

ION I. C. BRĂȚIANU

MOTTO: "Search the past and by lighting it, you will learn about the future."

Youth

Ionel Brătianu, "Romanian of the 20th century", was born in Florica, Argeș, on 20th August 1864. Son of Ion C. Brătianu, he spent his childhood on his parents' estate with his brothers and sisters. Taught by his father, "The Vizier" and inheriting his mother's qualities (from the Capellens), he knew that he would have an important role in life. And he intensely prepared for this. Ionel was a special child. This is how his and his brothers' school-teacher described him: "when I saw this slender boy, with beautiful eyes, curly hair, and his forehead lightened by the candle he was holding, I thought I saw Archangel Gabriel."

But his life was not a "dolce farniente". When he was only 13, his father took him on the battlefield. Witnessing the Romanian Army's bravery and his determined father, this future boy's will was to reach the rank destiny had prepared for him. Ion C. Brătianu had a boundless belief in his offspring. Except for Eugeniu Carada, the head of "The Occult" and friend of his father, Ionel was the only one who knew the secret writing "code" of the head of the Liberals. The King was puzzled but the Prime-Minister told him: "I trust no one more than my boys!"

So he was very hard working at "St. Sava" and he graduated brilliantly. The need of specialists in the country and the inexistence of polytechnic school in Bucharest made his father send him to Paris. Ionel was not happy, because out of love for his parents, he accepted to study engineering, when his eternal passion was history. But he perfectly understood his "old man's" reasons. The country became his duty. To ease his leaving, his father accompanied him to Germany, where he took him to visit the Chancellor, Prince of Bismark. The young man was impressed by the meal and by the companion of the two and of the Princess. He noticed that, when they left, the Chancellor held his father's coat, and the Princess saw them out herself. This was one of the many reasons why Ionel Brătianu would be considered the most courteous Romanian state person. The journey to Paris continued under the Eugeniu Carada's supervision. He became a student at the polytechnic school, and lived at "Ste. Barbe". As well as his brothers, he was very hard working. After two years he entered the Bridge and Road School. Dinu was at the Mine School, and Vintilă was studying economy at the Central School. Passing a hard period of illness and sadness, Ion C. Brătianu's only comfort were his sons' school results in Paris.

After 6 years of study (1883-1889), Ionel returns home and as a young engineer, he is hired at the "Railway" at Anghel Saligny's department. This was a period when-as he himself confessed-"society was haunted by one of those moral crisis that even robust temperaments hardly resisted". When he got his first salary, he bought theatre tickets to his sisters and had the old carriage repaired, loved so much by his mother. Then, he took part at the first Court Ball where he was declared "the most charming young man in Bucharest".

Public life

His first speech, the future party and country founder kept him at Tg. Jiu on 21st November/3rd December 1895 for the National Liberal Party meeting when he declared: "I don't have other merit but my name". He did not have problems in The Chamber. So he entered in politics, this "noble duty which, like any other science, needs to be based on experience"-he said.

He started his parliament activity with a daring speech about the “farmer stuff”. He knew that the farmers’ problems were vital for Romania’s economy.

In 1897 when he was only 33, he was the minister of Public Affairs in the “Dimitrie Sturdza” government. He knew that the valuable people of the Party did not become ministers without the Brătianu coat of arms. This made him say: “When a young officer on horse passes with the sign of the regiment in his hands, the old generals and all the officers take their swords and salute. But that officer would be mad if he thought that salute was for him and not for the flag he was holding.

After resign of the Conservative Government on 12th March 1907, during the farmer revolution, Ionel Brătianu is once again called in the new Sturdza government, but now as Minister of Internal Affairs. He found the country in total chaos, and managed to establish order in just a few weeks, having a prolific collaboration with Spiru Haret, Minister of Culture and Public Instruction, who had written letters to all priests and teachers from every village asking them to help appease the conflicts. Ion I. C. Brătianu write to the prefects to take firm measures not to outrun legality. The one who was coordinating the reprisals was general Averescu, appointed minister of War by Carol I.

Leader of the National Liberal Party and of the Council of Ministers

In December 1908 D. Sturdza’s health became worse. A new prime minister and a new president for the Liberal Party was needed. Carol appoints Ionel Brătianu president of the Council of Ministers. Prime minister of Romania will be the dignity he will prove during his life. Eugeniu Carada, the “Occult”, and the new generation of liberals decided to support Ion I. C. Brătianu as successor of D. Sturdza, who had left for treatment and had announced his resign from the Liberal Party on basis of illness.

On 11th January 1909, the National Liberal Party Congress declared Ion I. C. Brătianu as president of the Executive Committee and leader of the Liberal Party in the whole country.

On 9th December 1909 Ionel Brătianu was attacked by a hit man-who probably worked for foreign officials-and got three shots in his chest. Only luck, vigour and the thick coat he had got from his father helped him survive. He treated himself for a few months and put the power in the hands of M. Pherekyde. He used this period not only for treatment, but also to strengthen international relations. Being at baths at Mariembad he will have the opportunity to meet King Edward VII of England. He appreciated the king’s political analysis because Brătianu knew that United Kingdom could lose any battle but the last. Later, in the neutral period (1914-1916), life would confirm many ideas he had while in Bohemia. He returns with even more initiative and the period of big changes begins. Collaborating with his brother, Vintilă, and with E. Carada, they succeed in improving the national banking system. They emphasize the national capital which will supported by a wise politics based on the words: “we ourselves”. The country leaves the economic crisis and the country budget strengthens. Romania becomes a wealthy country, the “leu” reaches the level of the Swiss franc. Only France was before us in Europe. Romania was considered the “Orient’s Belgium”. But this situation didn’t last for long. 1914 brought grey clouds above Europe. After the Bosnian crisis, Romania was now in difficulty. The attempt from Sarayevo had given the opportunity for a real conflagration. All the staunchness and wisdom of Romanian politicians were needed. In the first two years Romania was neutral. Brătianu didn’t yield. Only when all his conditions were fulfilled the Romanian Army entered the war on the side of Antanta, with the declared goal of obtaining its territories.

The Great Romania and the Constitution from 1923

The most waited moment in Ionel Brătianu's life came on 29th November/12th December. He received the delegation from Transylvania led by Bishop Miron Cristea, the greek-catholic cardinal Iuliu Hossu, Dr. Al. Vaida-Voievod and Vasile Goldiș who brought to Bucharest the Declaration of Union from Alba Iulia. He welcomed them at the north railway station with the proper honors-like for head of states-laying down the red carpet, hugged them and said: "we've been waiting for a thousand years and now you've come and we'll never split!"

The Liberals lost the last elections in the Great Romania. People forgot quickly. Brătianu used this period to prepare political and economical reforms. He changed his attitude towards the press. He considered the press a new power in the democratic country. The acme of the changes was the Constitution from 1923, probably the most modern in Europe at that time. Brătianu got to maturity. He was a wise man. But he died on 24th November 1927. Nobody could believe this. He was very ill, and despite of the operation, he couldn't be saved. He stepped out of this life to enter another one. Ionel Brătianu didn't write history because he made history.