

# Dr. Ioan Mihu and the “Romanian-Hungarian Peace” of 1910

## The History of a Failure

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be given to us. The only thing  
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be a change of the system.”*  
*(Alexandru Vaida-Voevod)*

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**I**N THE mid-1930s, Silviu Dragomir published in the *Revue de Transylvanie* a text on the Romanian-Hungarian negotiations from 1910: “Le comte Étienne Tisza et les Roumains de Transylvanie.”<sup>1</sup> The title indicates the emphasis the historian laid on the important Hungarian political figure and the role he played in these events. The source according to which they were recounted, with all their “ins and outs,” was represented by the “memoirs of an eminent Romanian notable,” who had also attended those negotiations. The memoirs, unpublished at that time, were being edited by Dragomir with a view to having them published, which happened two years later. Their author was Dr. Ioan Mihu, “the former President of the Society for the Romanian Theater Fund, a former great landowner in Vinerea.” It had been only 11 years since the death of this personality, who, according to the same Dragomir, had “played an important role before the war.” The memory of the contemporaries needed, however, to be assisted in identifying this indi-

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vidual who, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next, had held prominent positions among the Romanian elite of southern Transylvania, too many to be listed on the title page of a book.

*Gleaning from My Thoughts*<sup>2</sup> is the title Mihu gave to his work, while its subtitle is *Political. Cultural. Economic*, indicating the fields of action in which he had distinguished himself. These were the achievements of a lifetime, in 500 large-format pages, of which about 350 were devoted to the “negotiations with the Hungarian government” and their “annexes,” indicating the importance the author ascribed to this episode, which lasted from the summer until the winter of 1910. Mihu did not leave memoirs fit for publication, in which he might have presented his own version of the events he had experienced as well as his own existence, but compiled a kind of breviary of documents, making them available to posterity. Although his work and achievements from before and after 1910 were more than remarkable, Mihu seems to have focused his recollections essentially on those few months of 1910–1911. He had his own version of them. And their account ultimately represents the story of a failure. It is a story that, if things had reached their envisaged purpose, could have become the great success not only of one life, but of an entire history: the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation.

About the 1910 negotiations, Mihu provided his own notes, taken down as the events were unfolding, but drafted in final form in December 1911 (according to the quasi-official conclusion at the end of the document), his correspondence with the Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon leaders (referring, obviously, to the same negotiations), and the file of press releases related to them (newspapers published in Romanian, Hungarian and German, from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Romania). Thus, the account became a kind of post-modern writing: multiple narrative voices, multiple versions of the same events.

Who was Dr. Ioan Mihu, this “interesting personality of Transylvanian political life,” who was nonetheless situated “outside the political groups”?<sup>3</sup> Born in the village of Vinerea in southern Transylvania in 1854, in the family of prominent peasants who had amassed great wealth from forest exploitation, Ioan Mihu studied in Orăștie and Sibiu, and read law at the Universities of Graz and Budapest. In 1883 he returned to Orăștie as a doctor of law and opened his own legal practice. Thus began his public and professional ascent, which transformed him, according to Ioan I. Lapedatu, into “the most distinguished Romanian personality in Transylvania,” “after Alexandru Mocioni.”<sup>4</sup> In 1885, he founded the Ardeleana Bank in the same town and managed it for 16 years. It became the second largest Romanian bank in Transylvania after Albina (where Mihu was a shareholder, as he was also at Victoria).<sup>5</sup> According to of S. Dragomir, during the last years of the nineteenth century, “Mihu truly led the entire Romanian movement” in Orăștie: he was chairman of the parish committee and of the

reading society, director of Branch IX of the Astra Association, a member in the Archdiocesan Synod and the National Ecclesiastical Congress; he led the Economic Reunion and the funeral one, the local club of the Romanian National Party, and “guided the political life of that constituency.”<sup>6</sup> The enumeration of titles and dignities above seems a page detached from I. L. Caragiale, whose characters also held the presidency of all kinds of committees and associations in provincial towns. The coincidence was not accidental. It reflected exactly what was happening with the Romanian bourgeoisie on either side of the Carpathians, at that time. Mihu and Caragiale were perfect contemporaries.<sup>7</sup>

Having stepped down from the management of the bank following some disputes, he focused at the beginning of the new century on his estates, which had also increased over time, especially after some acquisitions from the Hungarian landowners in the region.<sup>8</sup> The success of his business benefited many worthy, charitable or cultural, causes. As proved by his will, drawn up in 1905, when he was only 51 years old, Mihu seems to have built his wealth with the thought of contributing to the emancipation of his countrymen: “I have devoted my fortune to the good of my nation.” Its main beneficiary was the Consistory of the Orthodox Church in Sibiu, which “shall set up a foundation” meant to increase the “economic knowledge of our Romanian people, priests and teachers.” “On my estates there shall be established economic schools with Romanian as the language of instruction and with a Greek-Orthodox confessional character.”<sup>9</sup> At the time when his contacts with the Hungarian party started, in the summer of 1910, Mihu was already president of the Fund for the Romanian Theater (the Transylvanian Romanians did not yet have a theater company in the national language) and had just donated a large sum of money for the establishment of a Fund of the Romanian Journalists.<sup>10</sup> Often dragged into press-related court trials, some having poor financial situations, the journalists must have appreciated his gesture, especially since many of them were at the forefront of the national struggle, with its ups and downs, and their personal stories had not always been of the most serene.<sup>11</sup>

So, when he contacted Mihu through intermediaries (before the parliamentary elections from the early summer of 1910), Tisza seemed to know very well whom he was addressing. He had found the right man: a personality with a great capital of trust and (also material) prestige among the Romanians, but reserved towards the leadership of their National Party (whose activity had been officially banned in 1894). Points 1 and 9 of this party’s 1881 program provided for the autonomy of Transylvania and, respectively, the opposition to the Austro-Hungarian dualist pact. Dr. Mihu had made his position known in what was later called the “National Party crisis,” and at that time, according to Partenie Cosma’s expression, it was called “the matter of the cart stuck in the mud.”

The Romanians' National Party seemed stuck, like a cart that could not have its wheels pulled out of the mud. Mihu's solution appears in the letter he addressed to "a founder of the sheet *Libertatea*," published in the same newspaper. Here, at the beginning of 1902, he demanded that the two articles in the program be dropped and replaced with more realistic points, which would make possible the Romanians' economic and social emancipation. Neither passivism (the party's refusal to participate in the elections), nor political activism seemed sufficient by themselves for improving the situation of his fellow nationals. Still, his options seemed closer to those of the activists. However, he never attended the Sibiu Conference in 1905, which tipped the scales in favor of political activism.<sup>12</sup>

His quality as a good negotiator between the peoples of the empire seemed to have been attested by his former achievement, from the time when he was still in Orăștie, namely, an agreement for good governance between the three nationalities present in that town (Romanians, Saxons and Hungarians), an agreement that even provided for the sharing of positions in the civil service.<sup>13</sup> More than the good functioning of the institutions, it appears that what had been obtained between the three parties was "mutual respect," a *modus-vivendi* that Ioan I. Lapedatu nostalgically called the "republic of Orăștie."<sup>14</sup> What could be achieved at the level of a town (not among the largest in Transylvania, but with a Romanian majority) was going to prove, however, more difficult an undertaking at a larger scale.

If the word "crisis" cannot be avoided in regard to the situation of the Romanians in Hungary at that time, it is also not shunned by Hungarian historiography in diagnosing the situation in the country from the vantage point of the Hungarian elite. A long political crisis had come to an end with the installation, in early 1910, of Count Khuen-Héderváry's government, supported by a governmental party newly established as the National Labor Party, in whose cabinet one could find the same Count Tisza. The moment seemed to announce a "watershed in the political history of dualism."<sup>15</sup> The political representatives of the Romanians appear to have initially put some hopes in the orientation of the new government. They would later prove to have been mere illusions.

In view of the elections that were to be held in early summer (on 1 June), negotiations were carried out between the Romanian political leaders and the government representatives, the former hoping that they would obtain a large number of seats and consequently muffle, to some extent, the criticism that might have been brought against them in the press. Some of these leaders seemed to have so much faith in the new Hungarian party that they joined it: Vasile Mangra ran on the government's lists in these elections.<sup>16</sup> Mihu was therefore not the only Romanian approached by Tisza's envoys, with various types of proposals, in the period before and after the elections. The electoral goals of

the National Labor Party included “defeating several parliamentary opponents, meaning also the nationalities, and preventing the formation of a powerful bloc of deputies, devoted to Francis Ferdinand,” the heir to the crown.<sup>17</sup> It seems that these goals were achieved. The elections were a triumph for the government, but a “disaster” for the Romanian National Party, even considering the most unorthodox means used in the campaign by the party in power. The number of seats for the Romanian party fell from 15 (in 1906) to only 5.<sup>18</sup> A contemporary called them “the most savage elections in the Hungarian constitutional era.”<sup>19</sup>

**T**HIS WAS the context in which, in July 1910, the Mihú–Tisza or Mihú–Khuen-Héderváry meetings started. A certain international “suggestion” (Liviu Maior calls it “pressure”)<sup>20</sup> from Vienna and Berlin—interested in attracting Romania to their side in an increasingly possible European conflict—should also be taken into account when analyzing the situation.

Here come into play Mihú’s notes “about the part that I played in 1910 in the so-called peace talks with the Hungarian government, hastily jotted down”; in other words, his version as a participant. The reference to things “jotted down” in the subtitle suggests that these notes were taken down as the events unfolded; the same is implied by the grammatical tense used in several fragments: “today he has been at my place,” etc. It is also true that the past was also... present in the pages of the notes: “On my return from Abbazia, where I spent the winter months, stopping for a few days in Budapest, I found the political world there in even greater turmoil than usual,” etc. This indicates that there are at least two layers to this writing, intersecting without any warning to the reader. Probably Mihú ran off those initial notes, completing them later on, as he felt that the story had to be expanded, that it needed further clarification and contextualization. At the same time, realizing that this was part of something important, he insisted that the information he later learned about the events he had experienced should be recorded in the protocol of the events, which was nonetheless completed some time after they had actually occurred and placed the main character (the author) in a better light.

Mihú felt the need for a Foreword in which he outlined and developed his ideas regarding the fallacy that had afflicted Romanian politics over the past few decades (the reaction against the dualist pact, which in many respects, he believed, had caused a deterioration in the condition of his fellow nationals and had compromised the relation with the Hungarian party), implicitly indicating his motivation for entering the “negotiations”: he finally had the opportunity to do more than just criticize a particular policy. He could try to implement his own vision, as he had done before. “Learning and bread” first, “that is, cultural and economic well-being. Yes, because ultimately of what use were the most ad-

vanced political rights, as long as you have neither the intelligence to appreciate them justly, nor the moral and material independence to use them properly?”<sup>21</sup> He was now joining the struggle for political rights.

The political and parliamentary situation of the time, all the more difficult after the last elections, seems to have given him additional reasons to believe that it was time for a change of direction and that a rapprochement between the Hungarians and the Romanians would benefit both parties. It would benefit the Hungarians too, of course, who could understand, even “one day sooner,” that the “legitimate discontent of the majority of citizens has never strengthened and ensured the durability of any state.” And the “iron logic of the events” would not make any “exception, even for the Hungarian state.”<sup>22</sup> The “indispensable” conditions for achieving the “reconciliation” would be, according to Mihiu, certain renunciations. On the Romanian side, these included the federalist and autonomist claims, the opposition to the current order in the Hungarian state, *if* the powers that be granted and ensured the “following minimal demands”; three types of such claims were listed: language related and national-cultural rights, proportional representation at all institutional levels, and state subsidies for schools, the church and the economy. On the other hand, the Hungarian party was to abandon the “utopia of the unitary Hungarian state” and to change its oppressive attitude towards the Romanians, honorably meeting “all their just desiderata.”<sup>23</sup> What remained to be achieved was, of course, a problematic compromise between the “current minimum demands” of one party and what the other party considered to be “all their just desiderata.” The formulations proved too vague when these versions were actually compared.

After seemingly paying less attention to the first of Tisza’s emissaries (“a Jew from Budapest, with the airs of a writer-sociologist”), and also seeking to gain some time so as to find out if the proposal received had been truly serious, Mihiu gained confidence when they reached him *via* “my friend Dr. Klein” (the German signatory of the Tripartite Pact of Orăștie) or *via* the former “supreme *comes* in our county, a man whom Tisza and Khuen trusted, and, as a former fellow student, my good friend, Arthur Hollaky.” The first Mihiu–Tisza meeting took place on 23 July 1910, at the latter’s palace, in Budapest. The first meeting, the first impression: Tisza “has nothing of the characteristic air of the Hungarian magnates, but is more like a bourgeois intellectual . . . His precise and energetic statements gave the impression of a strong-minded man.” When asked if the government and the parliamentary majority were determined to “radically cleanse the actual desiderata and fair claims of the Romanians,” Mihiu received a two-phased response: the count could not make definitive statements on behalf of the government, but “individually he will insist with all his authority” that “the arrangement that would be made should be carried out.” The three-hour

long discussion took place on the basis of a “written summary,” hastily compiled the night before in a hotel room and reluctantly presented by Mihu, but which reflect “the way *I* see the manner of settling the matter.”<sup>24</sup> At its end, Tisza allegedly accepted the recognition of the Romanian National Party in Hungary, the participation of its members in the future negotiations and the ratification of a possible arrangement by the party’s national conference. Mihu left the meeting “surprised” and confident; “for me it is clear that Tisza seriously wants an agreement with the Romanians.”<sup>25</sup>

Two days later, Mihu was received at the ministerial palace in Buda by Prime Minister Khuen-Héderváry. The latter was a “pure blooded aristocrat,” “of almost annoying politeness.” Behind his cheerfulness, Mihu detected, however, less sincerity. Tisza was evidently at an advantage as concerned his awareness of the Romanians’ situation, in relation to which the prime minister admitted to possessing limited information. But not entirely, because he seemed to be familiar with the Romanian politicians, since he inserted the following remarks about them. It was difficult to make a “safe assumption” after the discussions with them, “because everyone speaks differently and in general terms.” Then, “quite reasonable in intimate discussions,” “they do not have the civic courage to publicly support” the same things. These scathing criticisms did not discourage Mihu, who left the meeting with a mandate from the Hungarian official. He was to submit to him “a statement on our wishes and aspirations,” after he had had consultations with religious and community leaders (“of different political orientations”). That same evening, in a discussion with Vasile Goldiș (his main advisor during this period), they agreed that the petition should be drafted (by them) together with Iuliu Maniu and Valeriu Braniște, and that this should be done “after my return home.” In order to also make public their own version of what had happened, a short press release was sent to the *Tribuna* in Arad, in order to counterbalance the government’s version, published in an evening newspaper in Budapest and read “with astonishment” by the Romanian participant in the discussions.<sup>26</sup> This was a sign that the talks that had to be “secret” or at least “discrete” had—already!—benefitted from a form of public coverage, for the time being influenced by the interested parties and used by them.

Pointing out that the first part of his mission had ended, tired perhaps by the “many conversations and combinations of the past few days,” Mihu resumed, the very next day, his interrupted “voyage from Kaltenlentgeben.”

This was the beginning of a new stage in the “reconciliation” process: preparing, through correspondence, the necessary consensus for the petition. Following the indications of the Hungarian prime minister, Mihu drew up a list of ten Romanian leaders whom he informed about the “conferences in Budapest.” Three of them belonged to the high clergy (two Orthodox, Metropolitan Ioan

Mețianu and Bishop Miron Cristea, one Greek-Catholic, Bishop Vasile Hossu), three were deputies—Alexandru Vaida-Voevod (of the National Party), Ioan Ciocan and Vasile Mangra (of the government party); Partenie Cosma was the director of the largest Romanian bank, and the list also included the names of Iuliu Maniu, Aurel Vlad and Nicolae Vecerdea. The representativeness required by Khuen seemed ensured, even though Mihiu did not really like some of them. The “defecting vicar of Oradea,” as he had already referred to Mangra, whose betrayal he would never forgive, would probably not have been among his choices. Their places of residence, also written down, give an idea of the location of the potential centers of the Romanian elite: Sibiu, Lugoj, Blaj, Orăștie, Brașov, Budapest, Oradea. Vaida was listed without an address, but he could have been in Karlsbad for the summer; as for the rest, as it is known, Vienna and Budapest, but not only. Some of them, who nonetheless seemed to matter less and less in the eyes of those in Hungary, had crossed over into the Kingdom of Romania. They were not among those Mihiu had in mind. Especially since some of them (Eugen Brote and Ioan Slavici) had supported Mangra’s gesture, which would make them undesirable in the eyes of most nationalist militants.<sup>27</sup>

The answers to the letters came one by one. From the way Mihiu commented on them, we may learn not only what ideas, advice and encouragements he was given, but also, for the most part, what the addressee thought about those in question: a combination between social, political hierarchies and personal considerations. Those who really mattered here were Vaida, Maniu and, partly, Vlad. They joined Goldiș, who had already been won over to the cause.<sup>28</sup> Maniu’s letter was expected “with some interest, given that Maniu is a young man of undisputedly superior culture.” Similarly, Vaida’s position was important to know, since he was accepted in the Viennese political circles and had influence there. These two, together with all those who wrote to him, assured Mihiu of their collaboration, of their trust in his skills as a “peacemaker.” The lucid Romanian politicians were less convinced by the sincerity of the government, by its real intention of solving the Romanian problem. For tactical reasons, they also agreed with Mihiu that a refusal of the negotiations was impossible, for it would allow the government officials to put the blame on the Romanian leaders.<sup>29</sup>

If for Maniu these negotiations had to end with “the greatest possible haste,” in Vaida’s view “the negotiations must not be interrupted without serious cause,” but “must be drawn-out,” which “will serve you the better.” A man of the world, who had visited various political centers, the deputy also had a more flexible view of the events: “As this is the jubilee year, it would be nice to appear in the foreign press, in one of the telegrams about the steps that the wise Khuen and Tisza are taking to reconcile the Romanians. There is also Germany’s intention to conclude the quadruple alliance with Romania and Turkey. The public opin-



ion in Romania should therefore be prepared. In the long run, however, nothing concrete will be given to us. The only thing that could help us would be a change of the system.”<sup>30</sup> The same Vaida, who in a previous letter had expressed his concern that Mihiu should not retire too early from the negotiations into his “splendid isolation,” ended his letter of 19 August 1910 with the wish “May you all have a good party and enduring humor in continuing the action commenced.”<sup>31</sup>

There are not too many signs showing that Mihiu took this wish into account. Accustomed to rigor and to a certain severity in dealing with the affairs in which he was involved, the landlord from Vinerea bent with difficulty or not at all to the political twists and turns from which he had stayed away for a long while. A first example would be his dispute with Metropolitan Meșianu. Although the latter had stated in an interview that “Mr. Mihiu is for us what Count Tisza is for the government,” this did not prevent him from getting upset that the Metropolitan had presented the Hungarian officials with his own version of the petition, without having the endorsement of “our national committee.” A retraction issued in the press stated this in terse and categorical terms: “I ask that I should not be identified with the affirmative petition of Metropolitan Meșianu or with the statements of His Holiness from today’s issue of the *Neue Freie Presse*. Dr. Ioan Mihiu.”<sup>32</sup> Otherwise, it should be noted that the Hungarian officials encouraged what they disavowed in their private conversations: the existence of diverging opinions among the Romanian community and elite.

**A**MID QUESTIONS and doubts, conflicting advice and incidents along the way, things nonetheless went further. On 21 August, a conference took place in Arad, initiated by Goldiș, where Mihiu came to see eye to eye with E. Ungureanu, Maniu, Braniște, Aurel Vlad and Ștefan Cicio-Pop as regards the conditions for further action. “After a waste of time and words” (Mihiu), the party representatives decided to cooperate in drafting the petition and, if the government accepted it and guaranteed to meet all requirements, then changes should be made in the political program.<sup>33</sup> With a pre-project prepared by Goldiș, Mihiu visited Maniu at Blaj in late August, obtaining the latter’s consent and agreement with its points.<sup>34</sup> After further meetings (in Sibiu) and exchanges of correspondence with various leaders who made their proposals known to him, he decided it was time to move on and, on 13 September, he sent the petition by mail, one copy to the prime minister and the other to Tisza. This was a text in 23 points, preceded by a preamble in which were presented the political, economic and cultural demands (focusing on the problems of schools and the church), from request no. 1 regarding the free functioning of a Romanian party, to the 23<sup>rd</sup>, which provided for the possibility of wearing the tricolor (red-yellow-blue) on the traditional costume. And then came the surprise: on

22 September Tisza replied that he had been “painfully surprised” by this document, which appeared to him to be much different from the first version, but that they could still talk about it, if Mihu accepted the invitation to visit him at his castle in Geszt.

This is what happened on 23 September, but not before Mihu expressed his puzzlement at having caused a surprise: “I do not really understand Tisza’s loud complaints, since it is only natural that the petition submitted at their request, with the collaboration and consent of the National Party, could not be completely identical with my individual discourse, and because, in the end, all the elements in the petition can be subsumed to my statements from the summer.”<sup>35</sup> A perfectly justified reaction: that is exactly what Mihu had been requested to do, on official assignment from the prime minister: he had had to collect the Romanians’ demands.

The mundane part of the visit to Geszt reached perfection: the quarters, the food, the carriage rides across the vast estate, the conversation, the manners, the meals, the diners were all of the finest quality. The discussion in private, with the petition on the table, created problems, however. Tisza was ready to concede on some points (partially or totally), while others could not be accepted.<sup>36</sup> It was Mihu’s turn to refuse to give assurances that the terms offered by the host would be satisfactory for the Romanian party: “Since I am not a part of any political organization, and I have not been otherwise authorized in this regard, of course I cannot make any binding and final statement on the matters discussed.”<sup>37</sup> The separation of the two was cordial, but at home the crisis cell was convened.

On 25 September, Goldiș, Maniu and Vlad went to Vinerea to decide together with Mihu what to do next. Things would take a problematic turn from this moment on. The versions presented in Mihu’s account, in the correspondence he had received from the Romanian leaders and the Hungarian politicians (especially Tisza) no longer coincided. There were contradictions in the accounts, and some misunderstandings appeared to have occurred between the various participants (Mihu—the leaders of the Romanian National Party; Mihu—the Hungarian party). It is very likely that Mihu had offered, under the charm exerted by the “tiger of Geszt,” some concessions that the Romanian side had not made and accepted. The fact is that the “Great Peacemaker” of Vinerea (as he was referred to by Braniște in a missive) seemed to have become entangled in a game in which it was not too clear to him what role he played or, more precisely, he appeared to have begun believing he was more than just a mediator between the parties.

At the meeting of 25 September in Vinerea, Maniu, Vlad and Goldiș “were very determined to continue the negotiations in the form proposed by Tisza,” believing that the Hungarians had not yet had the last word, while Mihu stated

that “under no circumstances will I take part in such a continuation” (a continuation for tactical reasons), demanding that the “minimal postulates from the petition should be unconditionally” respected. Moreover, it would be desirable that before any further step, “unconditionally, I should clearly and accurately know the point of view and the intention of the authorized representatives of the National Party, that is, of the National Committee.”<sup>38</sup> Mihu presented himself in these pages as being in a situation where he made “unconditional” demands (i.e. he set ultimatum conditions) either on his party, or on the government. “If I encounter difficulties with the petition at the government, or in the cooperation of the National Party . . . my continuing participation in the action in question is and remains out of the question,”<sup>39</sup> as each of the parties was informed. Or threatened: either my terms or... my withdrawal. Which sounds strange, to say the least, for the position of a mediator, peacemaker, etc. It rather looks like the (post festum?) preparation of an honorable exit from the scene. The sensitive issue seems to have been the “promised formulation,” sent to Tisza on the same day, in exchange for the fulfillment (albeit with amendments and reserves) of the petition “postulates.” And the price paid was high and envisaged the future course of action of the Romanians’ Party, about whom it said: “They [the Romanians] represent and support a party organization meant to see to the material and spiritual interests of the Romanian people and to ensure that the rights guaranteed, by law, to citizens with Romanian as their mother tongue are protected and that the decisions of the present agreement are respected. Once this has been achieved, they will carry out their political action within the existing parties.”<sup>40</sup>

That this was a sensitive point of the negotiations is confirmed by the few letters that Mihu received after the desired meeting of the party’s National Committee took place in Cluj on 4 October.<sup>41</sup> About the proposal sent by Tisza, Maniu wrote that “every word and sentence in that proposal has its significance. Hard work . . . My fear expressed in the first letter addressed to you has received its justification through the proposal of the friend in which what is asked is the ‘recognition of the current state of affairs.’ However, I still believe that we must do everything that is humanly possible so that a potential failure may not be ascribed to us.”<sup>42</sup> With the observation that Maniu seemed more concerned to avoid “the odium of failure” than failure itself (another proof of the importance that politicians gave, in the terms of that time, to “publicity,” and, in today’s terms, to “image”), let us mention here a fragment referring to the issue from Goldiș’s letter dated 11 October, with a more explicit and blunt phrasing. “It is also a contradiction in terms to admit the functioning of the party and then to add that the action should take place within the *framework* of other parties. . . . We must be completely honest. Either we accept the party in cooperation with

the ruling party or we do not accept any party, and then an agreement is out of the question. All the concessions are *void* if they do not allow the free operation of the party. With the party accepted, concessions can also be accepted practically in any form, while without a party all concessions would not lead to anything.”<sup>43</sup>

These were answers which, like the one given by Vlad, could not satisfy Mihiu. He read, on the same note, the successive press statements from the conference in Cluj, which presented, in terms of the need to resume the national struggle, the establishment of a commission of eight, designed to facilitate future agreements with the government. The statements appeared to Mihiu to be “equivocal” or “bellicose.” They were part of the same game of negotiation and the communication thereof, in which neither party wanted to appear as having given in too much.<sup>44</sup> What for the Romanian politicians seemed to be proofs of their efforts to continue the negotiations despite their doubts about the “sincerity” of the party, Mihiu saw rather as opposite signs. The party leaders did not cooperate enough in order to seal the agreement. Actually, they did not accept Mihiu’s version. Although in his report on the events, the “peacemaker” had announced in early October his withdrawal from the negotiations, this occurred later and in stages, indicating a decision made later than the date initially advanced.

The Hungarian party also created some difficulties for Mihiu. In a letter of 30 September, Tisza informed him of the unfavorable impression the petition had made on the Minister President (Khuen-Héderváry), alongside the idea of delaying the reconciliation “for better times.” The effects caused by the “unfortunate petition” had to be eliminated through a joint effort that “both” would have to make. The two, that is, Tisza and Mihiu, appeared in the image subtly suggested by the Hungarian count, who depicted them as saviors of the day. The suggestion seems to have had the desired effect, because in the following days (weeks), Mihiu seemed ready to convince his countrymen to accept to continue the negotiations on the terms proposed by Tisza. In the reply sent the following day, Mihiu did not inform his interlocutor about his withdrawal (given the mistrust expressed by the prime minister) from the negotiations, but proposed to him direct meetings “in the second half of the current month,” when he would be in Budapest for business matters,<sup>45</sup> hoping, perhaps, that in the meantime he would be able to influence, as desired, the opinion of most Romanian leaders. This did not happen.<sup>46</sup>

In mid-October, he let his partner know: “I wish to sincerely inform you that to claim or set, as a condition for peace, the merger of the Romanian party with any big party in the country is impossible.” This was a letter on a rather sad tone that suggested an awareness of failure and highlighted the negative contribution of the Hungarian press, which had “considerably deteriorated the atmosphere among the Romanians with the information it provided, whereby

Your Excellency only saw as provisional the functioning of the Romanian party thus created.” By contrast, the Romanian press, “here and in Romania,” had trusted him throughout the negotiations and “no voice has disturbed the success of my action.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the interventions of Goldiș and a (tacit) consensus had worked in the direction evoked and desired by Mihiu, up to a point. However, public interventions had pushed things towards a negative conclusion.

An official communiqué of the Hungarian government, published in the *Pester Lloyd* on 27 October, insisted on refuting the good news coming *via* the Bucharest press, which predicted the positive outcome of the negotiations. Yes, there had been talks, but “neither the Minister President Count Khuen-Héderváry, nor Count Tisza had accepted in principle the program presented to them by the leaders of the Romanians in Hungary.” Once again, the government was indeed willing to fulfill “all their wishes,” “brought to its attention.” With a single, important condition: that they stop negotiating “from a position of power, assumed ‘in the final phase of this process.’”<sup>48</sup> The press release and the letter Khuen-Héderváry sent to Mihiu on the same day (informing him that he considered the idea underlying the petition inappropriate for further discussion) pursued, of course, the same goal: to put pressure on “ill advised” diehards,<sup>49</sup> and ultimately (if things did not go as planned) to expose them to the “odium of failure,” which they strove so much to avoid.

A visit of “my friend, Dr. Klein,” which Mihiu dated 8 November, was meant to clarify once more the “tactical reasons” that had led to the prime minister’s letter and the government’s press release. It seems, however, that Mihiu had already informed the Hungarian officials of his withdrawal from the negotiations. Tisza appears to have been surprised by this, for in a short missive from Vienna, dated 10 November, he informed Mihiu about a three-party meeting with the head of the government, to be held in Budapest 7 days later. There was no point, Mihiu answered, as the decision to withdraw was “final.” The public statement that his petition had not been accepted as a basis for the discussions made his mission impossible: “Under these changed circumstances, I can win over nobody else but the deputies of the ruling party, and with them I cannot and would not identify.”<sup>50</sup>

Mihiu was now trapped in no man’s land, and any attempt made by Tisza to bring him back was doomed to failure. Only two people seemed capable, or worthy, of alleviating his suffering. They were his old friend Goldiș (who remained the same attentive, warm, fatherly political advisor, but turned more and more into his psychological counselor) and his new friend, the castellan of Geszt, to whom, in a last letter, he confessed (describing his own state) about the “sad and unexpected disappointment (that) experienced by those who, being the majority, had approached the peace initiative with confidence and persever-

ance,” but were now in a “general depression.” By contrast, the “other side,” the intransigent one, “although it had been quite loyal and did not disturb the negotiations in any way, remaining in abeyance, exulted now that it had obtained new arguments to prove that only the direction it represented was correct.”<sup>51</sup>

This is what failure looked like in the eyes of the man who had carried out the negotiations and had turned them into a personal quest. Not only the “peace initiative” had failed. Mihiu himself had failed. And that was the hardest burden to bear.<sup>52</sup>

Going out “publicly” could not have been easier. After recognizing within a select circle the failure of the negotiations, the public announcement followed. Mihiu took a respite before making it, which is why the press, so long held in check by party discipline,<sup>53</sup> punished him. The delicate Goldiș had once again assured him of his support (“you will let the public know what you believe is good and when you consider it opportune”), but there were some rifts ready to burst wide open, since the “comedy of reconciliation” was spoken about in not too flattering terms. An interview with Mihiu was published in the *Tribuna* at the end of November (29). There he announced his withdrawal from negotiations of a “confidential nature” (which is why he had hitherto not pronounced himself upon them in public), both because of the rejection of the petition by the prime minister, but also because of “difficulties” posed by “the prominent members of the National Party.” His statements managed to inflame, rather than appease the public opinion (the newspapers); in the coming weeks and months, these would debate and expand upon the subject of the negotiations, which became a new crisis within the “Romanian party.”<sup>54</sup>

The first epilogue to the story took place in Bucharest in early December, when Mihiu met with leading politicians (Ionel Brătianu, Take Ionescu, Titu Maiorescu, etc.) and when he was even received by the king, evidence of the interest with which the negotiations had been followed by the Kingdom of Romania. The latter hoped for an agreement acceptable to both parties, which would have allowed an alliance with Austria-Hungary “at the hour of common danger.”<sup>55</sup>

**S**IMILAR ROMANIAN-Hungarian negotiations would also take place in the coming years,<sup>56</sup> but without Mihiu’s participation. Retired in “splendid isolation,” the landlord of Vinerea lived there with the consciousness of his failure. He refused any future political engagement. He did not lack in invitations, even after 1918.<sup>57</sup> And while he seemed so well protected by his vast domains, he received another blow: the agrarian reform implemented after the Union deprived him of the lands in Orăștie, forcing him to change his will in 1923.<sup>58</sup> The envisaged agricultural schools would no longer be supported, but

even so, the church would have enough reasons to mention him among “the benefactors.”<sup>59</sup>

After the bad experiences of late 1910, Mihu gathered his forces and completed his memoirs of the “peace talks” of December 1911 (also recording a series of facts and events from that year, because the echoes of the talks subsided, particularly in the press). He obviously attempted to “sweeten” his situation, at least in writing. Besides that text, he also had the strength and honesty to leave us his correspondence and a file with the press releases on the matter. □

(Translated by CARMEN-VERONICA BORBÉLY)

## Notes

1. Silviu Dragomir, “Le comte Étienne Tisza et les Roumains de Transylvanie,” *Revue de Transylvanie* (Cluj) 2, 4 (1936): 440–474.
2. Ioan Mihu, *Spicuiuri din gândurile mele: Politice. Culturale. Economice*, published with a biographical study by Prof. Silviu Dragomir (Sibiu: Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1938).
3. The phrase belongs to Lucian Boia, “Contribuții privind criza Partidului Național Român și trecerea de la pasivism la activism,” *Studii* (Bucharest) 24, 5 (1971): 980.
4. Ioan I. Lapedatu, *Memorii și amintiri*, edited, afterword and notes by Ioan Opreș (Iași: Institutul European, 1998), 112.
5. See “Testamentul,” in Mihu, 476.
6. Dragomir, “Dr. Ioan Mihu,” biographical study in Mihu, 8.
7. On Caragiale’s involvement in at least two episodes related to the tumultuous history of the Transylvanian national movement, see Lucian Boia, *Eugen Brode 1850–1912: Destinul frânt al unui luptător național*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised and enlarged (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 193–194; id., “Contribuții privind mișcarea națională a românilor din Transilvania în anii 1910–1914,” *Studii* 25, 4 (1972): 793.
8. On the various facets of Mihu’s activity, see also Valentin Orga, *Aurel Lazăr: Istorie și destin* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2001), 45–240.
9. “Testamentul,” 475–479.
10. The newspapers of the time enthusiastically reported this new gesture of “patronage,” and Ioan I. Lapedatu, a close friend of Mihu’s, commented it thus: “The project of the donation and of the Foundation had been on Mihu’s mind for a long time. I think he only released the news then, on the one hand, to increase sympathy towards him, on the other, to temper the zeal of those who criticized the reconciliation attempt. For, compared to Mihu’s wealth, the sum of 25,000 crowns was but a crumb...” Lapedatu, 126.
11. See, for instance, Vlad Popovici, *Tribunismul (1884–1905)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008), especially “Epilogul.”

12. Dragomir, “Dr. Ioan Mihu,” 26–27; Boia, “Criza Partidului Național Român,” 980. Liviu Maior says rather more bluntly that Mihu was “the shadowy character who directed the actions of the neo-activist group”: *Mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania 1900–1914* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1986), 62.
13. Dragomir, “Dr. Ioan Mihu,” 10–11.
14. Lapedatu, 118–119.
15. *Histoire de la Transylvanie* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 594.
16. Boia, “Mișcarea națională a românilor,” 783–784; Marius Eppel, *Un mitropolit și epoca sa: Vasile Mangra (1850–1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006), 325.
17. *Histoire de la Transylvanie*, 595. For the contacts between the Romanians and Francis Ferdinand, see also Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Vaida-Voevod: Între Belvedere și Versailles* (Cluj-Napoca: Sincron, 1993), passim.
18. Boia, “Mișcarea națională a românilor,” 786.
19. Lapedatu, 120.
20. Maior, *Mișcarea națională*, 135. It is the same kind of international action that Alexandru Ghișa speaks about in *The Beginning of Diplomatic Relations between Romania and Hungary* (Cluj-Napoca: Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2003), 51–52.
21. Mihu, 5.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
24. In reality, at the time of his meeting with Tisza, Mihu already had the advice of three leaders he had contacted, as he said, to inform them about the scheduled meeting. Teodor Mihali, Vasile Goldiș and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod had already imparted upon him their own views on the issue and had even made some suggestions.
25. A “rather hasty” conclusion, as noted by Boia, “Mișcarea națională a românilor,” 787.
26. Mihu, 24–26.
27. Octavian Goga wrote a series of articles at the time, with his well-known virulence. The one referring to Ioan Slavici was actually entitled “A Man Has Died,” and he said farewell to the entire triad (Mangra, Brote, Slavici) in similar terms. See Boia, *Eugen Brote*, 281–282. Mihu himself referred to those episodes, showing how pleased he was with Goga’s writings: “Particularly beautifully written, in this respect, are the two articles of the poet Goga, the latest being entitled ‘A Fake Coriolanus,’ concerning Mangra, and the other ‘A Man Has Died,’ concerning Slavici” (Mihu, 13).
28. Goldiș’s contribution to the very first Mihu–Tisza meeting is unquestionable. The several pages-long “draft” contains ideas already expressed publicly by Mihu, but the meeting also benefited from suggestions he had received in a letter (dated Arad, 20 July 1910, before his meeting with Tisza) from Goldiș, which said: “If I were Dr. Mihu and stood before Tisza or Héderváry, I’d tell them the following.” And the essence of the “following” was the recognition of the Romanian National Party, which is what Mihu claimed to have obtained when he had come out of the conference. See Mihu, 108–109.



29. See the letter of Maniu to Mihiu, dated Blaj, 3 August 1910, in Mihiu, 131–134. Or the shorter, terser epistle of Aurel Vlad to Mihiu: *ibid.*, 137.
30. The letter of Vaida-Voevod to Mihiu, in *ibid.*, 157.
31. Whether Vaida-Voevod knew Mihiu better, or he applied his good medical skills in the psychological assessment of a person, his fears/wishes predicted fairly well what would happen.
32. The retraction was published in *Tribuna* on 6 August 1910: *ibid.*, 131.
33. *Ibid.*, 35–36.
34. Maniu sent Mihiu some additional proposals and formulations by mail, but they were no longer included in the final form, for the petition had already been sent. What deserves to be noted once again (with the future actions of the Transylvanian Romanians in mind) is that Goldiș and Maniu were the first to be summoned for the drafting of documents recording the Romanians' demands.
35. *Ibid.*, 47.
36. Showed in parallel, in two columns, the text of the petition and Tisza's observations are found in Dragomir, "Le comte Étienne Tisza," 453–464.
37. Mihiu, 51.
38. *Ibid.*, 53–55.
39. *Ibid.*, 55.
40. *Ibid.*
41. The notice of the meeting was signed by George Pop of Băsești and by Vasile Lucaciu. See *ibid.*, 189.
42. *Ibid.*, 192–193.
43. *Ibid.*, 195.
44. About that event and that meeting, Goldiș, who had not participated in them, wrote to him, in a contented and conciliatory manner: "As you can see, the committee has elected a delegation, from which you will designate for a potential discussion those people you agree with, however many they may be. I issued the press release more or less in keeping with the meaning of your statements. Maniu's latest press statement about the Committee meeting has not damaged anything yet. I intervened with the leaders of the *Tribuna* so that they would not publish anything that might complicate your mission of such great importance. About Cluj, Maniu will have given you a report. Everyone wishes good luck to your action. That there will be few slanderers is natural. That should not upset you." *Ibid.*, 194.
45. *Ibid.*, 187–188.
46. The treatise on Transylvanian history edited by the Hungarian Academy presents Mihiu thus: "Exasperated by increasingly greater disputes and demands, he withdrew." *Histoire de la Transylvanie*, 596.
47. Mihiu, 202.
48. *Ibid.*, 66.
49. A telegram sent while the prime minister was turned down by the "friend" H. Klein was meant to reassure Mihiu: "The letter of refusal intends solely to ease your situation. The matter follows the best possible course." *Ibid.*, 211.
50. *Ibid.*, 69, 221, 222.

51. Ibid., 230–231.
52. Silviu Dragomir speaks about a situation occurred years later (1922), when Mihu (continued to) picture himself as “defeated.” He also intervened right away to correct this perception, being unable to find any example given by Transylvanian political leaders in which they presented themselves as “victorious” in relation to Mihu. See Dragomir, “Dr. Mihu,” 44. It seems, however, that there are some counter-examples: Petru Groza, *Adio lumii vechi! Memorii* (Bucharest: Compania, 2003), 160–161 or the series of articles by Aurel Vlad, mentioned by Lapedatu, 128.
53. Boia, “Mișcarea națională a românilor,” 789.
54. Ibid., 790–794.
55. Mihu, 83, 261.
56. Maior, *Mișcarea națională*, 138–143; Boia, “Mișcarea națională a românilor,” 795–802. Not even those treaties led to the much desired Romanian-Hungarian “reconciliation.”
57. A telegram sent by Maniu asked him “to reply forthwith if he accepted the invitation” of the Central Election Commission of the party to run for the position of senator or deputy in the Orăștie constituency: Mihu, 357.
58. See the codicil to the testament in *ibid.*, 479–482.
59. See Visarion Rășinăreanu, “Un mecenat uitat: Dr. Ioan Mihu,” *Revista teologică* (Sibiu), new ser., 12 (84), 3 (July–September 2002): 3–6.

### Abstract

Dr. Ioan Mihu and the “Romanian-Hungarian Peace” of 1910:  
The History of a Failure

The paper discusses the failed Romanian-Hungarian negotiations of 1910, drawing on the memoirs of a direct participant, Dr. Ioan Mihu, a wealthy and well-educated Romanian landlord. After a presentation of this outstanding but otherwise little-known member of the Romanian Transylvanian elite, the paper discusses the various stages in the negotiations between the representatives of the Hungarian authorities of that time and the various representatives of the Romanian community in Transylvania. The perspective of Dr. Mihu, who found himself playing the role of go-between, is extremely valuable in this respect. Given the intransigence of both parties and a number of faux pas, the negotiations failed, compelling Mihu to withdraw from public life. Thus he had the opportunity to complete his memoirs, and he also had the strength and honesty to leave us his correspondence and a file with the press releases on the matter.

### Keywords

Transylvanian Romanians, national struggle, Count István Tizsa, Dr. Ioan Mihu