely essential. As one Legionary death song went: "We shall sacrifice ourselves with joy/ on the bodies of the enemy/ we shall build a new country."<sup>507</sup> Drawing on the deaths of Romanian soldiers, which Codreanu understood to have resulted in national independence, he argued that Legionaries could save the nation through death. By committing martyrdom, Legionaries could prove to God the Romanian nation's worthiness; by dying for the nation, Legionaries could become the greatest source of inspiration for the rest of Romanian society.<sup>508</sup> To commit martyrdom for the redemption of the Romanian nation, Legionaries argued, was the ultimate form of patriotism and Christian morality because it proved their love and devotion for their faith and people.

Legionaries accepted punishment because it made them heroic in the eyes of society and God. In late 1932, Codreanu established death teams, also referred to as the Iron Guard. In Codreanu's words, the death squads were Legionaries "with a firm determination to die," prepared to suffer violence at the hands of police and to go "forward through death" to

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<sup>505</sup> Moța, Ion "May 22, May 22 1929," in Moța & Marin, 70.

<sup>506</sup> Rusu, p. 260, 262.

<sup>507</sup> Ioanid, p. 145.

<sup>508</sup> Weber, M. 243 I draw this idea from Weber's explanation of charismatic authority. He writes that charismatic leaders sought to change people from within as to transform society. Charismatic leaders like Codreanu emphasized bonds of emotions in order to gain support. Through martyrdom, Legionaries sought to turn themselves into symbols of purity and move Romanians toward the Legionary cause.



ensure that the Legion's message of heroism and fearlessness was heard by all.<sup>509</sup> Their greeting to one another, "Long live death! Long live Legionary triumph," reflected the Legionary belief that their movement could succeed through righteous martyrdom.<sup>510</sup> During Romania's violent general election in December 1933, Prime Minister Ion Duca banned the Legion and organized the arrest and imprisonment of 18,000 Legionaries; eight died. Although Duca achieved another victory for the National Liberals, he had signed his own death warrant. Only nine days after the elections, he was assassinated by the Nicadori, a Legionary death squad, for suppressing the Legion. They immediately turned themselves into the police, in a bid to exhibit their moral superiority and to expiate for their act.<sup>511</sup> By surrendering themselves, the Nicadori communicated that they understood that they had committed a crime but were prepared to suffer for their beliefs and morals.<sup>512</sup> In doing so, the Nicadori evoked the connection between themselves and Christian martyrs, who had advocated their beliefs amongst pagans and accepted martyrdom.<sup>513</sup>

"There is nothing more noble than to sacrifice yourself for your afflicted neighbor," Moța declared, "that is what Christ did!"<sup>514</sup> As Christ's martyrdom had resulted in individual salvation, Legionaries argued that their mass martyrdom could indirectly redeem the entire nation. Therefore, sacrifice was absolutely essential. As Codreanu described his logic, "the Legion is...a 'living faith.' Just as someone who is not a Christian if he 'knows' and 'understands' the Gospel but only if he... 'lives the Gospel.'"<sup>515</sup> Codreanu demanded that Legionaries live their faith in order to prove the nation's worthiness and become new men. By sacrificing oneself, a Legionary could fully transform himself into a new man. As

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<sup>509</sup> Codreanu, 395.

<sup>510</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 408.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>512</sup> Iordachi, 34.

<sup>513</sup> Rusu, 268.

<sup>514</sup> Moța, Ion. "Our Cause is Morally Just and Serves Social Progress," *Dacia Nouă*, December 23, 1922.

<sup>515</sup> Codreanu, 291.

martyrdom became a prerequisite for national resurrection, imprisonment, torture, and death became a rite of passage to becoming a *true* Legionary – a martyr.<sup>516</sup>

Although National Democrats raised Waclawski as a Polish martyr, they still did not accept the normalization of violence. As Andrzej Wilicki notes, National Democrats still saw themselves as the “party of order,” not of revolution or anarchy.<sup>517</sup> Leading National Democrats exploited violence as a means of imposing order, social solidarity, and what they perceived as the national interest on Polish society.<sup>518</sup> Legionaries, in contrast, glorified martyrdom. “[We] accept this martyrdom for [our] people and the cross,” Moța wrote in 1933, “all because we believe that we will see better days for this nation.”<sup>519</sup> The Legion was not the only fascist movement to create an elaborate death cult along with ideas of resurrection; both the Croatian Ustaša and Spanish Falange created similar concepts.<sup>520</sup> What made Legionaries distinct from their counterparts was their conception of salvation based on the first Christians and their willingness to undertake violent martyrdom.<sup>521</sup> Whereas National Democrats continued to try to save society through political programs, Legionaries believed that the new world could only be achieved through their deaths.<sup>522</sup> Thus, the veneration of a Legionary’s death as “the most sacred among sacred deaths” cultivated a death cult that not only glamorized but required martyrdom.<sup>523</sup>

Although both National Democrats and Legionaries made the connection between sacrifice and carrying out the superior interest of the nation, dying was not central to the former’s ideology. Rejecting insurrectionary and sacrificial patriotism as irrational, National

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<sup>516</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 376.

<sup>517</sup> Wilicki, 25.

<sup>518</sup> Aleksium, 358.

<sup>519</sup> Moța, Ion. “Skulls of Wood? December, 1933” in Moța & Marin, 90–91.

<sup>520</sup> Rusu, 269.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>523</sup> Moța, Ion, “Its Spasm and Conclusion,” Petru Maior Student Center, 1928.

Democrats grounded their worldview in Social Darwinism, which slowed the spread of myths by encouraging Poles to think rationally and realistically about their existence. They believed that unity – not heroic death – would make Poland stronger.<sup>524</sup> It was for this reason that Dmowski gravitated toward the totalitarian aspect of Italian fascism. Even after Endecja adopted a semi-fascist model, most National Democrats hesitated to embrace the radical aspects of fascism, which Legionaries encouraged. When National Democrats did enact violence, it was retributive, not self-sacrificial.<sup>525</sup> The convergence of romanticized Romanian soldiers and a religious worldview laid the foundations for a myth of rebirth and redemption in the Legion.<sup>526</sup> Legionaries equated death with heroism and renewal. Unlike National Democrats, Legionaries believed that through death they could purify Romanian society.

Legionaries saw themselves as revolutionaries living through a turning point in modern history, a moment when they would destroy the old world and establish a new one full of youth, heroism, and national greatness.<sup>527</sup> Not all Legionaries believed in the myth of a Second Coming of Christ, but all believed in fascism's revolutionary promise of a better future.<sup>528</sup> Eugen Weber argues that it was Legionaries' hope for a better world that helped the Legion become a dominant influence in society in the 1930s.<sup>529</sup> Similarly, it was a belief in Codreanu's charismatic promises and the hope of a better future that drove Legionaries toward righteous violence and sacrilegious martyrdom. "Not being able to win while alive," Codreanu declared, "we will win by dying."<sup>530</sup> Just as the Christian martyrs of the first century had found a gateway to Heaven through agony and death, Legionaries sought

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<sup>524</sup> Wilicki, 33.

<sup>525</sup> Michlic, 179.

<sup>526</sup> Clark, 92.

<sup>527</sup> Moța, Ion. "Skulls of Wood? December, 1933" in Moța & Marin, 90–91.

<sup>528</sup> Clark, 57.

<sup>529</sup> Weber, E, 106.

<sup>530</sup> Codreanu, 284.

salvation through martyrdom.<sup>531</sup> By sacrificing oneself for the national ideals, a Legionary could become part of the immortalized nation in the afterlife. The more Legionaries suffered, the greater their cult of death became. Their self-perception of moral superiority, contrasting with the brutality of the regime, reinforced their identity as soldiers of God, as modern-day revolutionaries, and as martyrs.

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<sup>531</sup> Rusu, 268–269.

## Conclusion

*“It is not the punishment but the cause that makes the martyr.”*

— *Saint Augustine* <sup>532</sup>

During the interwar era, the fascist myth of national rebirth drove Legionaries and young National Democrats toward murder and martyrdom. The palingenetic myth of fascism captivated alienated and resentful young men, whose hopes of a prosperous future had been shattered by the consequences of World War One. Eugen Weber writes that young men were especially susceptible to the allure of radicalism and fanaticism; their youth brought out “their marginality, their restlessness...altogether their availability for radical visions and enterprises before which their elders might be inclined to hesitate.”<sup>533</sup> Radicals viewed fascism as a solution to their alienation; it gave them a sense of belonging to a higher cause. Fascism and palingenetic ultranationalism offered radical university students the opportunity to rise above daily life; it gave men like the Văcăreșteni and National Democratic university students a greater, more exalted purpose in life – the defense and rebirth of the nation.<sup>534</sup>

In 1908, the French philosopher Georges Sorel argued that violence, if applied justly, could be the greatest symbol of passion, devotion, and civility. “[I]t was so easy,” he wrote, “to pass to the idea that all violence is an evil...which is now accepted as a dogma by the *bleating herd* of moralists. They have not asked themselves what there is in brutality which is reprehensible.”<sup>535</sup> If used against a corrupt and selfish state to advance the progress of the people, violence could be rendered altruistic, heroic, and even virtuous.<sup>536</sup> Fascists

<sup>532</sup> “Saint Augustine Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*, Xplore, [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/saint\\_augustine\\_398720](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/saint_augustine_398720). Accessed January 23, 2021.

<sup>533</sup> Weber, E. 109–110.

<sup>534</sup> Paxton, 17; Brykczynski, 13.

<sup>535</sup> Sorel, 186–187.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

exploited Sorel's interpretation of violence to justify their own. Codreanu and Moța rationalized their violence as moral because it targeted what they saw as greater evils – Jews, the state, political corruption, and democracy.<sup>537</sup> Through altruistic violence and self-sacrifice, Legionaries believed that they could create a new world. National salvation, achieved through collective sacrifice, made personal ethics of lesser importance. With all focus on the survival of the national community, violence and self-sacrifice became justified and glamorized acts, which cultivated a cult of fatal heroism.<sup>538</sup> For Legionaries, violence and martyrdom made the perfect marriage of patriotism, Christian sacrifice, and vengeance. Legionaries' shared belief in achieving a better future and creating a new, heroic world allowed them to realize their revolutionary potential and propel themselves toward assassination, death, and their ultimate destruction in January 1941.<sup>539</sup>

Martyrdom was less prevalent in Endecja because of the division between younger and older generations, National Democrats' access to state power, and the lack of a fascist myth. From 1919 to 1935, Endecja remained ideologically fragmented, whereas a single ideology unified Legionaries.<sup>540</sup> Indeed, Endecja lacked a charismatic vision that could unify all members and inspire them to commit martyrdom. The Social Darwinist worldview of Dmowski and other senior National Democrats inhibited the spread of fascist thinking and an idealistic view of violence.<sup>541</sup> National Democrats' legalist and rational approach to ethnic conflict was antithetical to the fundamentalism and charismatic authority found in the Legion and other fascist movements.<sup>542</sup> Although senior National Democrats' hesitation to embrace violence and fanaticism slowed Endecja's radicalization, radical National

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<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>538</sup> Nagy-Talavera, 349.

<sup>539</sup> Paxton, 148; Clark, 141.

<sup>540</sup> Wilicki, 29.

<sup>541</sup> Brykczyński, 46.

<sup>542</sup> Weber, M. 242.

Democrats began to view the older generation as a hindrance to Poland's survival. Against the backdrop of a political crisis in 1926 and worsening economic conditions, the younger generation demanded more radical measures to address Poland's issues. In 1935, Dmowski and older National Democratic leaders were excluded from positions of power for being too moderate.<sup>543</sup> Like Legionaries, young National Democrats rebelled against a generation, a system, and a world that they believed had forsaken them.

Moța and Codreanu were killed before the Legion ascended to power. In 1936, Moța and a small contingent of Legionaries left to fight alongside Francisco Franco's Spanish Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. "I have loved Christ," Moța wrote to his parents in anticipation of his death, "and I have happily marched to death for Him!"<sup>544</sup> Following his death at the hands of Spanish Republican forces in January 1937, the Legion, the Romanian Orthodox Church, and nationalist circles hailed Moța as a martyr and his death as an ultimate example of sacrifice. Perceiving Codreanu's growing popularity as a threat to his own charismatic rule, King Carol II imprisoned Codreanu and suppressed the Legion in March 1938.<sup>545</sup> When Legionaries responded with violence and refused to pledge their loyalty to the King, he ordered Codreanu's execution. Codreanu was shot on November 30. Moța and Codreanu's deaths only reinforced Legionaries' fanaticism, Manichean worldview, and thirst for expiatory violence. When the Legion came to power in September 1940, Legionaries massacred over sixty government officials believed to have been involved in Codreanu's death.<sup>546</sup> Dmowski passed away on January 2, 1939, at the age of seventy-four. His funeral was attended by over 100,000 Poles. Having fought his whole life to defend the Polish nation's sovereignty, Dmowski died before having to witness Poles

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<sup>543</sup> Wilicki, 32.

<sup>544</sup> Moța, Ion. "To My Parents (I), November 22, 1936," in Moța & Marin, 105.

<sup>545</sup> Hitchins, 422–423.

<sup>546</sup> Clark, 304.

again be subjected to his worst fear – foreign occupation and brutal denationalization campaigns.<sup>547</sup>

Although Dmowski and his colleagues never matched the ideological zeal of the Legion's leaders, the cores of the National Democratic and Legionary worldviews were not completely dissimilar.<sup>548</sup> Indeed, Endecja lacked the aestheticism, palingenetic nationalism, and charisma of the Legion. Throughout the 1930s, the Legion's charisma, mysticism, and aestheticism captivated Romanian peasants, intellectuals, and politicians alike. But if one ripped the mask off the Legion, one found the same face of ultranationalism: a language of hatred, exclusion, and violence.<sup>549</sup>

The rise of fascism and the breakdown of democracy in Romania and Poland raise questions regarding the deficiencies of liberalism. Is the liberal state susceptible to fascism? Why does the liberal experiment fail in some states, and what are the necessary conditions for its successful creation and sustainment? One answer may lie in the structure of traditional society and the incorporation of the peasantry into politics.<sup>550</sup> Although peasants in the Austrian and Prussian partitions of Poland during the nineteenth century gained considerable access to electoral politics, their counterparts in the Russian partition faced a much more autocratic system.<sup>551</sup> In Romania, where the majority of Romanians were actively excluded from the political process, liberalism may have only intensified pre-existing structural issues.<sup>552</sup> For developing nation-states struggling to catch up with a modernized world, did the protracted proceduralism of liberalism frustrate those who were seeking immediate results, and, thus, make totalitarianism and fascism more appealing?<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Wilicki, 43.

<sup>548</sup> Brykczynski, 46.

<sup>549</sup> Ioanid, 97.

<sup>550</sup> Janos, Andrew C. *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825-1945*. Princeton University Press, 2012. xxi.

<sup>551</sup> Brykczynski, 64.

<sup>552</sup> Weber, E. 113.

<sup>553</sup> Janos, xviii.



These questions deserve to be analyzed in more depth by historians to understand the failure of liberal ideology not only in interwar Europe, but also in other parts of the world. This study of Romanian and Polish fascism can serve as a basis for the analysis of the pipeline from liberalism to fascism. An understanding of Polish and Romanian fascism in the 1920s is imperative because today again we see that when liberalism fails to adequately address frustrations, fears, and systemic issues, democracy shakes and fascist thinking flourishes.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Griffin, 12.

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