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Back to the past – chances of restoring monarchy in Romania in the 21st Century

Introduction

Romania has not been recognised as a monarchy since 30 December 1947 when King Mihai (Michael) was forced to abdicate and leave Romania. The republic was then proclaimed. From that point on, the Communist propaganda was focused on defaming the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen royal house, together with brainwashing Romanians about the monarchy. The main point of the arrangements was to diminish support for the Romanian dynasty and prohibit the royal family from returning to Romania, thus representatives of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen were perceived as a main threat to the stability of Nicolae Ceaușescu's and Ion Iliescu's regimes. Nevertheless, the national memory of having princes and kings in power has not completely vanished. The society of Romania has been gradually recovering from the traumatic past of the Communist times and has started noticing the benefits of having a monarch.

According to the survey conducted by the research institute Avangarde (Grupul de Studii Socio-Comportamentale Avangarde) between the 26 and 7 of January 2018, 46% of the respondents perceived monarchy as a better form of ruling the state than a republic, and around 40% were in favour of holding a referendum to return to a monarchy [*Survey: Romanians value monarchy, favour Prince Charles* 2018]. In comparison, a poll in 2007 presented only 14% support for restoring a monarchy [Valley 2009]. Since 2018, no research has been conducted to gauge the level of support for monarchy among Romanians.

The main goal of my research paper is to determine whether it is plausible to resurrect the monarchical political system in Europe in the twenty first century on the example of Romania. I posed two research questions: Which factors increase the

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odds of restoring monarchy in Serbia? What are the main obstacles in changing the political system in Romania? I assumed that dissatisfaction with current government as well as the memory of Romanian golden age under the royal reign could accelerate implementation of a crowned head of state in Romania. Regarding hindrances, I pointed out education system and rather low interest of Romanians in changing the system.

Methodology

Noticing the gap in comparative political research on Romanian monarchy in the twenty first century, conducting elite interviews is an advantageous method to elucidate specific and practical points of view concerning monarchy, its future in the twenty first century, and the possibility of it being reimplemented in Romania. Such elite interviews also represent an authoritative source of opinions, attitudes and emotions that the interviewees have the opportunity to share. These benefits distinguish this method from those focusing only on analysing already-collected data. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that the final conclusions were drawn from personal expressions and subjective perceptions, making the studies more open to interpretation and less connected with strictly specific findings.

The in-person interviews were conducted between the 1 and 30 of November, 2021, with local experts and academics from various political and social disciplines. Both supporters of monarchy and representatives of more reserved attitudes participated in the interviews. In two cases, the names of the respondents are not disclosed in this paper as they requested to remain anonymous. The article is divided into three substantive sections, enriched with quotations to prove the truth of my statements and answer to the posed research questions. The first part concerns the main dimensions that define the chances and obstacles to reimplementing monarchy in Romania. The second part considers possible reforms that could be implemented during a monarchical regime. The last part of this paper is focused on the question whether it is possible to reinstall monarchy in Romania in the nearest future.

Nine interviewees agreed to participate in the interview process:

- 1) Ion-Andrei Gherasim (supporter of monarchy) deputy of legislature in 1996–2000 and the Executive President of the Corneliu Coposu Foundation.
- 2) Alexandru Muraru (supporter of monarchy) member of the National Liberal Party, and honorary Adviser of the Prime Minister – Special Representative of the Romanian Government for the promotion of the policies of memory, the fight against anti-Semitism and xenophobia.
- 3) Marius Oprea (supporter of monarchy) historian, poet, essayist, journalist and researcher, founding president of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania.
- 4) Paul Ersilian Roșca (supporter of monarchy) theologian, historian and writer, five-time laureate of the Bistrita Municipality Prize for Culture.
- 5) Tudor Vișan-Miu (supporter of monarchy) historian, general secretary of the Royalist.

- 6) Youth Association (“Asociația Tineretului Regalist”). The author of *La școală cu Regele Mihai. Povestea Clasei Palatine*.
- 7) Ioan Stanomir (neutral) literary critic, publicist, political scientist, and professor at Bucharest University in the department of political sciences.
- 8) Anonymous A (neutral).
- 9) Anonymous B (neutral).

Romanian monarchy – past, present, and future

The interviewees analysed the issue of restoring monarchy in Romania through several aspects that can be classified into five dimensions:

- a) Historical;
- b) Social;
- c) Political;
- d) Legal;
- e) Connected with royal house.

The first refers to the time from gaining power by the Communists in 1947 to 1990. In terms of the communist regime, there are two significant issues that shaped Romanians’ perspective of monarchy, namely introducing the republic on in December 1947 and conducting a campaign against the monarchy.

Most of my interviewees underlined that the creation of the republic in Romania was not the people’s choice, rather a political system imposed by the Communists in 1947 which has been modified since then. Nowadays, the ruling elite and society blame the republic for all crises between political institutions, calling it an unsuitable form of governance for Romania which was created to be ruled only by monarchs. The republic is “[...] a symbol of foreign occupation,” as M. Oprea expressed, “blackmailing of Soviet tanks and [the] Communist regime,”¹ and “[...] the will of a foreign power,” as was highlighted by Anonymous A. These are descriptions of the Romanian republic considered to be illegally imposed by the Red Army and Joseph Stalin. M. Oprea said that during Communism, the monarchy was demonised and at the beginning of 1990, this anti-royal propaganda was continued by Iliescu’s regime: “For them [Romanian communists], the monarchy was a real danger” because King Michael was the only person who had experience in dealing with Communists²:

[...] when he came for the first time to Romania on the occasion of Easter one million people saluted him. It was practically the biggest public event in Romanian history, and it means something.

The tactic and results of the USSR’s politics and propaganda were precisely explained by I.A. Gherasim:

¹ “[...] de tancurile sovietice și regimul communist [...]”

² On 23 August 1944, the king arrested Ion Antonescu and prevented the Soviet army’s invasion of Romania and Transylvania.

[...] about 80–90% of Romanians were deceived, and changing the mentality is time-consuming. When the Soviets arrived in 1944/45, Romania was a kingdom with a very prosperous economy. At that time, it was difficult to understand what the communists wanted, especially when they started demoralising the younger generations, intelligentsia, workers, and peasants. Many Romanians were sent to the concentration camps in Siberia. Everyone was imprisoned, regardless of their political or social views, even my parents and grandparents. It is said that the Communists and the Securitate (secret police agency of the Socialist Republic of Romania) killed around one million Romanians in prisons between 1947 and 1989. King Michael was the last fighter for a better Romania, who was forced to leave the country on 30 December 1947. This was the end of democracy and the monarchy. When you think about Romania, you do not think about the republic [...]. We do not know what the republic is. The state is Romania, not the Republic of Romania.

Anonymous A mentioned. For A. Muraru, the republic is not associated with democracy or the rule of law:

[...] the word ‘republic’ is almost a synonym of democracy, and in Romania, this does not sound like a great idea. The republic does not seem natural. It is more like something that has been imposed on us. It is tough to make this comparison because ‘republic’ was a synonym of ‘communist republic’ for forty-one years, from 1948 to 1989, and a new republic was formed after that.

For A. Muraru, it is the Romanian royal family who is a synonym of history and of Romanian greatness:

[...] some states could be successful with a republican form of government, but for Romania, we have a real [royal] family who demonstrates that monarchy definitely represents an alternative [...]. They [the royal family] expect us to engage them in public life. The royal family is known to say they are ready to get involved if people need them, and they will always be here.

The novelty of the republic in Romania can also cause troubles in defining it and putting into the Romanian historic-political context. As A. Muraru said:

It is difficult to say which republic we are in now – the third or the fourth? In France, the number of a republic is based on the number of accepted constitutions, so in Romania, the first Constitution was in 1948, the second was in 1952, and the third was in 1965. The new democratic one was in 1991, then in 2003, so it is not so simple, and it is not right that the republic was born in 1989. Even though it is a democratic republic, it is deeply rooted in communism.

The debate about the monarchy, as A. Muraru said, would have ended and the idea of having a republic in Romania would have been settled if only there had been

a referendum right after the social transformation: “If Romania had had a referendum in 1990 and 50–70% had decided that a republic is the greatest form, the discussion would have been closed. However, we did not have a referendum, so this discussion is still open.”

I. Stanomir is not out of line in drawing a relation between the monarchy and communism as well as the damage caused by the communist regime:

Josef Stalin probably planted the idea of overthrowing the monarch in the heads of communists to ensure absolute loyalty of the Romanian elite before the Cold War [...]. Between 1947 and 1999, there was no republic, but a totalitarian system and a totalitarian system cannot be considered a republic. So, the republic was a shame, a travesty and a vehicle for the communist party to inflict cruelty on Romanians who were held captive. In 1999, the republic had to reinvent and rebrand itself. I think it will probably be impossible for Romanians to contemplate the prospect of restoring the monarchy because public opinion has been shaped by a long-standing memory of hatred against the monarchy.

T. Vişan-Miu joined I. Stanomir in this case, saying that abolishing the monarchy was unavoidable, under Soviet occupation, however:

I think it [the republic] was not the right solution for Romania. We should have discussed whether it was a right solution to implement it and keep the republic after the Romanian anti-communist revolution.

As follows, the republic has been termed a “foreign occupation,” a system forcibly imposed on Romanians, without consulting this idea with public opinion, and therefore, against the law. It was also the beginning of putting the monarchy in a bad light in order to turn Romanians against King Mihai. The republic in the Romanian case study does not sound like a democratic way of protecting the nation and providing it with development and security. Conversely, it is a memory of the Communist past and a time of a lawless regime of elites directed to further their own interests rather than those of Romanians.

The indoctrination of Romanians resulted in subordinating the society to the domestic regime and reducing the ability of Romanians to seek help from the royalty. Moving on, this is how the historical context is connected with a second factor – the social one. On this point, I.A. Gherasim joins other speakers emphasising the significance of explaining what the real monarchy was:

You need time, at least five years, to achieve this goal. You have to go to all regions, and talk to people of all social classes. This means, for me, a real democracy. I personally support democracy, but if we want democracy, we must go everywhere and explain what is good and bad with each regime. Indeed, it is vital to go on the television to meet supporters of republican government and debate on their opinions. After this endeavour, we can hold a referendum, but I repeat, in Romania, at this moment, it is essential to explain what the constitutional monarchy before 1947 was.

People were used to being indoctrinated by the ruling regimes in order to maintain power and remove the threat of losing control in favour of the king. As I.A. Gherasim said:

On 30th December 1947, the king was forced to sign an abdication document. The Prime Minister, Petru Groza, threatened that if the king did not sign the document, one thousand young people would be shot. The king did not want them to die, so signing it was an act of courage. Many so-called “experts” who analyse this piece of history underline that the most significant part is that King Michael signed the letter of abdication, no matter that he was under pressure. Most specialists in constitutionalism and history say there was a new chance to re-establish the monarchy in Romania on 22 December 1989. Nevertheless, an extensive manipulation campaign in Romania had already been directed towards Romanians. After 1990, there were and still are many neo-communists. They only changed their names, ‘changed their jackets’ [...].

As a result of an extensive pro-communist campaign, as I.A. Gherasim said, part of the Romanian society did not perceive the monarchy as a reliable authority, instead seeing it as a thief and traitor. Meanwhile, according to Vişan-Miu, those who were born after the dictatorship was abolished are more prone to seeing monarchy as a better solution:

Those who lived under the dictatorship are still mostly under the spell of communist propaganda against the monarchy. After the fall of communism, it was a time when most sympathized with the monarchy because they did not have any prejudice against the royal family.

My interviewees underlined many times that changing mentalities takes time and a lot of effort. This issue was underlined by A. Muraru:

You cannot understand the monarchy after over forty years of communism and then eleven years since the royal family returned. We cannot operate with these alternatives, the republic-monarchy, interchangeably. For more than a half-century (1947–1997), people were set against the royal government. We need another fifty years of teaching accurate history to change this mentality.

These are the words of M. Oprea, who is one of many advocates for proper education and discussion with the public to “repair” the unfairly distorted opinion of the monarchy.

However, this education should not only concern society, but also the political elite. I.A. Muraru said that having well-educated politicians is one step further to restoring the monarchy: “You should have dozens of members of parliaments educated in western Europe who understand the attributes of monarchy and that monarchy does not take anything from them.” Education is a way of decoding the meaning of monarchy and emphasising its advantages. Regardless of educating the society and having

a dialogue with the people, A. Muraru added that the monarchy should also be revived culturally, such as through renaming streets to have names of Romanian kings and queens, and associating educational institutions (universities, libraries) with history:

The only way to improve public awareness of what the royal family do for the state is to reform the education system so students have a chance to learn more about the Romanian monarchy. Another way to make people more familiar with the idea of the role of the monarchy would be to rename street names, libraries and other public institutions so they represent the royal figures.

M. Oprea added that the educational process should also include mass media since its influence and omnipresence could shorten the time of reinstalling the monarchy even to within ten years. The role of the media was taken into consideration by Vişan-Miu, emphasising that media outlets work in favour of the royal family, but they can simultaneously damage this image:

We have a show on the national channel every Saturday, “The King’s hour” (*Ora Regelui*), which started during Mihai’s life, where activities of the royal family are shown. The other private TV channels only talk about the monarchy if something terrible happens, which is not good for them [the royal family].

In the same manner, I. Stanomir underscored the necessity of having a debate to explain the real history of Romania and the monarchy:

We should have a proper debate about what kind of lessons we should draw from our past, what types of potential monarchy we can restore, and after that, why not try to have a public conversation about that and eventually a referendum, but this is purely hypothetical.

T. Vişan-Miu joined those who recommended a broader debate with society: “People should be informed about what the monarchy really means, and it should be done in schools, on the media, in the streets, and everywhere.” A real monarchy, in the eyes of I.A. Gherasim, is about improving the state in the way a republic cannot:

[...] you must fight in the following years with verified information. You must explain to people what you want and what the monarchy would change [...]. We are talking here about real relations, like in a family. If you want to improve the economy and social and political life, you must have a monarchy.

Finally, when individuals are well-versed with the truth, they may perceive the monarchy differently. Returning to P.E. Roşca’s answer:

Those who know history are more open to understanding the need for change. I know many young people who want to restore the monarchy and seniors who want the monarchy back. Some of them are nostalgic and intend to regain the golden age of Romania.

T. Vişan-Miu, like P.E. Roşca, stands for the significance of history in understanding the monarchy: "If you are not keen on history, you would not be fond of the monarchy. Not knowing anything about the monarchy means you know nothing about Romania." Furthermore, P.E. Roşca put emphasis on social perception and feelings as a *sine qua non* of any future monarch's effectiveness:

If you are not for a monarchy from the bottom of your heart and you see the monarchy only as a wooden statue, it will not change anything or, if so, not too much. If the king or queen wanted to change everything at once, the system would respond and isolate the king more effectively than the constitution. He would just be a person who participates in public festivals to take pictures.

P.E. Roşca talked about young people who should represent a different viewpoint in the case of a monarchy. M. Oprea's belief is that both generations (born before and after 1989) are in a similar position, however there are some visible differences: "Young people are more likely to be convinced, while older people are sceptical and have preconceptions. Having said that, this is a question of time." The historian does not pin all his hopes on younger generations, highlighting the problem with education:

The young generation knows practically nothing about the monarchy, and mine has suffered from the brainwashing performed under Communism. Nowadays, more than 20% of the representatives of my generation support the monarchy. However, the number of people against reinstalling kingship has strongly increased, and the rest of the society does not care.

Nowadays, as M. Oprea assumes, the number of voices supporting the monarchy is around 30%, and the number against the monarchy has doubled. In spite of this, M. Oprea believes that there are still chances to reintroduce the monarchy: "When I was young, the monarchy was a piece of history. Soon, the republic may be history." The scholar suggested that to accelerate the process of restoring the monarchy, it is worth including new digital instruments such as Facebook: "If you can smuggle the topic of the monarchy into the virtual space with the engagement of some young, well-known figures, you will succeed very quickly." Young generations, as M. Oprea continued, are easy to attract to new ideas.

The interest (or lack thereof) in the monarchy among young people has resulted in academic activity in this field. Anonymous 2 responded to this saying that: "This is not a subject, I am afraid. I have not seen any dissertation that was related to this. There is interest, but what exactly should be studied more?". A. Muraru replied on the same topic that the youth could support this idea, but they have other priorities:

Right now, I would say that people born after 1989 are more in favour than the others because maybe they do not have negative associations related to the monarchy, they are neutral, and this means a lot. This is something good compared to people who were

brainwashed before 1989, when historical books were based on the narrative that the monarchy was something wrong.

A. Muraru appreciates young people because they can think more rationally and their knowledge derives from experience, such as travelling to European monarchies. P.E. Roșca, conversely, responded that Romanians are not interested in this subject: “They are anchored in social problems – no jobs, no money to pay bills, no kindergartens or schools.” This lack of interest is especially visible during elections:

Roughly 30% of Romanians went to the polls, and the rest did not care who would govern the state. If they are not interested in their presidents, prime ministers, or mayors, they will not care whether the head of state is a president or a king. They ask the question, ‘What is a king? A person whose palaces I have to pay for, and in turn, he does nothing? Will he give me money? No? Then I do not want to vote for him.

The issue of financing the monarchy bears relevant meaning for young people. I. Stanomir, in turn, pinpointed on the problem with the youth’s interesting in politics and the real significance of today’s monarchy:

I would say that the younger generation may be tempted to stay away from politics. It is complicated because you cannot have hope in an institution that is purely virtual.

P.E. Roșca’s and I. Stanomir’s statements highlight the attitudes of younger generations that have lost their connection with their homeland. P.E. Roșca mentioned a question he once posed:

I asked my students, if Russians attacked Romania tomorrow, would they go, fight and die for Romania. I think 90% would pack up and leave for the USA. Why do I have to fight for a state that gives me nothing? For politicians who do not care? You have no symbols to fight for. You live in a rental flat, not in a house built with the bare hands of our ancestors. They do not care anymore. They do not understand why those soldiers died for the king. Saying that, it will be difficult to have a monarchy. They perceive it more as an anachronical and exotic thing.

Young people should be the engine of progress and force the implementation of better solutions. As it turns out, the younger generations are not interested in the history of their homeland and have not developed a special link between them and their country. This has resulted in a lack of motivation to change the system and a lack of driving force to acquire knowledge about the great time during the royal regime. However, M. Oprea pointed out that perhaps social media channels can start a “peaceful revolution” of changing the system. The only things that are obligatory are the visibility and participation of authorities the youth respect and look up to. This would probably be the only way to open up the process of restoring the monarchy in Romania.

The social feelings and perception of the monarchy could be highly visible in organising a theoretical referendum. Anonymous 1 highlighted that there is no need to organise such a referendum to have a return to the monarchy: "Now, you can ignore a referendum for monarchy because in the nineties, there was no referendum on this topic as it would clearly show the support for the republic." A. Muraru plainly doubts in gaining great support via a referendum. Nevertheless, the politician added that there could be some significant voices against having the monarchy back, namely from the royal family: "[...] a referendum would trigger a public debate, potentially damaging their reputation and decreasing their chances of success in future referenda." Anonymous 2 shares similar feelings about a referendum:

[...] I am afraid that now it is not a good time to organise a referendum because it would definitely fail. Maybe in a decade. Nonetheless, it is also a personal issue because the monarchy was well-connected with King Michael. People do not trust Margareta [Michael's daughter].

I. Stanomir also has little faith in the restoration of the monarchy through a referendum:

A parliamentary monarchy would imply that you cannot directly elect the head of government to office as this person is chosen as a result of deliberation in the parliament. I do not think Romanians would be willing to entrust the parliament with the task of selecting the head of parliament [...]. T. Vişan-Miu also underlined the meaning of electing the head of state for Romanians as they have the power in some way to influence the political situation: "People are excited about a presidential election because we can choose [...]."

M. Oprea said that the referendum's success depends on many factors, such as how this idea is presented, and how many opinion leaders represent such disciplines as journalism or political science: "It is like marketing – everything depends on how you sell the product. In a week, the chances of success are very high if the idea is presented in a good way." T. Vişan-Miu also confirmed this statement:

You do not need to be a historian to understand the monarchy or how it works. There are lawyers who, of course, speak about it lawfully. I would not say that historians lead this debate. Representatives of all fields of activities lead it.

Education can be the first step to increase the chances of having the monarchy back in Romania and it has to concern all social groups through talking to them and surrounding them with cultural objects that could remind Romanians about their past and possibility of restoring the monarchy. The influence of these arrangements, if successful, could reflect on the final result of the referendum. However, the experts and academics mentioned that there is another issue that regulates the possibility of reintroducing the monarchy – the political factor.

At this point, I would like to cite the answer provided by I.A. Gherasim:

A lot of Romanians see the republic as a disaster, especially regarding the president. It is crucial to be a president of all Romanians and not only a representative of the specific party. It is entirely different from a king or a queen because they create stability.

M. Oprea voiced his disappointment in underlining that every head of state, except for Emil Constantinescu, was a “historical accident:”

Nicolae Ceaușescu was a dictator, Ion Iliescu was a former communist, Traian Băsescu was a madman, and Klaus Iohannis is absent. People start asking themselves: who is going to be next?

The history of presidents in Romania has proven that the heads of state have not fulfilled their duties and have been abusing the power given to them. In consequence, these presidents have neglected the national and state interest, simultaneously deteriorating the image of chief of state among Romanians who could not experience any positive outcomes of having a republic:

In Romania, we had the very aggressive and undemocratic Traian Băsescu, who ruled the country for ten years as president. In the last days of his mandate, he struggled with the political class, the parliament. That was also the time when the concept of monarchy was being reconsidered by the public.

Those are the words of A. Muraru who noticed that, in times of political depression, the monarchy has been considered as a possible solution to stabilise the situation. The scholar continued: “In the last thirty years, the political class reconsidered the monarchy because they could use the monarchy as an alternative for political assistance.” Saying that, the monarchy has been instrumentalised to win the electoral game. A king or queen would be subordinated to the ruling classes with the task to support the government and diminish the meaning of the opposition. From this perspective, the monarchy would be a far cry from the idea of the monarch as a mediator between conflicted sides and a broker in the relations between the society and government, which for T. Vișan-Miu turned out to be highly crucial:

The monarchy is perceived as an impartial institution between political parties, challenging them to unite in the name of the national interest.

The discussion of restoring the monarchy would not be open if there were no controversies with the figure of the Romanian president. Romanians have experienced many disappointments in trusting heads of state that were not strong enough to properly implement the interests of the state. The monarchy would prevent oncoming scandals and crises, and repair the image of political institutions while contributing to increasing social trust in civic actors. Still, there is a risk of exploiting the monarchy

as a mean of political parties and coalitions to perpetuate their own interests. In this case, the monarchy would be nothing more than another player too weak to object and too insufficient to respectfully represent the people's interests.

The second last dimension regards the legal aspect. The main obstacle is article 152 of the Romanian Constitution³ which forbids changing the republican form of government. The only amendments introduced to the Constitution were implemented when Romania joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). I. Stanomir clearly said that the constitution's limitations are "purely unconstitutional" and it is a "constitutional dead end." The limitations included in the Romanian constitution 1991 are, according to A. Muraru, not democratic, providing the example of the article that forbids changing the flag, territory, borders and form of government:

[...] this is a fundamental limitation, and it is not democratic because when you create a constitution, you have to make it for the generations. So, what kind of solution do the interviewees propose?

I. Stanomir recommended [...] convening a constitutional assembly and starting from scratch. It is also possible to change the Constitution by popular demand. Nevertheless, T. Vișan-Miu mentioned that Romania does not have the tradition of the Constitution being changed by popular demand, like in Spain in 1975 or in Cambodia in 1993:

[...] around three years ago, some religious groups initiated a debate about changing the definition of a family. As a result, we even had a referendum which failed not because of how people voted but because there were not enough participants. Changing the Constitution should be done by the Parliament, which has declared itself a constitutional assembly and is responsible for working on a new text. Unfortunately, it is very tricky to have a monarchy today because to pass the proposal of introducing a crowned head of state, it is obligatory to have at least half of the members of Parliament vote for this reform, which, in view of today's situation, is highly unlikely to succeed.

By referring to what T. Vișan-Miu said, the fate of the monarchy is in the hands of both the nation and the Romanian parliament. M. Oprea mentioned the Constitution as the largest legal obstacle, however, he marked that there is still a chance to get round this hindrance, namely when: "[...] the secret service is convinced to not elect a head of state for a mandate." In agreement with M. Oprea, restoring the monarchy does not depend on the people or parliament, but on how the third actor, the secret service, perceives the possibility of having a crowned head of state.

³ Article 152 (1): "The provisions of this Constitution with regard to the national, independent, unitary and indivisible character of the Romanian State, the republican form of government, territorial integrity, independence of justice, political pluralism and official language shall not be subject to revision" [The Constitution of Romania 2022].

P.E. Roșca drew attention to two other legal problems that were not mentioned by any others. After 2000, King Mihai changed the rule which allowed only male heirs to ascend to the throne. Unfortunately, Margareta, the custodian of the crown, is supposed to be next in the line of succession. In this case, it is necessary to change the law. Yet, in Romania, as a republic, the parliament cannot discuss this type of royal family dilemma. Secondly, there has been no tradition of having a queen as a single ruler. Not so long ago, the first female prime minister – Viorica Dăncilă – was elected in Romania, but as P.E. Roșca said: “[...] the experience was not the greatest.” Regarding this issue, Anonymous 1 described the problem of the custodian of crown as follows:

[...] Margareta [...] is not a very popular figure. People are not against her but are not for her [...]. She is neutral and not very charismatic. I do not notice any bond between her and the society [...]. Margareta is the heir from the point of view of the dynasty, not the Constitution. Saying that, I am against [the monarchy], because it is clear that the royal family is not a constitutional reality. I can vote for the monarchy if there is another solution. I am not against the idea of the monarchy, but against empowering a person.

An additional issue came up during the interviews, namely the age of the keeper of the crown and having no children of her own. Even if the monarchy was settled and the law allowed women to rule, a possible problem would concern whether Margareta is the right candidate to have this honour of being the first Romanian queen or perhaps another figure should be chosen. A. Muraru pointed out that reimplanting the monarchy would bring to the table questions such as having a queen as a ruler, who has never been a monarch and is not a historical figure, for the first time in Romanian history. Having said that, complications in restoring the monarchy are not only legal, historical, political, and social, but are also deeply rooted in the aspect connected with royal house and its image, which is the last dimension.

Like in every royal court, there is gossip and scandals which distort the image and prestige of the dynasty. In Romania, the most popular controversy concerns princes Radu Duda (accused of working for the Secret Service to infiltrate to royal court) and Nicholas (removed from the family for his affair and having a child born out of wedlock). A. Muraru does not believe in such gossip:

The royal family is an institution with their own regulations, and if they want to disown somebody, this is to benefit the family [...]. We cannot interfere with their private lives and rules, and collaboration with the Securitate is nothing new. It was one of the biggest fake news stories involving Radu.

According to A. Muraru, the prince is the most active member of the royal family and ninety percent of the royal family's projects were Radu's ideas.

In assessing the activity of the royal family, I. Stanomir said that they intend to carry out their duties and tasks granted by the state. The royal family has made peace with losing the chance of regaining the throne. M. Oprea pointed out that the current problem with the royal family is that its members are not united. Margareta decided

to throw Nicholas out of the dynasty which, according to M. Oprea, was not a good idea. Nicholas was perceived as a danger by Radu because, according to the rules of the old Constitution, Nicholas is next in the line of succession after Mihai's death, not Margareta. This clearly divided the royal house into two branches: those who side with Margareta and those who side with Nicholas: "He has made a lot of mistakes in his life, but those were made when he was young. He is more charismatic, younger, and more popular. I know him. He is more like a king." M. Oprea pointed out that this conflict harms the members of the royal family: "In the meantime, Margareta and Radu want to benefit from the state and transform the monarchy into a state agency, selling possibility of having a crowned ruler in Romania."

The crises inside the royal family were also mentioned by Anonymous 2. The first one is about Prince Radu, who:

[...] is not very popular and everyone believes that this is how the regime wants to conquer the royal family, because there were rumours that he was a collaborator on the recommendation of the Securitate [...]. In reports of the Securitate, you can find that this institution has been interested in Margareta and who she will choose as her husband. They were afraid that if Margareta had taken a husband from other European monarchy that family would have tried to overthrow the Ceaușescu regime. After what happened in 1990, prince Radu Duda came out of nowhere, [...] right now the family has to fight with these rumours even if prince Radu denies them, there are some people who say: 'Since King Michael is dead, the royal family is infiltrated by the Secret Services, people of the regime, and so on'. This is one of the disadvantages of the history of the monarchy because those people say: 'Alright, we are neutral with Margareta but we do not want prince Radu.

The second case refers to the disagreement between Margareta and Mihai's nephew, Nicholas:

Prince Nicholas is very much adored by Romanians. They feel that he is a victim of Margareta and Radu. He lives in Romania and if people were asked who they would want to be king, maybe they would prefer him. However, there is a conflict inside the royal family [...] because prince Radu believes that Nicholas would replace him, and this fight between members of the royal family is not good at all. I think that they have to try to reconcile if they want to show that they are a united family. At some point, he will be more popular, but he would be used by the government in some diplomatic activities and so on [...].

According to Anonymous 2, Prince Nicholas is the possible future of the monarchy, but the conflict inside the royal family works unfavourably for the monarchy's image among Romanians:

We need people like Nicholas to promote a new image of Romania, for sure. But for this, you need time. Right now, there is no time due to this fight inside the royal family.

In contrast, P.E. Roșca says the royal house is quite active and they are trying to match new standards:

They are quite active and modern. The royal family offers scholarships, and patronises sports events and different institutions. In his will, Carol I asked for his fortune to be divided into scholarships, and you will not find any political activity in this attitude.

Anonymous 2 voiced the opinion that the royal activity is barely visible to Romanians:

There are not many recipients of this [royal] foundation's help. I do not know the numbers, but if you asked people and social carers, nine out of ten would tell you they do not know about this foundation.

Moreover, P.E. Roșca mentioned that those arrangements are rather unknown to the wider public opinion because of a lack of media interest:

A small portion of the population knows that the royal house acts and represents the country abroad, they meet with personalities, they ask them to help Romania, but no one knows about this [...].

T. Vișan-Miu supports P.E. Roșca in his statement, namely that the royal family is an active actor trying to be perceived as a part of society, but also to promote Romanian interests abroad:

[...] they are diplomatically engaged. They have cultural and philanthropic activities and support organisations. They give awards to people from Romanian society to acknowledge their merits. The royal family even issues some sorts of certificates of quality. To sum up, they are present in Romanian society. They can 'open some doors' more easily in foreign affairs, not only in other monarchies but even in republics, because of their historical prestige. We are grateful for that.

I.A. Gherasim spoke positively about the Romanian royal family, and underscored that popularising the monarchy depends not only on members of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, but also monarchy-supporters:

The Custodian of the Crown, Margareta, is the president of the Romanian Red Cross. I participate in many events and conferences on what that royal family does in Romania. Furthermore, they want to encourage Romanians who are abroad to support Romania. Public opinion in Romania highly regards the activity of Queen Margareta and Prince Radu. For me, you cannot stop. You have to fight. In my opinion, the Custodian of the Crown is not responsible for protecting and popularising the monarchy but for those who support the monarchy. They should go to people and start talking with them. We now have other generations who do not have grandparents who can tell them

stories about Great Romania and the monarchy. The real fight takes place in Romanians' homes. After many years of different types of republics, I think we should implement a constitutional monarchy in Romania, and this is the only solution. Every country has national projects, and in Romania, it takes the form of an opportunity to start a new life. The republic project is a failure, and I do not think of it positively. I have a lot of good arguments that a monarchy is better than a republic. For me, the fighters against communism and Polish fighters should be the pattern, especially regarding courage. We need it. Right now, we have an accurate model to follow, not the fabricated one, and in the last thirty years, we have had plenty of fake news.

For some, the royal family should be more involved in social activity and be present among Romanian citizens. On the other hand, the members of the dynasty the undertaken arrangements have sustained the significance of the royal family in the society satisfactorily. However, this engagement can also harm the royal house. Anonymous 1 underlined that:

It is not a good strategy to raise their popularity. If they are popular, politicians will not accept it. They [politicians] want neutral individuals. The political elite require the monarchy to be a symbol that engages in no political discourse or real relations with the society. There cannot be a potential counter-power. Saying that, the strategy of the royal family now is very smart.

Monarchy – hope for a better Romania

The subject of the monarchy would not be debated if there was no benefit in restoring royal power. In terms of speaking about the chances of reinstalling the monarchy in Romania, I took into the consideration the idea of looking ahead, namely a time in the future when the monarchy could work again as a political system. I asked the question about what kinds of reforms would be introduced and if these reforms would tend to concern social-political affairs or the economic sphere.

According to Vişan-Miu, people mostly perceive the monarchy as a way to improve the economy. However, the problem lies in the concept of how this institution would work. In the case of a monarch, he or she would appoint judges and is the head of the army, but simultaneously would represent a more neutral approach in terms of political issues. Secondly, T. Vişan-Miu considers the return of the monarchy to be a remedy for stabilising the political situation in Romania. Anonymous 1 and P.E. Roşca see the monarchy as a way of solving the problem of legitimacy, and ending political crises. According to Anonymous 1, the monarchy in the twenty-first-century Europe is not about reforms, but about maintaining a balance between state powers:

The presidential power would be redistributed between the Parliament and the Prime Minister [...]. The relation with the parties would be symbolic. This symbolic dimension is important for the legitimacy of the regime [...] there will be changes in relations with

the secret service, information service, Constitutional Court [...] the relation between institutions: parliament, government and the judiciary.

M. Oprea shares the same view, saying that the monarchy would improve the level of political life and the quality of politicians' attitudes: "[...] who will not be able to 'bark' in front of the king." The monarchy, according to M. Oprea, would eliminate the problem with having politicians who would do anything to stay in power, as was mentioned by M. Oprea Traian Băsescu and Ion Iliescu. Furthermore, a monarch would not be absent like the current president Klaus Iohannis. On bringing an end to the political conflict, A. Muraru mentioned:

This change of the political system could take place either through a referendum or by changing the system to a parliamentary republic. The former would certainly be a challenge, but the latter would enable the parliament to open up a debate about the monarchy and potential future changes to the system.

The problem with presidents has been clearly underscored by T. Vișan-Miu by indicating the Romanian history of heads of state and vague constitutional clauses defining the president's power:

[...] I agree with putting forward the question not if the president is good or bad but if he has the means to do evil or good things. Secondly, how the Constitution is created is very ambiguous regarding the issue of what and how the president should do things. Sometimes, a president meddles too much and sometimes lets things be like they are. The current president is criticised for not interfering enough, and his predecessors were interfering too much. We have always had this problem.

I. Stanomir warned that any changes would not be imposed to the contrary of the public feeling and should take into account the experience of Romanians with dealing with political regimes:

I am not a politician, but what I can notice is you cannot impose changes that run contrary to the public feeling, so the problem is extremely complex because of the communist past, which involved corruption, financial malpractice and mistrust, and this cannot disappear with the wave of a magic wand. It is a long process, and the duration of the process is staggering.

According to P.E. Roșca's viewpoint, public opinion is convinced that a monarch would not dare to steal, is born to hold this office, and rule the state: "He or she loves this country, and you can be proud of this kind of ruler." Finally, a monarch would not allow himself or herself to betray their respected image, like presidents do.

At the international level, the monarchy would be responsible for improving Romania's image and establishing long-lasting contacts with other states, especially other monarchies. As T. Vișan-Miu mentioned:

[...] Great Britain, Belgium, Spain and the Scandinavian monarchies would see us more as a trustworthy state, which may result in us having economic relations or establishing other forms of cooperation.

Referring to the statement of M. Oprea, Romania would be perceived as a more serious state, among others because the ambassador would be the same person for as long as the monarch rules, increasing the stability of contacts with other states:

Romania would be perceived, I think, in a better way, as a respectable state among others because Romanian ambassadors would be like “kings.” Those diplomats would bear the same office as long as a monarch rules. This could lead to Romania being seen as a trustworthy partner for long-term projects.

In terms of the connection between other royal houses, P.E. Roşca expressed his feelings on the topic of education and preparation to represent the state abroad:

Our president [Klaus Johannis] speaks perfectly few languages perfectly, but Iliescu only spoke Russian, and Traian Băsescu spoke English but with a Russian accent, Nicolae Ceauşescu what four school classes, nothing but Romanian. When you go to an international meeting and you do not know your counterpart’s language, you cannot talk without a translator, and you start feeling like an outsider. A king or queen is brought up to represent a state and to speak several languages. They are well-versed in *savoir vivre*. You would be honoured to have this kind of person represent you. However, there is a pending debate about the future of the monarchy in Europe.

The monarchy is considered to be the regulator of the political system that inhibits any of the institutions of the tripartite separation of powers from seizing power. The monarchy seems to be the “golden mean” for the Romanian political landscape. The monarch is not only well-prepared to carry out his/her duties as a head of state, but also tries to not abuse his/her power and takes care of the royal image. In the debate about possible reforms introduced during a new monarchy, it would definitely stabilise the political platform and prevent new crises from arising. Secondly, it would be the best way to improve the communication between the politicians and citizens. The monarchy would be obliged to work in accordance with what society intends to be done. Finally, the monarchy leading the nation would promote the image of Romania internationally, establishing long-lasting contacts, especially with other monarchies.

Return of monarchy – dream or fact?

Implementing a monarchy is not a popular idea in Europe or in the world generally. The experts interviewed would gladly accept monarchy as a new form of rule, but they were restrained in speaking about the chances of replacing the president with a monarch. One of them, P.E. Roşca, said: “I am optimistic but realistic, and I do not

think there will be a monarchy again. [...]. It would be better to have a monarchy in Romania, but it would be a miracle.” P.E. Roșca said in the interview that the chances of reinstating the monarchy in Romania increase every time there is a crisis in the state:

In Romania, it is a miracle when there are no crises for two-to-three years. There is always a crisis, a conflict between the current president and political parties, the president and prime minister. From time to time, the idea to bring the monarchy back emerges in the media or in the academic environment.

I. Stanomir said that the monarchy is a Romanian end goal for a better life and political improvement:

I think Romania is destined to be a monarchical state. The state is in a paradoxical position; we are in NATO and a member of the UN. We emerged from totalitarianism but still have many things to settle and a lot of unfinished business. The closer you look at the Romanian state, the more you get frustrated that it has failed some citizens in providing basic services, a sense of security and things like these.

I. Stanomir directly answered that he does not hold out any hope that the monarchy will be reinstated:

I am curious what the Romanian state could look like in the next twenty years whether with a republic or a monarchy [...]. I sincerely do not have any hope when it comes to Romanian politics. Your question is noble, but I do not have an answer to it. I do not have any hope. Talking about hope would be a sign of hypocrisy. One who does not have hope is not exactly entitled to talk about hope.

In contrast, I.A. Gherasim is more inclined to believe in having the monarchy back:

For sure, I have hope. I pray to God to give me the health to see the monarchy back in Romania. I am sure the monarchy will return in Romania in my lifetime. I feel it and fight for this, but I do not know when it will happen.

M. Oprea also underlined the chances of restoring the monarchy in Romania: “It is more likely in Romania than in any other former monarchy to bring back a monarch, thanks to the successes of King Michael, who remained the most popular and prominent figure in our recent history.” M. Oprea believes that the monarchy will be reintroduced in a short period of time – not in twenty years, but in ten years, and to make this process faster, the scholar said that, first, it is essential to get the media on the monarchy’s side: “You just need proper education and mass media to spread the news in order to change the mentality and have a monarchy in a short time, like in ten years.” M. Oprea’s hope in getting the monarchy back derives from the past when Romanians were so motivated that they were able to change the whole system in few days:

Romania is a state full of surprises. I thought that Ceaușescu would be the president until 2000. Then, in December 1989, Romania changed in a few days, not only the communist leader but the whole political system. Communism disappeared in a few days. Is it possible to reintroduce the monarchy? In Romania, it is possible.

A. Muraru also has hope of having the monarchy back soon: “I would say that you should multiply the same years that communists took to change mentalities. Now there are a lot of crises (economic, institutional, governmental, demographic, pandemic), and people do not have time for this, but it could be a groundbreaking solution. It would be a vision to change the entire political system.” P.E. Roșca recommended giving the monarchy a try to show its value: “Give the monarchy a chance. Perhaps it will be different. If a king does something inappropriate, you can always change the Constitution and abolish the monarchy, but first, give it a chance.” T. Vișan-Miu commented that Romania is considered to be one of the states with the largest chances to restore the monarchy, which means that the possibility of replacing president is a realistic proposition: “[...] Romania has the biggest chance of restoring the monarchy. This is why the Romanian monarchy is under such pressure, and if we succeeded, it could have a huge impact on other states deliberating on having their monarchy back.”

My interviewees were rather careful with predicting a promising future for the monarchy as another political institution in Romania. Besides accenting the advantages the monarchy could bring, the interviewees expressed concerns about changing the mentality and attitudes at the domestic and global levels. It is necessary to modify the mentality, system of education, and “utility” of the monarchy in order to repair the distorted image of the royal family among Romanians, but also in the eyes of a global public opinion convinced that monarchy is an ancient relic unsuitable in modern times.

Conclusions

The research paper shows that resurrecting the monarchical political system in Europe in the twenty first century is possible but obstructed by various factors. In the case of Romania, the issue of restoring the monarchy is rooted in a few dimensions. Communist propaganda has shaped the mentality of Romanians against the monarchy, and even nowadays, preserved antiroyal attitudes are visible. Secondly, the society of Romania does not perceive the monarchy to be a remedy for their concerns, rather as another institution they will have to pay taxes for. On other hand, legal issues such as the Constitution prohibit changes to the political system, and when it comes to a referendum, the chances of reaching a quorum are rather low. The monarchy could also be a new obstacle for the ruling elite or just a new instrument to further politicians’ interests. Furthermore, rumours about the royal family and its activities have deteriorated the image of the former ruling dynasty.

Nevertheless, there are still opportunities to restore the monarchy in Romania. Education and debate were mostly highlighted as the main means of fighting for citizens’ attention and understanding. With the help of the mass media to uncover the

truth about the monarchy, it would be possible to speed up the process of restoring the monarchy. The dynasty itself should also carry out its social involvement more publicly and simultaneously find a way to reunite. As a result, the monarchy could be reintroduced in Romania and in that way contribute to regulating the domestic political arena, and improving the global image of the state. The “golden age” of royal Romania can be repeated and presidential cries can come to an end, but this would take time.

Further studies should observe and report the process of Romanians reinstating the monarchy and determine if any factor included in the paper has been modified or replaced. Monarchies are not only those that exist today, but also republics which have tendencies to come back to their royal past, but this time under new conditions.

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Back to the past – chances of restoring monarchy in Romania in the 21st century

Abstract

There are twelve monarchies in Europe. However, this enumeration concerns exclusively those states that have a royal head of state, and does not apply to the republics which manifest growing approval of restoring monarchies, such as Romania. In order to draw the final conclusions, I conducted nine interviews with Romanian researchers and experts on the subject of monarchy in Romania. This article is a result of the project “Then and now – Romanian monarchical tradition and pro-monarchist tendencies in Romanian society” completed during a short-term visit at the University of Bucharest in Romania (from 1 to 30 November 2021) organised and financed from the funds of the Student and Scholar Exchange Program within the framework of bilateral cooperation (NAWA). The final results show that even though there are some social-legal impediments, monarchy is again considered to be a viable political system in Romania in place of the republic.

Keywords: Communist regime, Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, pro-monarchist tendencies, Romanian monarchy, Romanian republic

