

REGIONAL POLICY PROJECTS (1920–1989)

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Abstract: The article reveals the main legislative initiatives and the main events concerning Romania as a part of the government policies about regional vs centralized administration in the period 1920–1989. It was a period with different regimes, different military organization and territorial evolution. Romania had an evolution as a middle country as population and surface with three frontiers with hostile countries as Bulgaria, Hungary and the Soviet Union.

Key words: Romania, strategy, political projects, 1920–1989, regional projects, political leaders.

Did Romania need a regional development? In the last decade, that is, since 2012, the discussions have been for and against, and the call to history has been made quite often. In the Romanian space, centralization has always been the watchword, and the county has a multi-century tradition. If in Muntenia, Oltenia was a kind of regional territory with certain special attributions, in Moldavia, the Upper Country and the Lower Country were also two structures more symbolic for the institution of the reign. Is regionalization an administrative import? Both in the case of the regionalization of Carol II and during the communist regionalization, the Yugoslav and Soviet models were clear.

Carol II had pursued the consolidation of the central policy by creating a category of high-ranking officials, the royal residents, to put into practice his directives. Thus, it was not at all a regional autonomy. The regions following the Soviet model wanted to accelerate the compatibility of the Romanian administration with the Soviet one. Here, too, there was no question of any local autonomy except for the Hungarian Autonomous Region, but its autonomy was more ethnic and not administrative. It was a gesture Stalin made to show the Romanians that he could always intervene in changing the administration in Transylvania if Dej wanted to follow in Tito's footsteps in Yugoslavia.

The period 1920–1989 includes several events such as the Second World War, administrative reorganizations of county, regional and then again county level.

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The period 1920–1938 experienced the administrative organization in counties. In 1938–1940, the organization changed from counties to the districts, a great part of Oltenia being part of Olt County. From 1940 to 1945, Romania was in a state of preparation for war, followed by the signing of the armistice of September 12, 1944 and the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947.

In the period 1949–1968, the regional organization followed, inspired by the Soviet model, so that after 1968, the territory was organized in counties.

In 1918, the Old Kingdom united with historical regions that had been through hundreds of years of different foreign administrations. The union of Dobrogea, the takeover of the Quadrilateral had been relatively simple exercises in relation to what would follow in the first years after 1918.

Romania, from the Great Union of 1918 to 1920, had to watch over the administrative integration of the historical regions returned to Romania through the will of its citizens. These plebiscitary acts of union were recognized by the Paris Peace Conferences, thus, except for the formally acknowledged unification of Bessarabia, with the obligation that it was to be the subject to a future Romanian-Soviet treaty. The Romanian historical provinces, united with the country, were administered through the institutions designated at the plebiscitary assemblies in Chişinău, Cernăuţi and Alba Iulia. They decided to delegate representatives to the governing bodies in Bucharest to speed up the process of administrative and territorial unification. There ought to be underlined that there were major differences between the Romanian, the Tsarist and the Austro-Hungarian administrative systems.

However, Romania had known the example of Dobrogea, which had been integrated into Romania on November 14, 1878. There, the Romanian population was rather small, but there was the advantage that many Turks chose to leave, and the lands of the former Ottoman people and institutions came to be offered to the Romanians brought from the Old Kingdom.

Even after the establishment of the Romanian administration, including in Southern Dobrogea (the Quadrilateral), the Greeks, for example, were for a long-time prefects and mayors in Constanţa and Tulcea.

Transylvania had been organized into 25 shires and communes, Bukovina had 11 *căpităni* (approx. districts) which had no legal personality, with landed properties, cities with special status and communes. Bessarabia had been organized as a gubernia (*oblastie*-border province) with volosts (communes) and 8 counties divided into *ocoale* (approx. districts).

The Old Kingdom (Romania after March 14, 1881) had 37 counties. The project initiated by NLP (National Liberal Party), as the main party, provided that Romania should include seven regions and councils.

The commission led by Simion Mehedinţi in 1920 proposed a division into regions. Constantin Argetoianu, a close friend then an opponent of Alexandru Averescu, had imagined in 1921 and resumed in 1931, a project of administration with 9 regions and regional councils. The Romanian National Party from

Transylvania wanted, in 1922, a project based on provinces. Iuliu Maniu, the leader of this party and the leader of the Conducting Council, did not want Transylvania to lose its individuality in the new Great Romania. He considered that Transylvania should also have a military autonomy, to which would be added an autonomy of minorities, something that, quite obviously, the politicians in Bucharest, led by Ionel Brătianu, did not accept.

Iuliu Maniu wanted to have, in Cluj, the most important secretariats to deal with the problems of Transylvania, these keeping in touch with the authorities in Bucharest in general matters. However, Vasile Goldiș opposed the plans of Iuliu Maniu and the Conducting Council, which functioned for almost 500 days with 16 ministries, disbanded.

The president of the Romanian Academy, the historian Ioan Aurel Pop concludes:

“The ideas related to the fate of Transylvania, in the case of some of the Romanian leaders, were radicalized, in the sense of union with Romania, only in the years 1916-1918. Iuliu Maniu wanted first, like Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, a regime of autonomy of Transylvania and then the union. It was a stepped vision, because they did not imagine that everything could be done hastily or abruptly. Before the Union Resolution, however, on the eve of December 1st, Maniu was a fervent supporter of the union and told all the Romanian leaders to put aside all the disagreements, in order to achieve an ideal. After the union, however, he was disappointed by a lot of the Bucharest misconducts ...”¹.

So, the first major debate of the interwar period arises: centralization or local autonomy through regionalization? The Romanian medieval tradition that the modern reforms of the period of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (the law of the county councils) did nothing but optimize for the provision that the boyars' domains should not have compact villages in a number that would determine a territorial secession in case of internal conflict.

Bănia in Oltenia had had an extended autonomy, with significant prerogatives, but the Organic Regulations practically abolished Bănia as an institution after the Phanariot reigns had reduced it to a decorative role.

The date of June 14, 1925 is emblematic of the fate of the administrative political projects. Then, centralization triumphed over regionalization. It was at that time that the law for the administrative unification came into force. It came naturally after the adoption, in March 1923, of the Constitution of Great Romania, which is considered the most advanced institutional political act of the interwar period. In Article 4 of Title I, the territory of Romania was divided into counties, and counties into communes. The local government laws were required to finalize their number, size and name.

¹ See <https://ilierad.ro/o-precizare-privitoare-la-iuliu-maniu/>, accessed on June 11, 2022.

On August 5, 1929, a new step forward was taken, opposite to regionalization and favourable to centralization: the law of local administration was adopted, under the influence of the national-peasant doctrine. By 1936, the law had undergone no fewer than 14 amendments. On March 27, 1936, the new law of administration entered into force, which introduced important provisions in case of war².

The period of the authoritarian monarchy of King Carol II will represent an ascendant of the idea of regionalization at the expense of the centralized administration.

The legislative actions of King Carol II will lead to the introduction of a new administrative unit, superior to the county, the *plăși* and the communes, the canton (*ținut*). Undoubtedly, it had been inspired by previous reforms by King Alexander of Yugoslavia, brother-in-law of King Carol II.

The ten counties did not have regional councils, but were led by a representative of the central authority. The administrative Law no. 2919, published in the Official Gazette no. 187 of August 14, 1938 provided that all the 71 counties of Romania to be grouped into 10 cantons. The canton was a territorial constituency having a regional character, with legal personality. The cantons were administered by royal residents, to whom extensive administrative, economic, social, cultural competences were assigned. Each ministry had an external service that helped the royal resident, without the ministries that had as portfolios: the judiciary, the army, the foreign affairs, the autonomous public administrations, the institutions of higher education and the commercial administrations.

The cantons had a peculiarity, trying to reunite in some places and counties from historically different regions. The Lower Danube Canton, for example, had 8 counties in the Old Kingdom and 2 in Bukovina. The cantons were as follows:

- ✓ Olt, with the seat at Craiova, comprising 6 counties;
- ✓ Bucegi, with the seat at Bucharest, comprising 10 counties;
- ✓ Mării, with the seat at Constanța, comprising 4 counties;
- ✓ Dunărea de Jos, with the seat at Galați, comprising 10 counties;
- ✓ Nistru, with the seat at Chișinău, comprising 4 counties;
- ✓ Prut, with the seat at Iași, comprising 9 counties;
- ✓ Suceava, with the seat at Cernăuți, comprising 7 counties;
- ✓ Mureș, with the seat at Alba Iulia, comprising 9 counties;
- ✓ Someș, with the seat at Cluj, comprising 7 counties;
- ✓ Timiș, with the seat at Timișoara, comprising 5 counties.

Armand Călinescu, minister of the interior in the government of Patriarch Miron Cristea portrayed the image of the royal resident as a position: "... to not be a politician. To be a representative, authoritative figure. He can also be old if he is given a young secretary-general"³.

² N. Marcu, *Istoria economică*, Bucharest, Didactică și Pedagogică Press, 1979, pp. 33–34.

³ See http://www.romania-actualitati.ro/structuri_administrative_in_istoria_romaniei_1920_1968-39973, accessed on November 12, 2021.

After in 1940, the North-West Transylvania was ceded to Hungary, by the Vienna Dictate, the institutions with legal profile were moved: those from Bihor to Beiuș, from Ciuc to Brașov, from Cluj to Sibiu and Turda, from Maramureș to Caransebeș, from Mureș to Târnava-Mare and Târnava Mică, from Năsăud to Alba, from Odorhei to Făgăraș, from Satu-Mare to Timișoara, from Sălaj to Lugoj and Oravița, from Trei-Scaune to Brașov. The courts, together with the staff and the related archives, were relocated.

The decree Law no. 31278 established the General Commissariat of Refugees from Northern Transylvania, based in Bucharest, subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a budget of 50 million lei. It was united with another similar body, the Commissariat of Refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, resulting in the General Commissariat of Refugees⁴.

The Decree-Law of 1940 that completed the provisions of art. 135 of the Administrative Law reorganized the Bihor, Cluj-Turda, Târnava-Mare, Târnava-Mică and Brașov County Constituencies – Bihor County, with the seat at Beiuș, received the remaining communes of Romania from the old Bihor County; – Cluj-Turda County, with the seat at Turda, received the remaining communes from the old county of Cluj, the territorial constituency of Turda County and the remaining communes from Mureș County; Căpușul-de-Câmpie, Dileul-Nou, Dileul-Vechiu, Grebenișul-de-Câmpie, Iclandul-Mare, Iclânzel, Lechința, Oarba-de-Mureș, Oroiu, Petea-de-Câmpie, Sânmărghita, Șăulia, Vaideiu, Săușa, Delureni, Pogăceaua, Sângeorgiu-de-Câmpie and Ulieș; – Târnava-Mică County, with the seat at Blaj, Cerghid and Cerghizel communes from Mures County; – Târnava-Mare County, with the seat at Sighișoara had the communes of Bodogaia, Eliseni, Feleag, Mureni, Dârjiu, Mujna, Petecu and Iacodul coming from Odorhei County; – Brașov County, with the seat at Brasov, also administered the localities of Băcel, Doboli-de-Jos, Lunca Călnicului, Araci, Ariușd, Arini, Iarăși and Hâghig from Trei-Scaune County⁵.

The territorial constituencies of Timiș, Marea, Dunărea de Jos, Prut and Suceava were reorganized: – Bihor County was subordinated to Timiș county; – Cluj-Turda County, newly formed, entered into the Mures County; – Tulcea County was subordinated to the Marea County; – Baia County became part of Suceava County.

The political-military regime Ion Antonescu, a classic right-wing military dictatorship, had two periods: – the so-called stage of the national legionary state (September 14, 1940 – January 23, 1941), the stage of the military dictatorship based on a government of soldiers and technocrats, a war-related stage from June 22, 1941, until Antonescu government removal, on August 23, 1944, by the will of King Michael and the traditional political parties (liberals, peasants, social democrats), including communists who were then in illegality.

⁴ Viorel Stănică, *Administrarea teritoriului României în timpul celui De-Al Doilea Război Mondial*, in “Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences”, 19/2007, pp. 107–108.

⁵ I.S. Nistor, *Comuna și județul: evoluția istorică*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Press, 2000, p. 125.

The Decree-Law for the dissolution of the Royal Residences and the organization of the county prefectures was promulgated under no. 3219 of 21 September 1940. He abolished the lands and restored to the legal personality of the counties, with the role of administrative districts, without the county councils.

The prefect ruled by applying the law, as he considered it legal, having administrative tutelage and powers of control over the rural and urban communes that were not the seat the county. They could issue ordinances within the limits of the law, which became enforceable after the submission to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, they could create revenues, could introduce taxes, fees and contributions within legal limits. They drew up the budget for the county and administered the county financially⁶.

The Decree-Law of September 21, 1940 re-established the office of the subprefect (abolished by the Administrative Law of 1938). A subprefect – a state official – in the absence of work duties, seconded the prefect, without having personal authority. The Prefecture Council, at the convocation of the prefect, worked in groups, on specialties, but its members were not permanent and were neither paid nor elected⁷.

Under the provisions of Decree-Law no. 790 from September 1941 Bessarabia, Hertsa, Northern Bukovina, retrieved in the autumn of 1941, formed two administrative provinces, with legal personality and own budgets, led by a governor who was also general administrator and authorized representative of the Head of State. The Directorates were subordinated to the governor (the directorate of administrative affairs; of finance; of agriculture and land; of national economy; of education and cults; of labor and social insurance; of public works and communications; of health; of Romanianisation; colonization and inventory), with the respective administrative services.

The provincial council for coordination and general guidance of the administrative activity was an advisory body of the Governor, composed of the heads of the directorates (art.11). The control over the two provinces was achieved through the Corps of General Commissioners for Bessarabia and Bukovina, which functioned under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Government). Every month, a Council of Ministers (government meeting) was organized for Bessarabia and Bukovina, a council in which the Governors compulsorily participated (art.37)⁸.

Bessarabia Province, with the seat at Chişinău, consisted of 9 counties: Bălţi, Cetatea-Albă, Cahul, Chilia, Ismail, Lăpuşna, Orhei, Soroca and Tighina. Bukovina Province, with the seat at Cernăuţi, included 6 counties: Câmpulung, Cernăuţi, Hotin, Rădăuţi, Storojineţ and Suceava, as well as Dorohoi County. The counties were ruled by prefects appointed by the Head of State at the proposal of the

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 109–110.

⁷ V. Ureche, *Organizarea administrativ-teritorială a României 1918–2000*, Timişoara, Augusta Press, 2000, pp. 45–49.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

Governor. These counties did not have legal personality, due to the special military context.

Ordinance no. 8 of September 12, 1941 regulated the organization of Transnistria as a province with legal personality, headed by a Governor, empowered by the Head of State (Ion Antonescu), being the general administrator of the province. Transnistria had the city of Odessa as seat, controlling 13 counties, according to the name of the city of residence: Ananiev, Balta, Berezovca, Dubăsari, Golta, Jugastru, Moghilău, Oceacov, Odessa, Ovidiopol, Râbnița, Tiraspol and Tulcin. Each county was divided in smaller districts, *raioane* (according to the Soviet model, between 3 and 8 districts), the prefect being seconded by two sub-prefects, one Transnistrian and another from Bessarabia.

In January 1942, the law for the organization of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1936 was amended, appearing the General Administrative Inspectorate, a forum for guiding and controlling the external services and the local administration. It dealt with investigations, inspections and special assignments ordered by the ministry.

From February 1943, by Decree-Law of 22 March 1943, the general inspectors had extensive powers, even in the application of sanctions and penalties. There were 11 General Administrative Inspectorates: I. Alba-Iulia with the counties of: Alba, Bihor, Cluj-Turda and Hunedoara; II. Bacău with the counties: Bacău, Neamț, Putna and Roman; III. Brașov with the counties: Brașov, Dâmbovița, Făgăraș and Prahova; IV. Bucharest with the counties: Ilfov, Buzau, Rm. Sărat and Vlașca; V. Constanța with the counties: Constanța, Brăila, Ialomița and Tulcea; VI. Craiova with the counties: Dolj, Mehedinți, Gorj and Romanați; VII. Galați with the counties: Covurlui, Fălciu, Tecuci and Tutova; VIII. Iași with the counties: Iași, Baia, Botoșani, Vaslui; IX. Pitești with the counties: Arges, Muscel, Olt and Teleorman; X. Sibiu with the counties: Sibiu, Târnava-Mare, Târnava-Mică and Vâlcea; XI. Timișoara with the counties: Timiș-Torontal, Arad, Severin and Caraș⁹.

Therefore, Antonescu decided to also borrow certain elements from the organization during the time of Carol II. If Carol had organized the country in 10 counties, Ion Antonescu appointed 11 general administrative inspectors. Apparently, their duties and functions differed completely, but the preference for controlling several counties remained.

The fact that Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Hertsa and Transnistria were somehow militarized in the special context they had, being the first outpost in the case of a general Soviet counteroffensive that began in the summer of 1943.

After October 25, 1944, the North-West of Transylvania came under Soviet military administration because the Soviets were dissatisfied with certain actions of the followers of Iuliu Maniu and of the “Black Sumanas” organization that wanted to avenge the Hungarian atrocities of 1940. On March 6, 1945, North-West Transylvania returned to Romania, by a personal decision of Stalin, communicated

⁹ Viorel Stănică, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–116.

to the new head of government, Petru Groza, who had had the consent and the support of the USSR to be appointed by King Michael.

Decision no. 3363 A of April 27, 1945, of the Department of Internal Affairs amended this law to include the counties of North-West Transylvania, which returned to the Romanian civil administration on March 6, 1945, after having been administered militarily by the Soviet Red Army since the autumn of 1944. The new constituencies were designated in Braşov, Bucharest, Cluj, Constanţa, Craiova, Galaţi, Iaşi, Piteşti, Sibiu, Suceava and Timişoara.

The governing during Antonescu regime was done without the Parliament, and the counties had no county councils. Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria were governed by civils, but the army had a greater role than in the rest of the country in supervising the situation. All the decisions came from higher authorities and they were often made on military criteria, being specific to the state of war.

Therefore, the Ministry of Interior organized a vertical public administration structure, from which the representative character of the local governing bodies disappeared.

After March 9, 1945, the counties of Bihor, Ciuc, Cluj, Maramureş, Mureş, Năsăud, Odorhei, Satu-Mare, Sălaj, Someş and Trei Scaune re-entered administratively in the scheme of the Romanian counties. Bihor, Cluj and Turda counties returned to the territorial division, that before August 30, 1940.

After 1945, Romania had 58 counties out of the total of 71 in the interwar period, having 424 *plăşi* and 6,276 communes. The Romanian authorities, controlled until 1958 by the Soviet counsellors, ensured the preparation of four major objectives: the agrarian reform, the extended universal suffrage (without the exceptions of 1919 and 1938), the nationalization and collectivization of agriculture. The first three objectives became a reality in 1946 and 1948. The collectivization took place, with interruptions, from 1949 to 1962¹⁰.

The installation of the communist regime and the adoption of the 1948 Constitution made Romania have 28 regions consisting of 177 raions and 4,052 communes, according to the Soviet model. On December 3, 1950, the local power was held through elections by the regional, raion, city and communal popular councils.

The 1952 Constitution led to the reorganization of Romania's administrative regions and raions, closer to the interwar regional tradition.

Radu Săgeată considers that the first 28 regions hindered the economic development, being unviable because the only criterion was the imitation of the Soviet model. Basically, 12 of them had to be absorbed¹¹:

¹⁰ D. Dobrinu, C. Iordachi, *Țărâניה și puterea. Procesul de colectivizare a agriculturii în România (1949–1962)*, Iași, Polirom Press, 2005, p. 52.

¹¹ Radu Săgeată, *Evoluția organizării administrativ-teritoriale a României între 1950 și 1968*, in "Studii și Cercetări de Geografie", XLIX–L, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 2002–2003, pp. 133–144.

“Delimited on economic criteria, according to the Soviet oblasts, the 28 regions soon proved to form a structure far too fragmented, unable to meet the political demands of the moment. They were unable to survive the constitution of September 24, 1952, which copied to an even greater extent than its predecessor in 1948, the Soviet model. The constitutional provisions were amplified by decree 331 of September 29, 1952, which imposed a new administrative-territorial organization. 12 regions disappeared by merging: Botoșani, Buzău, Dolj, Gorj, Ialomița, Mureș, Putna, Rodna, Severin, Sibiu, Teleorman and Vâlcea, instead being established two others: the Craiova region, by merging the regions of Dolj and Gorj and the Hungarian Autonomous Region, following the model of the autonomous oblasts of the USSR, by unifying the territories inhabited by the Szeklers of Covasna, Harghita and Mureș. The unification of Arges region with Vâlcea region gave rise to Pitești region; Prahova and Buzău regions formed Ploiești region; Severin region disappeared through its incorporation into the region of Timișoara; Putna region was incorporated into Bârlad region, etc. The consequences were the considerable increase in the area of the regions and the disappearance from the administrative map of the country of some old Romanian names, which had been in the consciousness of the population for centuries, and its depersonalization by replacing them with the names of the capital cities or with «imported» names (Stalin)”.

The local authorities had to put into practice the decisions of the RWP (Romanian Work Party, which resulted from the merger, in February 1948, of the PCR-the Communist Party of Romania, with the PSD-the Social Democrat Party), and all the state institutions, including the regional, raion administration, had Soviet councillors¹².

The local authorities had to accept the coordination and control of the Militia and Security (DSS) for the arrest of the so-called enemies of the people: members of the former historical parties, kulaks, opponents willing to enter the resistance movements, etc.

The liquidation, by the Communists, of the resistance movements put pressure on the local authorities who had to give information about those withdrawn to the mountains, about the connections with those in the villages who could supply, hide, warn them, etc.

As of now, there were 18 regions, one of which was based on ethnic criteria: the Hungarian Autonomous Region (RAM) with the districts: Ciuc, Gheorgheni, Odorhei, Reghin, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Sfântul Gheorghe, Târgu Mureș, Târgu Secuiesc, Toplița.

In the years 1956 and 1960 there were other changes in the administrative-territorial structure of the country. In 1956, Arad region was united with Timișoara, in anat region, Bârlad was a region divided between Bacău, Iași and Galați.

¹² V. Surd, I. Bold, V. Zotic, C. Chira, *Amenajarea teritoriului și infrastructuri tehnice*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană Press, 2005, pp. 89–91.

In 1960, the number of regions dropped to 16. The Hungarian Autonomous Region became the Mureș Hungarian Autonomous Region, having the approximate dimensions of the current Mureș County.

The change of leader of the unique party, the adoption of a new Constitution in 1965, the detachment from the ideological commands of Moscow imposed a new administrative-territorial reorganization. It was a return to the counties in 1968. The initial project had 37 counties planned, but it reached 39 together with the municipality of Bucharest.

Romania crossed from 1920 to 1989, a history of administrative reforms focused on finding an original path based on Romanian tradition, but which faced the influence of the administration conditioned by war and impacts of the Soviet administration that were maintained for another decade after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania.

Subsequently, Călărași, Ialomița and Ilfov Agricultural Sector counties, subordinated to Bucharest, were as well organized. Thus, in the 70s-80s, Romania had 40 counties, and the municipality of Bucharest.

After 1956, the need for a gradual return to the traditional Romanian administrative situation was felt, until the Soviet model was renounced in 1968.

Nonetheless, the watchword after 1968 was centralization. Not even in an innocent joke did any party activist try to bring up regionalisation or decentralisation. The only area where regionalization was preserved was in the technical field of the railway management organization, where there were “CFR regionals”. Obviously, these were strictly technical structures subordinated to the Ministry of Transport that responded directly to the central administration and had no initiatives.

An essential component of the Romanian administration during the analysed period was the existence of a leadership that evolved from authoritarianism, to a far-right military dictatorship and a far-left political dictatorship, as a result of the political-military developments specific to the period before the World War II and the post-war period.

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