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## THE PROCESS OF REGIONALIZATION OF ROMANIA IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD - THE FIRST LEGISLATIVE STEPS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The interwar period defined the reform of the Romanian regionalization on the background of the Great Union. This materialized in the form of a process of integration, of uniformity of the structures of the Old Kingdom, taking into account the specifics of each province. At the same time, the process was one of recovering the advance of the West, of integrating in a new stage of the Romanian state. Even if the projects created at that time aimed to form a construct of efficient territorial organization and applicable to the current reality of the interwar period, in the end it proved to be deeply influenced and organized against the problem of territorial unity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *regions, regionalization, interwar period, Romania, constitution*

### INTRODUCTION

The year 1918 reveals a post-war Romania with a doubled territory and number of inhabitants, along with a status of regional power. At that time, the administrative organization of the state did not derive from a single legal source, but from several. At that time, it could be said that we have as many systems of administrative organization as there are large regions that make up the country. The old kingdom has its administrative structure, which was given to it in 1864 and which was strengthened, two years later, by the Constitution. We must not forget, however, that the idea of this structure is purely Latin, as one that proceeds from the ideas of the Great French Revolution, which ended the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

This made it necessary to formulate a new constitution, the 1923 Constitution, along with a unification of administrative legislation. Administrative decentralization was announced by granting counties and communes the right to satisfy their own interests through elected councils.<sup>2</sup>

The term region is not yet established at this period as a unit of administrative-territorial decentralization.<sup>3</sup> The provisions of the constitution of 1923 did not allow the establishment of such units superior to the counties. All that could be achieved were the so-called ministerial directorates with administrative deconcentration units at the level of which the counties were to necessarily form associations endowed with legal personality<sup>4</sup>.

The same problems can be signaled in the case of the reforms following the union with Bessarabia, together with the excessive centralism through innumerable attributions offered to the Country Council. The process of reorganizing the province was achieved by adopting the administrative institutions of the Old Kingdom, but without resorting to a sudden elimination of the old Russian institutions.<sup>5</sup> For Bucovina, the process of applying the

<sup>1</sup> Anibal Teodorescu, *Viitoarea organizare administrativă a României, în Constituția din 1923 în dezbaterile contemporanilor*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1990, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, Ediția a 2-a, București, Editura Hamangiu, 2006, p.260.

<sup>3</sup> Monitorul Oficial, *Legea nr. 95/1925 pentru Unificarea Administrativă*.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, Ediția a 2-a, București, Editura Hamangiu, 2006, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> A se vedea Monitorul Oficial, *Legea nr. 95/1925 pentru Unificarea Administrativă*.

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Romanian administration was much more complicated and involved a much longer period of time, because the approval of the Romanian government's delegate minister in Chernivtsi was needed.

### MEASURES TAKEN FOR ADMINISTRATIVE-TERRITORIAL REORGANIZATION

In this context, the idea of regionalism was resumed in 1921 by Constantin Argetoianu, in whose project of organizing the local administration it was proposed to group the 76 counties of Greater Romania and to establish nine regions.

The regionalist problem was brought up again on the occasion of the Draft Law for the Organization of Local Administration in 1921, submitted by Constantin Argetoianu, the Minister of Interior at that time.<sup>6</sup> This project tells us about the creation of a new administrative constituency, of the region, consisting of several counties, as a consequence of the increase of the territory and of the number of inhabitants of the country. The project talks about the formation of a regional council that will lead the interests of the new constituency and will be composed of delegated members of the county councils and municipal councils in the region, but also of law members. The executing body will be appointed the president of the region. However, the commune, the net and the county remain equally subordinate to the higher administrative bodies of the region.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of the region, according to this project, is to deconcentrate some attributions exercised by the central power and to facilitate the application of laws, having as object the administrative services and the services of hygiene, assistance and social provision, as well as to give a greater impulse and development. local economic and cultural interests, interests that go beyond the territorial limits of the counties<sup>8</sup>.

The process of creating a single legislative and institutional framework for the entire country lasted several years, being legislated by the Law of Administrative Unification of June 14, 1925.<sup>9</sup> The law supported the idea of association of counties, which specifies the formation of a deliberate body - the Regional Assembly, consisting of members of each county. Each such region will have a center that will be represented by the prefect of the county and that will have the role of government commissioner in the region and will supervise the execution of laws and regulations of public administration.

According to the constitution, Romania's territory was divided administratively into counties and counties into communes. Statistical Yearbook of 1923<sup>10</sup>, it recognized a number of 76 counties and 7241 communes, of which 144 were urban communes. From a judicial point of view, the territory has judicial districts, and each county has a court. Another division of the country's space is the constituencies, sanitary, school, labor or forestry and mining.<sup>11</sup>

According to Art. 4 Title 1 of the Constitution of 1923: The territory of Romania from an administrative point of view is divided into counties, counties into communes. Their number, extent and territorial subdivisions shall be determined in accordance with the forms provided for in the laws on administrative organization.<sup>12</sup>

This article exposes to us clearly and concisely the fact that the territory of Romania is administratively organized from counties, which have as subdivision, communes. Nothing is reported about an administrative-territorial organization in the form of regions or in the form

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Onofreiu, *Un proiect de regionalizare a României din anul 1921. Cazul județului Bistrița-Năsăud*, Revista Bistriței XXVIII/2014, pp. 299-331.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Negulescu, *Tratat de drept administrativ*, volumul I, București, Tipografiile Române Unite, 1925, p. 562.

<sup>9</sup> Monitorul oficial, *Legea de unificare administrativă de la 14 iunie 1925*.

<sup>10</sup> Ministerul Industriei și Comerțului, *Anuarul statistic al României din 1923*, București, Tipografia Curții Regale, 1924.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Negulescu, *Tratat de drept administrativ român*, vol. I, edițiunea a III-a, București, Editura Tipografiile Române Unite, 1925, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Monitorul Oficial, *Constituția României din 1923*, Titlul I, Articolul 4.

of other methods of territorial grouping more comprehensive than counties. This fact can be seen as a deficient aspect in the wording of the articles of the Constitution, taking into account that it is the first fundamental law elaborated after the achievement of the Great Union. It was important and relevant to produce an article that had an organization more specific to the current needs of the newly formed state, not a simplistic and very clear one as the existing one.

At the same time, Title 1. About the territory of Romania, has in its composition only four articles and only one refers to the administrative organization of the territory of Romania, although there have been several projects and proposals for such an organization. Among them, we mention that of Anibal Teodorescu, who proposed the formation of the region in order to simplify the state administration by deconcentrating what would bring the existence of this region in the attributions of the center, being at the same time a good method to supervise administration of the counties from which it would be composed.<sup>13</sup> He believed that there should be financial autonomy of the counties, and the region could be a means to achieve the goal of better decentralization.

This idea of the association of counties is taken up by the Law of 1925.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the region will have a deliberative body, the regional assembly consisting of full members along with members elected by the county councils in each county, but also an executory body that will be represented by a standing committee that will work during the sessions of the assembly and will be composed of three delegates for each county, elected from the regional assembly. Each region will benefit from the existence of a center that will be represented by the prefect of the county who will have the role of government commissioner in the region and will supervise the execution of laws and regulations of public administration. At the same time, it will represent the legal personality of the State in court.

A few years later, close to the outbreak of World War II, we encounter a new attempt to achieve a process of regionalization, proposed by the political class of the time, through ministerial directorates. The ministerial directorates within which the counties were obliged to form associations with legal personality could be considered the parents of the notion of region that we use today, this being the most concrete example of the regionalization process in the interwar period.

Between 1925 and 1929, between the Law for Administrative Union, respectively the Law for the organization of local administration, three more decisions of the Council of Ministers were issued:

- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 577 of 1926 - grouping the 71 counties in nine administrative districts with executive role, without legal personality;
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 25 134 of 1927 - the establishment, under the same conditions, of ten administrative districts;
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 4,640 from 1928 - grouped the counties into nine other administrative districts.<sup>15</sup>

The government formed by the National Peasant Party, led by Iuliu Maniu, installed on November 10, 1928, undertook rapid measures of administrative reorganization, especially aiming at a better integration of the united provinces. Thus, by the Law for the organization of local administration, of August 3, 1929, seven centers of local administration and inspection were created, called local ministerial directorates, as institutions of deconcentration and administrative integration.<sup>16</sup>

The fall of the national-peasant government and the takeover of power by the government led by Nicolae Iorga, attracted a series of changes. Thus, the question of the

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<sup>13</sup> Anibal Teodorescu, *Viitoarea organizare administrativă a României, în Constituția din 1923 în dezbaterile contemporanilor*, Humanitas, București, 1990, p. 417.

<sup>14</sup> Monitorul Oficial, *Legea nr. 95/1925 pentru Unificarea Administrativă*.

<sup>15</sup> Radu Săgeată, *Acte normative care au vizat organizarea administrativ-teritorială a României*, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Silviu Nistor, *Comuna și județul. Evoluție istorică*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2000, p. 123.

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viable functioning of the ministerial directorates is called into question, the decision to abolish them being taken on 15 July 1931.

*The administrative law of 1936 does not bring essential changes to the county organization, maintaining the principles and spirit of the law of 1925. A greater impact had the administrative law of August 14, 1938, by grouping the counties into ten lands that were large territorial divisions of regional character, endowed with personality legal, the counties remaining simple administrative constituencies of control.*<sup>17</sup>

As a characteristic term of the Romanian legislation, the idea of regionalization appeared with 1938, being a regulation that aimed at the administrative organization of the territory. The law for administrative reform of August 14, 1938 stipulated that the territorial constituencies through which the local administration is exercised are: commune, net, county and county. The commune and the county were legal persons representing local interests and exercising at the same time the attributions of general administration, conferred by law, while the network and the county were defined as constituencies of control and deconcentration of the general administration.<sup>18</sup> The most important changes that took place at this time were the transformation of the village or commune into the only local administrative formations, but also the establishment of bodies larger than the counties - the lands. The lands appeared in the context of the dictatorship of King Charles II, following the administrative model of fascist Italy and Yugoslavia during the dictatorship of King Alexander I.

The notion of land from 1938 defines the formation of administrative bodies larger than counties. As a result of these changes, the counties become control and deconcentration districts of the general administration, and the communes and the lands are units of administrative decentralization.

*The law for administrative reform established the land as a mixed administrative region: it functioned both as a unit of administrative devolution, meant to satisfy the general interests of the state in close connection with those of the local community, and as an administrative-territorial unit of administrative decentralization*<sup>19</sup>. From a decision-making point of view, the mayor or the royal resident became the main decision-making body at communal / county level. The communal / territorial council was still a deliberative body, but it took second place in terms of responsibilities and importance. But these forms of organization, the lands, were designated by the Decree-Law for the abolition of the Royal Residences and the organization of the county prefectures promulgated under no. 3219 of September 21, 1940<sup>20</sup>, as a result of the territorial losses that Romania suffered in August 1940. Thus, the counties regained legal personality, establishing an administration based on the principle of deconcentration. However, the counties became only administrative districts, without deliberative bodies (county councils) characteristic of decentralization.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1938 represents for Romania the moment that defines the beginning of a dictatorial and totalitarian regime in a country that barely managed to define the idea of parliamentary democracy. A new Constitution is elected, which maintains the monarchy as a form of government, but establishes a king with broad powers of government and administration, hence the wording of the king and the ruler and the government, who is the head of the central public administration.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Cristian Petrișor Onete, *Considerații privind necesitatea deconcentrării administrativ-teritoriale, descentralizării și regionalizării României, în Descentralizarea. Prezent și perspective în contextul transformărilor din administrația publică românească*, Sibiu, Institutul de Științe Administrative Paul Negulescu în colaborarea cu Universitatea Româno-Germană din Sibiu, 2009, p. 515.

<sup>19</sup> Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, București, Editura Hamangiu, 2006, p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Monitorul Oficial, p. I, nr. 221, 22 septembrie 1940.

<sup>21</sup> Viorel Stănică, *Administrarea teritoriului României în timpul celui de-al doilea război mondial*, Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, 19/2007, p. 109.

Under the new constitution, there was no longer any reference to administrative-territorial units, and the principle of administrative decentralization and the eligibility of local deliberative bodies were no longer constitutional. Thus, it was up to the Parliament to decide the principles that would underlie the organization of the local public administration.<sup>22</sup> These decisions of the central administration were nothing more than having full control over the local authorities.

The year 1938 represents the rapid orientation of Romania towards totalitarianism. A first moment in this sense is represented by the abolition of political parties and the establishment of the National Renaissance Front. This fact attracted the transformation of political life into one monopolized by this single party, but also the condition of appointment to certain positions of membership in this political group. All these actions attract excessive political control, which leads us to conclude briefly that decentralization is only history: the country's territory is divided into provinces and communes, the county and the network becoming constituencies of control<sup>23</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, we can say that Romania presented itself as a state formed by inhomogeneous structures from a legal and demographic point of view, the basic principles of the Old Kingdom coexisting with the particular ones of each province. The desire to abandon the centralization characteristic of the period before the First World War by adopting decentralized administrative policies, which would benefit from a guarantee of preserving the regional identity, is visible.

Even though a new constitution was drafted towards the end of the interwar period, its articles did not provide for references or allow the formation of administrative units in the form of what we now call regions. However, we meet a form of regionalization with the help of units appointed at that time ministerial directorates in which the counties were obliged to form associations with legal personality. The experiments carried out until 1936 highlighted the fact that neither the obsession of ensuring the politico-territorial unity of the state, nor the obsession of achieving a decentralization according to scientific laboratory formulas did not benefit the reform of the local public administration.<sup>24</sup>

The issue of regionalization of the territory was an important aspect for the studies and research of the interwar period, but this was not a priority on the agenda of politicians, because more importance was given to projects of state unity, and the concept of regionalization was presented in the form of project ideas that more closely resembled administrative or political regionalization.

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<sup>22</sup> Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, Ediția a 2-a, București, Editura Hamangiu, 2006, p. 269.

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<sup>24</sup> Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești*, București, Editura Hamangiu, 2006, p. 261.

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