

Foreign Policy Analysis

The Foreign Policy of Romania and the Party “All for the Country” (1936-1939)

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Abstract: The foreign policy of Roumania was profoundly pacifistic. The policy rests in the first place on the League of Nations, in the second place on the Little Entente and on the Balkanic Pact, and in the third place on the alliance with France and the non-aggression pacts with different countries, pacts which are all without exception registered at the League of Nations. The main principles of the “All for the Country Party” was those of the Iron Guard. In the international sphere, its programme may be summarized as follows: Peace and good relation with all those who respect Roumania’s frontiers and all our rights as a free State.

Keywords: foreign policy; Romania; Spanish Civil War; Iron Guard; Germany

In Europe, the authoritarian model of governance, with the radical right as its ideological basis was imposing itself more and more. Romania’s foreign policy of orientation towards the Western democracies - France and England, had been coordinated in the recent years by Nicolae Titulescu, who also had tried an approach to the USSR - a political gesture diversely commented at the time. Codreanu anxiously followed Titulescu’s activity, which he considered unrealistic, detached from the historical interests of Romanianism and much too inclined to compromises with the Soviets. He was not the only one who had rejected this course of action, great personalities like Octavian Goga and Gheorghe I. Brătianu could also be offered as similar examples.

In terms of legal logic, Titulescu’s diplomatic model amazed through its accuracy, but was totally dependent on the French military potential and the British will. Moreover, the interests of the member states of the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente could never be effectively harmonized. It could not be proven that

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Titulescu deliberately subordinated Romania's interests to Moscow, but his excessive idealism and confidence in the peaceful intentions of the USSR caused discontent in nationalist circles in Romania. The impression was that the only viable diplomatic formula was exclusively in Titulescu's possession and to doubt even theoretically its viability could be tantamount to sacrilege. National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy were regarded by Titulescu with much greater reluctance than the USSR, and France became almost a myth. Codreanu wasn't familiar with the subtleties of diplomacy and didn't have the necessary theoretical knowledge to be able to hypothetically compare himself with Titulescu, but his personal intuition seemed to have substituted those shortcomings. He acted more based on instinct.

In a circular dated May 30th, 1936, Codreanu presented his views on how Nicolae Titulescu orchestrated Romania's foreign policy. Codreanu's tone equally combined bitterness and irony. Titulescu appeared like a helpless luxury creating a feeling of safety for the public opinion, when in reality it was the opposite. Like Octavian Goga, the leader of the Legionnaires referred to Titulescu's personality with bitter irony: "*We Romanians understand that Mr. Titulescu is a talent, is less intelligence and almost not at all wisdom. Better to entrust the fate of a country to a wise man without talent, than to a talented man without wisdom*". (1993, p. 112)

Codreanu could not under any circumstances accept closer relations between Romania and the USSR. For the founder of the Legionary Movement the Russian people was synonymous to expansionist Tsarism and unscrupulous Communism, the entire history of Russian-Romanian relations proving the Russians' lack of respect for the principles of good neighborliness. Titulescu often claimed that between Romania and Russia there had never been a state of war, considering it a sufficient argument when he sustained the normalization of relations between Bucharest and Moscow. But history was different than principles, good intentions or lawyerly deceiving arguments. The painful episodes related to the presence of the Tsarist armies in the Romanian Principalities, the looting, the economic spoliation, the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 and the echoes of Stalinist-Communist dictatorship had long ago penetrated the collective memory of Romanians. Of course no one could be so blind as to wish for a permanent state of conflict between Romania and the USSR, but Titulescu's critics wanted only a purely formal relation to be maintained, without insisting too much.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was also irritated by Titulescu because he had stated his support for the Spanish Republican government in the civil war against the anti-left rebels led by General Francisco Franco. Germany and Italy supported Franco, while the Soviets were on the side of the republicans. Like all those who sympathized with the cause of the Spanish nationalists, Codreanu saw in the opposing camp a true group of the Devil.

Referring to a possible closeness between Romania and the USSR - due to Titulescu's policy, the leader of the Iron Guard saw this as a betrayal of the moral order of the world that the Romanians would commit, thus being firstly guilty in the eyes of those nations who were in a position of unrelenting adversity to the enemies of Christianity. Indirectly, Codreanu was thinking of Germany and Italy, whose interests were in contradiction both to the Western democracies and the Soviet Union: "*Honor to those nations. Our gesture is like a stain on the cheek of Romanian history, it dishonors it. Only through blood, a lot of blood, we will redeem ourselves in the future in the face of those who we betray and who will look down on us*". (1993, p. 112)

Some were quick to decipher in Codreanu's sentences an alleged subordination of the Iron Guard to National Socialism and Fascism, the Legionary Movement being merely their reflex in Romania. We need to understand the international political context of the time and the manner in which Codreanu thought, his psychology. For the Legionnaires (as well as for other representatives of the European far right), the Communism of Soviet type represented the greatest danger to Christian civilization, unlike some Western politicians who looked at the Soviet political model with a certain understanding or with ambiguity.

Being impregnated with biblical representations, the founder of the Legionary Movement believed that absolute evil was present in the world in the form of the Russian Communist state and one must admit that his perception was not far from the truth.

Codreanu wanted Romania to be constantly on standby, watching the East, the place where the largest invasion of the European continent always came from. For the leader of the Legion, Asia of long forgotten times - the territory of migratory tribes, ready to turn anytime into a horde of looters, was a palpable reality and Romanians were compelled to take this into account at all times. The reality in Germany and Italy were deciphered by Codreanu using the same anti-Communist

paradigm: both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini had created their own movements as a reaction to the danger of their peoples' Bolshevization...

"If the Russian troops will enter the country and come out victorious, in the Devil's name, who can believe, where is that person that can claim that they will leave our land before they satanize it, namely bolshevize it? The consequences? It's pointless to discuss them". (1993, p. 112)

Those who now reduce Codreanu's analysis to a sequence of pseudo-academic clichés, or to the manner of interpretation introduced for the first time in Romania by the sinister Mihai Roller, saw in the prediction of the leader of the Iron Guard his desire to see Romania oriented in diplomatic terms towards Germany and Italy, only because the Legionnaires were "the fifth column" of Fascism and Nazism in Romania. In reality, Codreanu proved a holistic view and an ability to foresee (unfortunately) in a disturbing accurate way what was going to happen. A decade after those phrases, Romania was already occupied by Russian Communist troops...

Titulescu would later be dismissed by King Carol II, but Codreanu's and the Legion's attitude concerning Romania's future foreign policy would not change. On the 5th of November 1936, the founder of the Legion would publish a petition addressed to the sovereign, the politicians and the Romanian public opinion. In a civilized but firm tone, Codreanu took a stand as clear as possible against what he called the issue of Romania's future. The Legionnaires' leader believed that he didn't only express the views of the Iron Guard, but also of a new generation of Romanian citizens who wanted something else in this regard: *"All that Romanian politicians do in terms of foreign policy they stake on our flesh, blood and responsibility. Good or bad, they have lived their lives. Now ours follows. It's alarming that their acts and attitudes now will put a great responsibility on the shoulders of our generation". (1993, p. 113)*

Again proving an extraordinary power of foresight, Codreanu warned the leaders of Romania that his generation should not go through the disgrace of "witnessing the crippling up or division of Greater Romania, to pay for the sins of an infamous foreign policy". (1993, p. 113)

Trying to make the officials change their foreign policy, Codreanu asked the sovereign to force the involved politicians to "pay with their lives for the directives they issue". (1993, p. 113)

The same requirement was addressed to Carol II personally: *“We also expect the same gesture of great courage and high chivalry from Your Majesty in respect of the royal line of Romanian foreign policy. In this way, in the event of a disaster the Country will know: both to whom the responsibility belongs and the nature of the sanction”*. (1993, p. 113)

Codreanu actually advocated for better communication between the official media of Romanian politics and public opinion, considering that such a question of the utmost importance, as the guidelines of Romanian diplomacy, should enjoy the consent of the nation. The manner in which Codreanu had pressed this issue seemed brutal and insolent to some, but in reality it was clear and resolute, proving an amazing pragmatism. In his opinion, politicians should not issue judgments or theoretical demonstrations totally devoid of any practical value, but opt for useful actions in the interest of the nation. Codreanu also provided a sensible characterization of the viability of external policy, in general: *“Because a certain course of foreign policy is good or bad not when it admits a theoretical demonstration, but when its results are good or fatal for the Country.”* (1993, p. 112)

With his pen he dismissed the entire diplomatic activity conducted by Nicolae Titulescu, considering that alliances such as the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente would not simply exist and who was stubborn enough to support their viability and effectiveness, was tragically mistaken and proved not to have understood anything in reality. Codreanu opted for a dichotomous vision of the European realities, considering that *“only two worlds sat face to face. Under their pressure, when a war starts, all diplomatic alliances will crumble like castles made of cardboard.”* (1993, p. 112)

On the 18th of July 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out, an event considered exceptionally serious. Following the elections in February 1936, the small majority obtained by the Popular Front allowed the formation of a government dominated by the Communists who were controlled by the USSR. On July 13th, 1936, the leader of the Spanish monarchist opposition, Calvo Sotelo, was assassinated which would ultimately determine Francisco Franco, the commander of the troops in Spanish Morocco, to start the rebellion against what he called *“the red government”* in Madrid.

The Spanish conflict inevitably got an international character. Atrocities were common on both sides, but in terms of media, the supporters of the pro-Soviet

republicans won this battle, pictures of the atrocities of Franco's troops being more frequent than the crimes committed by the other side. And yet, top intellectuals, supporters of the European conservative right showed the public opinion the unleashed hatred and atheism the representatives of the Spanish government have triggered after their accession to power. The murders and imprisonments of priests, the robberies and rapes had thrown upon Spain a wave of darkness and fear. (Savelle & Alfred, 1937, p. 293)

During the three years of the Spanish Civil War 12 bishops, 4,000 priests, 300 nuns and 2,000 monks were killed. In 2001, Pope John Paul II beatified 233 Catholic martyrs of the Spanish Civil War, victims of republicans. (Moța-Marin, 2002, p. 17)

The Romanian Legionnaires were watching with keen interest the development of the war in Spain and in October 1936 they saluted the brilliant victory obtained by Colonel Jose Moscardo Ituarte against the republican forces at Toledo. Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Grănicerul went to Spain to personally hand over to Moscardo a Toledo steel sword - a symbol of the appreciation shown to him by the Iron Guard. General Cantacuzino-Granicerul was accompanied by Ion Moța, the priest Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa, the Prince Alecu Cantacuzino (a career diplomat), Gheorghe Clime, Nicolae Totu, Bănică Dobre and Vasile Marin. (Moța-Marin, 2002, p. 20)

The initiative belonged to Ion Moța, who saw in the heroism of Colonel Moscardo a symbol of the victory of Christianity against atheism and darkness.

Ion Moța also proposed to Codreanu that a team of Legionnaires should join Franco's army to participate in the battles against the republicans. Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa reported: *"To join the Spanish army and take part in battles for a limited period of time, proposal with which, after much discussion, the Boss agreed, but only to take part in the line of the battle for 10 days"*. (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., pp. 186-187)

This was a widely discussed undertaking, not only in legionary circles, but also in the Romanian public opinion. The photos of the Iron Guard delegation show a group of men with proud eyes, in martial stance, expressing an unusual confidence. Dressed in his priestly clothes, Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa seemingly tries to symbolically support his comrades through the mysterious power of prayer. Without any doubt the Legionnaires who left for the Spanish front saw this mission as a privilege fate had reserved for them. They had the chance to actually fight with

weapons against Bolshevik atheism that, wherever it acted, it continued to be equally dangerous for the Romanian people. Overwhelmed by emotion, Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa later remembered the moments before departure: *“We made preparations for the road. I, with my priestly vestments, with the Cross and the Holy Communion. (...) We asked our vicar to perform church services for us, we confessed our sins and received Christ’s Holy Communion, like people who are getting ready for death.”* (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., pp. 187-188)

The journey was a real initiation for all of them, being convinced that they were leaving on an equally decisive and purifying mission. Ion Moța seemed totally transposed in his imaginary world, populated by saints and heroes. He constantly had in mind the image of Archangel Michael and he believed that it had multiplied everywhere: in churches frescoes, on the faces of statues, on the streets, the towers, in the arching sky, Moța felt his bright and burning presence, full of sorrow and heroism. With his restlessly swinging fiery sword, making no sound, like an image in a dream seen in the troubled waves of a river.

It is difficult if not impossible for a cool and lucid analyst of nowadays to understand the feelings experienced by the members of that legionary group. Some may reduce them to a simple psychological disorder - facets of some spirits dominated by a reprehensible mysticism. In truth, faith can transform the soul in a truly exceptional manner, manifesting in real bright trances, the individual feeling happy even when he predicts his own death. The idea of death itself appears without its chill and darkness and can metamorphose into a feeling of complete spiritual bliss and fulfillment.

Arriving at the border between Portugal and Spain, the Legionnaires were impressed by the landscape of the great Iberian plateau, seemingly drenched in incurable sadness. The large areas without any trace of grass, barren, rocky, inhabited by goats and donkeys seemed some naïve paintings that portrayed the trials of the first Christians. All the pain of the world seemed to have been distilled in the clouds and shadows, foretelling the beginning of a great turmoil. Entering the Spanish land, an apocalyptic picture of human suffering unfolded in front of the Romanians’ eyes: *“As we stepped into Spain, we found wounded men all over the place, filling us with horror. We were greeted by a captain and a lieutenant, wounded in the battle of Toledo, still wearing bandages and having one hand suspended from the neck. They got us into the cars that had been sent to take us to*

Salamanca, where Franco's and the Nationalist government's residence was." (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., p. 190)

In turn, Vasile Marin presented an interesting picture of the atmosphere of war, where the characters seem dominated by a strange calm: *"As early as we have crossed the border, we have seen recovering wounded men walking on the railway platform. Many uniforms. Two charity nuns collect money from the few travelers for the Spanish Red Cross. The General generously offers our share. In the train stations more and more Spanish nationalist soldiers get on. All kinds of uniforms and especially badges: the caps with two top knots and no bill of the Legion (Tercio), the navy blue caps of the Falangists (S.O.N.S., the Spanish Falange of the nests of national-syndicalist offensive), the red berets like poppies of the Carolists (...) and from time to time the white berets of the Moroccans."* (Moța-Marin, 2002, pp. 123-124)

General Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Grănicerul had to return to Romania, while the remaining group of Legionnaires was to be trained to leave as soon as possible for the front. At Ion Moța's proposal it was decided that the Romanians were to be soldiers and not officers so they could effectively be in the trenches of war, side by side with ordinary soldiers. After only two weeks of training, the Legionnaires were sent by train to Toledo. The atmosphere was heavy and also electrifying, the idea of nearing death gave the men an almost spectral aura, resembling the halos of some characters in Goya's paintings.

Ion Moța always carried a Romanian tricolor close to his bosom, like a talisman meant for protection. He had a curious mood, a blend of dynamism and anxiety.

Images succeeded each other as in a kaleidoscope of ugliness: lice crawling, the smell of abandoned corpses by the roadsides, slowly decomposing under the fiery rays of a hostile sun; the smoldering ruins of former houses, churches mutilated by bombs and shrapnel with gaping holes, bringing in the stars, the crows and the rain over the bloodstained, stone or wooden Madonnas; the endless strings of refugees, moving without a destination on the dusty paths full of stones and thistles. The noises were muffled, but getting closer and closer, blending with the prayers and wrath filled songs of the combatants who caressed their rifle butts as if they were their long ago seen sweethearts.

The fighters who had joined General Franco formed a diverse, fascinating, disconcerting and heroic mix made up of adventurers, former common-law

prisoners, monks who had fled their monasteries after the passing of the pillaging hordes of "the reds", peasants or craftsmen ruined by the violence of those international battalions, always incited to violence and robbery by their Moscow instructors...

With a mystical confidence they continued to believe in the ultimate victory of what they called the powers of truth and of the cross, in the fight against atheistic Communist. Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa seconded Ion Moța in his attitude of maximum religious intensity, carrying his cross with awe, dressed in his priestly vestments. While in the trucks that were transporting them to the front, the Legionnaires were recording on the retinas of their souls all the memories of their lives, the landscapes of their childhood, all their hopes and expectations. Their homeland had been left behind, preserved only in photographs, icons and crumpled letters...

The day in which Codreanu's men were to receive the baptism of fire the most diverse feelings were unleashed: *"I do not know how others felt, but I was stricken with horror and fear of death. Bănică couldn't stay calm so he sang, encouraging us. Alecu became sullen and nervous. The man born into wealth and privilege, the little prince, as we called him, could not stand the filth and lice anymore. (...) Time passed slowly in a state of great tension"*. (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., pp. 193-194)

Alexandru Cantacuzino (Alecu) later observed: *"We want to fight as soldiers and to give an example. An example of spiritual communion with the soldiers, with the poor and miserable whose sacrifices are not adorned with laurels. We wanted the workers, the villagers and the schoolchildren to know with unwavering conviction that: the legionary commanders earn their ranks and right to command not through privilege and deviousness, but through enduring shortages, sufferance and wounds, and smiling when death hisses."* (Sima & Horia, 1995, p. 166)

In those days, the troops of Francisco Franco were making terrible efforts to conquer Madrid, which was tenaciously defended by the republicans. The international brigades of volunteers that came to the help of the Spanish government fought remarkably, stopping each time Franco's offensive. It was hoped that Madrid would not resist much longer, especially since Franco's troops had better quality weapons, massively provided by Germany and Italy.

The anger of Franco's men was continuously amplifying, influenced by the horrible manner in which the Republicans behaved. Almost every place they had passed through bore the traces of Republican looting, destruction, killings and

rapes. The nightmare scenes, the desecration of churches, the destruction of religious images by bayonets - all these deeply impressed the Romanian Legionnaires present in Spain: *“Icons painted by famous artists, works of art from the Renaissance and even from before that as the monastery is about 600 years old, are broken, with the eyes pulled out. The desecrated icons of the Virgin Mary ask for revenge. One cannot describe all the horrors... (...) Our torch fantastically lights the galleries, the altars; it looks like the end of the world and hell took over. Filth on the altar, everything is filthy and - so that the sacrilege to be even greater- the hammer and sickle, drawn by skilled hands, fills the walls, the icons and every corner. Here's what civilization awaits us. (...) The chapel is transformed into a place of scorn. On the steps of the altar something can be seen, it looks like a human body, but we can't believe it. We get closer. With horror we recognize in that bundle of clothes and dried blood, the dead body of a priest. He looks at us with glassy eyes, surrounded by blood. We are surprised by these abnormally large eyes, we take a closer look and we shiver. His eyelids were cut. The nostrils were burned and broken, signs of gunpowder are visible. The priest's nose was used for fireworks. The Communists had filled his nostrils with gunpowder and then lit it. What a sadistic spectacle! His hands had been tied as to see the disfigurement or to lengthen his torment. Everywhere blood on the walls, in some places bits of dried brain with strands of hair. Here it had been established a sort of Communist military command... In the same village, the bodies of a young woman and a little girl about six years old, raped and killed by these monsters”.* (Sima & Horia, 1995, p. 166)

Besides some exaggeration due to emotional stress, it is certain that such horrors were not invented, being also confirmed by other sources. A famous writer like George Orwell, initially a sympathizer of the Spanish left and a participant in the Spanish Civil War, concentrated in a volume all his disappointment when he discovered that behind the grandiose speeches about democracy and anti-Fascism hid the image of tyrannical Communism. (Orwell & George, 1997, (in extensor)

The battles were fierce, the Legionnaires acted like ordinary soldiers shooting, advancing, sheltering or withdrawing. Of all, it seems that the most enthusiastic and transposed was Ion Moța. Bănică Dobre was the first to stop fighting as he had been wounded and therefore had to be evacuated. The republican forces counter-attacked each time and did not give up any positions they defended, despite the fact that the weapons of Franco's troops were better and their troop concentration was also better.

The 21st Company (where the Romanian Legionnaires were) was subjected at that time to the most powerful fire of machine guns and artillery. The republican airplanes were almost continuously on sorties, intensely bombing the nationalist trenches. (Sima & Horia, 1995, p. 166)

All seemed lost for Franco's troops until a true moment of grace took place, the protagonist of which was Ion Moța: *"Hell on earth. The trenches are upside down. There is no escape. You see legs, hands, and broken bodies, you hear cries, moans, screams and the shooting that never weakens. Help cannot come, for the enemy has also blocked the path of the reserves... Suddenly, a voice, a yell that had nothing human in it. We all jump up. Moța, standing on the trench, in the hail of bullets, took command: 'Advance!' They all understood, Spaniards, Portuguese, Russians, Germans. Moța was twice as big, like a statue. 'Fix bayonets!' It is crazy what we are doing, but nevertheless death awaits us. Not men, but beasts maddened by the deadly fire spring from the trenches"*. (Sima, Horia, 1995, p. 166)

Nicolae Totu (the author of these descriptions) perhaps best captured (along with the priest Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa), the episodes that characterized the Romanian Legionnaires' presence in Spain. The Legion's critics have looked at best with indifference at the voluntary gesture of this small group of Romanians. However they lived with an unusual intensity every battle that they participated in and whoever reads their testimonies can only be impressed by the great dedication that drove all of them and by their, at times, superhuman courage: *"Around Moța a circle is formed. The officers congratulate him. The soldiers look at him with admiration. We, the Romanians, are very happy and proud. Tears come to our eyes. His gaze floats on new heights. He is transfigured"*. (Sima, Horia, 1995, p. 166)

Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa: *"Moța and Marin, behind a wall to our left, were vigorously shooting. Clime, Alecu and I, in a rear position, with a machine gun, opened fire through the windows of a building. (...) A full day of whistling bullets, grenade explosions and the smell of gunpowder"* (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., p. 197).

The six Romanian legionary volunteers spent nearly a month continuously fighting, the rest periods being extremely short. With Ion Moța always ahead, stimulating and encouraging them, permanently ready to engage in the most dangerous situations like a professional soldier, the Legion's followers behaved heroically in the bloodiest civil war that Europe had known until then. In their perception they were direct participants in a confrontation with biblical echoes, between Good and

Evil, defending the Spanish Christian civilization against the Bolshevik atheistic attacks.

On the 11th of January 1937, the Legionnaires were in the small village of Majadahonda, 15 kilometers from Madrid. Until then they had earned the respect and sympathy of their Spanish and of other ethnicity comrades in arms who considered them among the bravest fighters and true models of boldness and daring.

Suffering of very high fever, Nicolae Totu was transported to a hospital. At that time, on the front remained Ion Moța, Vasile Marin, Gheorghe Clime, Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa and Alexandru Cantacuzino. (Sima & Horia, 1995, p. 171)

The night before a new attack, the priest Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa kept watch together with Ion Moța, both acting as sentinels. Moța probably sensed his end, as he seemed in deep concentration. Thus he asked his comrade, a priest, to pray together. The scene described later by Dumitrescu-Borșa has in it something of an ancient greatness: *"And now I ask you to pray with me. I felt how he sank in prayer, forgetting about him. Chills went down my spine, having a feeling that he was going to die. I didn't say anything to him."* (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., p. 199)

Ion Moța had written to Corneliu Zelea Codreanu saying that the group of Legionnaires intended to return to Romania, the brother-in-law of the Legion's leader considering that they had fulfilled their duty and had honorably represented the Iron Guard. He seemed completely absent, a prisoner of an invisible world that seemed to fully control him and exhaust all his power of concentration. His soul was troubled, yet peaceful, as he was certain that everything he had done was written in the book of his destiny.

In a testamentary letter addressed to his family on November 22nd, 1936, Ion Moța proved the same supernatural serenity, the same acceptance of fate, which he did not condemn but accepted, with his typical mysticism.

The phrase *"God wanted it to be this way"* hides in its apparently conventional brevity a disturbing individual drama. Read in this particular clef, Moța's psychology appears very special, and this man, despite his limits and ethnic fixation, proves to be made of elite spirits' material. We do not talk here of the doctrinaire. It's about the person who considered that the exemplary deed would confer his ideas the halo of eternity. Moța had heard the call of death and probably already had the representation of his violent end. Aware of the pain that his

potential death would cause his loved ones, he urged them to see in his presence in Spain another anthological page in the great epopee of universal Christian heroism. It seemed that a new time of Crusades had arrived, a time cursed with sophisticated methods of death, possessing terrifying means for carnage and young Moța was simply playing the role that he had always dreamt to play - that of a martyr of a cause which he considered sacred: "(...) *They were shooting machine guns bullets into the face of Christ! The foundation of the Christian world was shaking! Could we remain indifferent? Isn't it a great spiritual benefit for the afterlife to fall while in the defense of Christ? (...) This is how I understood my life's duty. I have loved Christ and I happily went to death for Him!*" (Moța-Marin, 2002, p. 93)

On Christmas 1937, Ion Moța had expressed in an article his views of the conflict that he was participating in. His emotion transfigured the phrases and the images were of an extraordinary evocative power, despite their old-fashioned perfume: "*Never since the Savior had come down among us, did a part of humanity raise with so much hatred and fierceness to destroy the establishment of the Christian world as they do today. Communism is like the red beast of the Apocalypse that rises in order to banish Christ from the world. The red beast will be defeated, no doubt, in the end. For the Church founded by Christ our Lord cannot be brought down even by the gates of hell. (...) We believe in the resurrection of the Church, both in Russia and in Communist Spain. But this resurrection and also the salvation of our country from the Antichrist depend on our resolution*". (Moța-Marin, 2002, p. 102)

Ion Moța intensely lived every word he had written in equal measure to the battles he had participated in and for which he was cherished. The passion, fatalism, unshaken faith and melancholy followed him like shadows. It's hard to understand nowadays the psychology of a man like Moța. It's tempting to describe him in a few ironic sentences, to label him a freak, a pathologic case, even an example of intense mysticism and total lack of realism. One could be tempted to overlook his unusual, unreal sensitivity and his courage in the midst of battles could be seen only as fanaticism and madness. If there is a huge dose of respect and admiration when evoking the heroes of the Crusades or the soldiers or children who went on the painful road to initiation, why is there none in Ion Moța's case? The times were different, but the conscience of the young Romanian lawyer was prisoner, like in a cocoon, in an ideal territory, inhabited by spirits and celestial beings. When the butterfly wanted to emerge, he entered into the ocean of eternity.

The 13th of January 1937 would be the saddest day for the little group of Romanian Legionnaires. They were preparing, in the trenches, for another confrontation with the Republican forces.

They seemed dominated by a terrifying boldness and the battle was expected to be fierce. Ion Moța seemed to have recovered from his previous apathy and focused all his energy on throwing grenades for stopping the enemy tanks that were approaching the nationalist positions in densely packed rows. He was permanently seconded by Vasile Marin, who seemed somewhat calmer. Some tanks had been stopped when, quite unexpectedly, the powerful explosion of a bombshell happened. Earth covered Franco's men, but they had the strength to shake off the dust and resume the fight. In the explosion, Ion Moța and Vasile Marin were killed.

Alexandru Cantacuzino: *"I kneel and I lift his head. It is Ionel Moța. I hold his head in my hands, looking at him with my thoughts in faraway lands. One meter away lays Vasile Marin, with his back against the wall of the trenches. I turn to scream at Clime and father Dumitrescu, over the sound of bullets and shells: 'Ionel and Marin are dead!' Over the coat with fresh blood stains, Ionel Moța's watch hangs from its chain with the glass broken. It stopped. It's a quarter to five."* (Sima, Horia, 1995, p. 172)

Ion Moța had been hit in the heart and had his chest torn, while Vasile Marin was hit in the head by shrapnel. Apparently they did not suffer, instantly passing to the world of shadows, without even a moan. Moța had been heard, moments before the explosion, urging his comrades not to allow being taken prisoners...

Their comrades' pain was immense. The priest Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa was the one who watched over Moța and Marin and officiated at the appropriate prayers for the dead. In a basement, the flickering lamp light cast strange shadows on the yellow, petrified faces of the two young men. Muffled sounds of the explosions outside could yet be heard. Transported to the hospital in Toledo, the bodies of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin were embalmed and then put in galvanized coffins. They were to be brought back to their country. (Dumitrescu-Borșa et al., p. 201)

A telegram was sent to Romania and Codreanu Zelea Codreanu, hearing the news of the death of the two, issued a circular to all Legionnaires, on January 15th, 1937: *"Ion Moța, founder of the Legionary Movement, honorary president of the Romanian students, and Vasile Marin M.D., legionary commander, head of the organization in the Capital, have both after 14 years of pain, blows and prisons,*

endured for the faith in the Romanian Nation, gone to sleep forever on the front of Majadahonda, in defense of our Lord Jesus Christ. This heartbreaking news fell like a thunderbolt upon us. It will shake every Romanian's heart. We gave God the best children of this Nation. General Cantacuzino leaves tomorrow to bring their bodies back to the country. Requiring a large amount of money, I appeal to those who have to contribute by telegraph, for these holy bodies to be brought back to their country. Sunday, January 17th, 1937, religious services will take place in churches. May God receive their sacrifice” (Moța-Marin, 2002, p. 139)

The coffins with the bodies of the two Legionnaires were brought to Romania by a special train, opting for the following route: Chernivtsi, Adjud, Cuciucul Mare, Adâncata, Vadul Șiretului, Domnești, Dărmănești, Suceava, Burdujeni, Dolhasca, Pașcani, Roman, Bacău, Târgu Ocna, Comănești, Petru Rareș, Războieni, Câmpia Turzii, Ghimeș Palanca, Ciceu, Aiud, Teiuș, Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Sibiu, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Drăgășani, Piatra Olt, Pitești, Bucharest. (Ornea, 1995, p. 320)

The Romanian public opinion received with immense emotion the event, despite the statements of some leftist publicists who believed that the death of the two Legionnaires was insignificant and not worth publishing. Even Nicolae Iorga, a staunch opponent of the Legion wrote, visibly touched, about the example provided by Ion Moța and Vasile Marin:”*Fighting for their Christian faith and for the honor of their people, for what is eternal, dear and clean in the not Bolshevik Latin world, two young Romanians, two brave Boys, Moța and Marin, fell in front of Madrid - defended by the Reds. In the last few days, ignoring the monotonous news - despite the daily carnage - on what was happening in midwinter there, in miserable Spain, we did not think that among those who gave their lives fighting for the right cause there were these two sons of our country.*

Led by an enthusiasm that needed to be directed and not suppressed (because otherwise the other enthusiasm remains, against which the State cannot fight enough and especially alone), animated by an idea to which they have committed themselves entirely, they decided that it was better not to remain in Romania, where restlessness does not always bring good things, but to go where there are no speeches and street demonstrations and man always stands in front of death for what he believes holy and great. And they fell.

Who knows what will come out of the terrible storm that is sweeping that far-away Latin land, where blood flows from every wound of that noble nation! But, if we ever see Spain as it was, as it should be, we will be able to say with tender pride

that a few drops of our precious young blood have also been spilt for it.”
(Newspaper, 1937)

In turn, Mircea Eliade observed that the death of the two leaders of the Iron Guard should be interpreted in a symbolic way, being in itself a relevant event to what the Romanian people had better and purer in terms of collective and religious conscience.

Nothing had compelled the two to such an action and yet they took the decision to directly participate on the Spanish front, gun in hand, as if in a ritual of the confrontation between darkness and light: *”The significance of their deaths exceeds the manly values and heroism. The voluntary death of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin has a mystical meaning: the sacrifice for Christianity. A sacrifice that proves the heroism and faith of an entire generation. A sacrifice meant to benefit, to strengthen Christianity, to stimulate the youth. (...) Two people of such different inner structure receive death with the same joy. Destiny has chosen them to prove, to show others the serenity that faith gives one, the Christian and heroic meaning that life gets when one is ready, at any moment, to give it up.”* (The Time, Newspaper, 1937)

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