

The Integration of Regional Leadership after the Great Union The Case of Iuliu Maniu*

LUMINIȚA IGNAT-COMAN

AFTER WORLD War I, Greater Romania was formed as a national state by incorporating the provinces which had previously been under foreign domination. The emerging nationalist discourse emphasized the idea of uniformity and the construction of a normative Romanian identity. The evolution of the national state was marked by the pressure of homogenization and normative unification, by the necessity to integrate regional and local identities as well as the newly-constituted national minorities. According to the dialectics of the homogenous state, the capital city of Bucharest tended to be the only center of political authority and power. The emerging political elite of the national state included members not only from the Old Romanian Kingdom, but also from the newly-incorporated provinces. The latter's valuable political experience proved pivotal in their advancement within the ranks of the national elite.

This study focuses on the political activity of Iuliu Maniu, one of the most prominent Romanian politicians of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century. Furthermore, it assesses the different ways in which the provincial political elite integrated into and advanced within the national political elite, with special emphasis on Maniu's political career. As a representative of Transylvania, the largest province which joined Romania in 1918, Maniu imposed himself as a staunch defender of the rights of Transylvanian Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and an ardent promoter of the Union. After 1918, he became a prominent national leader involved in the most important events that marked the evolution of the newly-formed state.¹

Maniu's origins and political activity reveal his intimate connection with Transylvania. He represented the province both as a regional and national leader, often

* This research was financed by the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research under the research grant PD no. 403/2010.

being criticized for his regional patriotism in the interwar years. Maniu mainly used two political strategies in the nation-state. The first strategy, initially rejected, but later adopted, involved the establishment of alliances. As leader of the Transylvanian Romanian National Party (the provincial label had not disappeared), he was the artisan of its merger with the Peasant Party of the Old Romanian Kingdom and the foundation of the National Peasant Party (PNT). This strategy brought not only electoral success for the new party, but also Maniu's appointment as Prime Minister. The second strategy involved active opposition to the Hungarian political parties, which he practiced in the Budapest Parliament for many years. Maniu's political actions, dedication and sense of mission transformed him into a first-class national leader in the interwar period.

It is an outstanding achievement for a regional political leader to become a prominent national leader and one of the greatest politicians Romania had in the interwar period in such a short time. This indicates not only the mobility of the emerging political elite in the newly-created Romanian state whose aim is to be politically functional, but also the possibility for regional leaders to advance within the ranks of the national political elite due to their valuable political background. Maniu undoubtedly represents the prototype of the regional leader who evolves into a first-rate national leader. His exceptional insight into the political realities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as his experience of dialogue with the imperial authorities on issues pertaining to the defense and recognition of the rights of Transylvanian Romanians, as well as the preservation of their specificity and identity established him as a new model of political leadership. His political conduct was inspired by the Western world conduct, based on dialogue and negotiation as well as solid argumentation and common sense.

I structured the arguments of the analysis into three parts. The first part presents certain aspects from Maniu's biography which reveal a strong family background in the struggle to defend and assert the identity of Transylvanian Romanians and highlight the key moments in his political formation. The second part focuses both on the analysis of Maniu's political activity and on the transformation of his status from regional leader to national leader in the context of Transylvania's integration into the Romanian nation-state after the 1918 Union. It also discusses the connections between his political activity and the political achievements of the national state as well as his status as a democratic leader during King Carol II's authoritarian regime at the end of the 1930s. The concluding part synthesizes these issues and stresses Iuliu Maniu's legacy as a major political figure due to his human qualities and political actions.

I used several types of sources for this article. The first type includes Maniu's written works. Additionally, there are biographical works and a rich literature on his biography, political activity and trial published by authors such as Ioan Scurtu and Apostol Stan, among others. A number of authors, such as Ioan Scurtu and Armin Heinen, investigate Romanian history in the interwar period and under commu-

nism with certain references to the topic. Finally, I consulted theoretical works of sociological nature. This research goes beyond the interpretative paradigms offered by most authors who deal with Maniu's biography and his political activity, laying special emphasis on the analysis of his political activity and his transformation from a regional political leader into a prominent member of the national political elite. The novelty of the study comes from the interpretive model and analytical approach.

Authors generally note the manifold meanings of the term "elite" as well as the differences in meaning which result from its use in the singular or plural. In the singular, it is frequently synonymous to the ruling or governing elite. According to each case, it designates the governing milieu, the political class, and in a larger sense, all those whom we justifiably or unjustifiably imagine as participating openly or covertly in major decision-making problem and influencing the life of a nation or international relations.² Elite in the fullest sense is a social group whose members occupy similarly advantaged command positions in the social distribution of authority and who are linked to one another through the demographic process of circulation and interaction.³

I shall analyze the Romanian political elites in the period which coincides with the creation of the national state, more precisely the integration of Transylvanian political elites into the national political elite after 1918. The case study of Iuliu Maniu is representative of the gradual integration of provincial political elites into the national elite as a result of either personal merit or certain strategies such as political alliances, or the combination of these factors. The study also illustrates the fact that certain provincial leaders who played a major political role before the Union continued to play a similarly important role at national level.

Biographical note

IULIU MANIU was born on 8 January 1873 into a family of ethnic Romanians in Bădăcini, close to the town of Șimleul Silvaniei in Transylvania which, at that time, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Genealogy reveals that he came from a modest family with a background in the struggle to defend the national rights of Transylvanian Romanians. His father, Ion Maniu, was a descendant of Simion Bărnuțiu while his mother Clara Cororianu was the daughter of Iuliu Coroianu. Both Simion Bărnuțiu and Iuliu Coroianu were known for their political activity and their involvement in the national movement in Transylvania.⁴ Iuliu Maniu became the most prominent provincial leader as well as a major representative of Romania's political elite after the Great Union, previously standing out due to his remarkable political activity in Transylvania.

Maniu attended primary school in Blaj and the Calvinist high-school in Zalău. Then, he studied Law in Cluj, Budapest and Vienna and obtained his Ph.D. in Law in 1896.⁵ His education reveals many similarities with that of other Transylvanian

intellectuals who studied at prestigious universities in the Empire as well. In 1898, he started his professional activity and acted as a lawyer for the Greek-Catholic Church in Blaj. He held this position until 1915.⁶ However, his preference and vocation for politics had become obvious before the start of his activity as a lawyer.

Maniu became a member of the Romanian National Party, formed in 1881, while still a student.⁷ He was involved in actions which had a strong impact on the evolution of the national movement. During his student years, he was first a member and later president of the “Petru Maior” Academic Society. As such, he organized various manifestations that expressed solidarity with the *Memorandum*, a purely political act which dominated the political life of Transylvanian Romanians in the 1890s and which included their main grievances against the prevailing system.⁸ Maniu together with several other generation colleagues such as Alexandru Vaida Voevod⁹ significantly contributed to the drafting of the *Reply* – a document which reflected the desire of young Romanians living in Austria-Hungary to make the Romanian cause known – through their valuable work in collecting source material.¹⁰ This reflects Maniu’s strong commitment to the national cause and his deep concern for the fate and emancipation of Transylvanian Romanians.

Maniu became a leading political figure in Transylvania early in his career. Thus, at the age of 31, he was elected vice-president of the Romanian National Party.¹¹ After the 1867 Compromise, the Transylvanian Romanian political elite opted for two strategies to oppose the system. The first was passive opposition which involved non-participation in the political life as a way to ignore the system. Conversely, the strategy of active opposition was underpinned by the idea that doing something is better than doing nothing. Maniu’s political experience justifies his choice for the second strategy which was adopted at the National Conference in 1905. The adoption of this tactic paved the Party’s way to the Budapest Parliament and allowed for the representation of Transylvanian Romanians in the political arena of the Empire. After an initial electoral failure in 1905 when he was a candidate in the constituency of Vințu de Jos in Alba County, Maniu was elected along with nineteen other Romanians to the Budapest Parliament a year later.¹² From this moment on, he became an active participant in the parliamentary debates, first as a representative of Transylvanian Romanians, and later as a representative of other nationalities in the Empire, who established a club. He held his first speech in Parliament on 22 May 1906. His great skill as an orator together with his firmness and nationalist rhetoric impressed Hungarians. Many times he finished his speeches despite repeated interruptions. Most of them reflect his views on the fate and rights of Transylvanian Romanians and bring legal arguments to defend the rightfulness of the Romanian national cause.

An important stage in Maniu’s political career is connected to the establishment of the Romanian national unitary state. Romanian historiography unanimously recognizes him as one of the artisans of the Great Union in 1918. During World War I, he had served first on the Italian Front and then in Vienna. There, he instilled the

necessity for the Union in the Romanian front soldiers and inspired them to actively participate in its achievement.¹³ Maniu's decisive role in the Grand National Assembly, held in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, rightfully propelled him among the political elite of the newly-established Romanian state. Additionally, in his capacity as President of the Governing Council (*Consiliul Dirigent*) in Sibiu, he was deeply involved in Transylvania's integration into Greater Romania.¹⁴

During 1919, his contacts with Bucharest became closer and more frequent. After the 1919 elections, the Governing Council was disbanded albeit it had significantly contributed to the integration of Transylvania and the establishment of an administratively-functional nation-state. On the one hand, his relations with certain leaders in Bucharest and particularly with the National Liberal Party (PNL) worsened. This year, Maniu also earned his first mandate as a deputy in the Bucharest Parliament, which opened the path to his rise to prominence in national politics. He held his seat in Parliament uninterruptedly until 1938.

Iuliu Maniu as a national leader: his political activity within the Romanian national state

IN ANALYZING Maniu's political path, one can distinguish several major stages. The first stage includes his activity as a provincial leader and a member of the Transylvanian political elite. As such, he proved his great political ability as president of the Romanian National Party and deputy in the Budapest Parliament as well as during his endeavors for the establishment of the Romanian national unitary state. After 1918, in his capacity as deputy in the Bucharest Parliament, president of the National Peasant Party, Prime Minister as well as opposition leader during the Liberal government, Maniu became a nationally-recognized political figure and a pivotal member of the Romanian political elite. Another important stage in his prestigious political career is his democratic opposition to the authoritarian regime imposed by King Carol II in 1938. The last stage in his political activity, and perhaps the most dramatic, was his active opposition to the communist regime and his subsequent imprisonment after a show trial in 1947.

Maniu belongs to the category of politicians with legal training and experience. Maniu also shared many features with modern and charismatic leaders. According to Max Weber, a society has three types of authority exercised by as many types of leaders: traditional authority, charismatic authority and rational-legal authority. Weber argues that firstly there is the authority of "the eternal yesterday," namely the traditional authority as it was exercised by patriarchs and princes. The second type of authority is based on "the exemplary character of an individual person," namely on personal endowment and the trust of others in his qualities and talent. This is the charismatic domination exercised by the prophet as well as the party leader in poli-

tics. Finally, the third type involves the exercise of authority by virtue of legality, faith in the validity of a legal status and actual competencies based on rationally-elaborated rules. It is about the rational-legal authority exercised by modern statesmen.¹⁵

The type of authority which Maniu exercised in the Romanian national state is a combination of charismatic and rational-legal authority (Weber suggests that a pure type of authority exists in very rare situations). The arguments come from the manner in which he acceded to and occupied political positions. Maniu became a deputy in the Bucharest Parliament as a result of democratic elections and Prime Minister after being appointed by the King. This makes him a legitimate leader and a representative of the citizens who expressed their opinion. He is a leader who fulfills his obligations in compliance with the law.

His exceptional personal value doubled by a solid political background and experience gained as a politician in the Empire as well as his leadership positions (party leader, President of the Governing Council, and Prime Minister) include him in the category of charismatic leaders (generally, authors emphasize the volatile and situational character as well as the precariousness of the authority based on charisma).¹⁶ Other aspects that include him in this category are his political action driven by a sense of mission and the belief that his actions can change and democratize the emerging national state.

Maniu's transformation from a regional leader into a national leader resulted from the change of the political context as well as the emergence of the national unitary state and its political elite. His close connection with his native province of Transylvania and his local and regional patriotism drew criticism right from the start. In the period following the Great Union, he focused his political activity on the province's integration into Greater Romania in his double capacity as President of the transitional Governing Council, especially created to facilitate the integration of the province and the creation of an administratively-functional state, and leader of the Romanian National Party, a position he gained after the passing of the former leader, Gheorghe Pop of Băsești.

His political activity in the new state was influenced by the success in the 1919 elections. The Romanian National Party won 160 seats in the Assembly and 66 seats in the Senate. As previously mentioned, Maniu also won a deputy mandate.¹⁷ In the context of the post-1918 dynamic political scene, there were different opinions concerning the Party's future within its ranks. Thus, the group led by Octavian Goga advocated in favor of a merger with another party, arguing that the role of the Romanian National Party ended. Conversely, the group led by Iuliu Maniu considered that the Party should remain as it was and continue its activity.¹⁸ On the one hand, one can note Maniu's endeavor to transform the Party into a major political force at national level. On the other hand, his rejection of the merger strategy at this stage was justified by concerns regarding the manner it could be done (he feared an annexation instead of a merger in the true sense of the word). Thus, Maniu symbolically expressed his view on how the integration of Transylvania in the national state

should occur. The period between 1918 and 1920 can be considered a transitional period, Maniu's main political actions being closely connected to state building.

His activity as deputy in the Bucharest Parliament propelled him among the national political elite and substantially contributed to his political success in the 1920s and most of the 1930s until the establishment of authoritarian regimes, when his political career started to decline. As a national leader, Iuliu Maniu defined himself in relation to two formidable rivals: the Liberals, who seized power after the Union, and King Carol II. His active opposition to the Liberals transformed him not only into a vocal critic of the system and the modernization reforms imposed by them, but also into an Opposition leader who proposed and promoted alternative development paths. His antagonism with Ion I. C. Brătianu and his opposition to the liberal Constitution of 1923, even if it was later recognized 'de facto' and 'de jure', are well-documented facts.¹⁹

The same open opposition to the Liberals ultimately led to the merger of the Transylvanian Romanian National Party with the Peasant Party. They participated in the 1926 elections as the National Peasant Block and won 28% of the votes.²⁰ The merger confirmed Maniu as an important leader given that at the first congress held on 10 October 1926 he was elected president of the newly constituted National Peasant Party.²¹ His political rise was also marked by his appointment as Prime Minister on three occasions between 1928 and 1932 (10 November 1928 – 7 June 1930; 13 June 1930 – 10 October 1930 and 20 October 1932 – 13 January 1933).²²

Due to high expectations from the electorate, largely generated by the active opposition he had exercised during the liberal governments, Maniu was criticized for the manner in which he carried out his mandates as Prime Minister. Maniu did not meet the electorate's expectations due to the party's actions on the one hand and the adverse economic circumstances caused by the Great Depression on the other.²³

The next stage marked the beginning of his political decline which occurred on the backdrop of his conflict with King Carol II and the negative media campaigns, the best-known being related to the notorious Skoda Affair. His strained relations with the King brought him to the fore in a new position, namely that of a democratic leader under authoritarianism. Undoubtedly, Maniu was a staunch monarchist, but he was also fully aware of the need to transform the institution of monarchy into an instrument for the consolidation of democracy.²⁴ His relations with the King gradually deteriorated and determined Maniu to resign from the various functions he held. On 8 October 1930, Maniu resigned as Prime Minister in protest of Carol II's refusal to be crowned King along with his wife Elena, the mother of Prince Mihai. On 22 June 1931, he publicly announced his resignation as president of the National Peasant Party, a gesture that he later explained by invoking a conflict of opinions with another Transylvanian politician, Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Later, he would reconsider and return to the leadership of the party.²⁵ At the end of 1932, his relation with the King took a turn to the worse. The King was irritated at and dissatisfied with Maniu's inflexible attitude. The final break occurred in 1933, the

last year Maniu held the dignity of Prime Minister.²⁶ His resignation on 12 January 1933 is unprecedented in the interwar political landscape and further distinguishes him from other political leaders. As Scurtu notes, this episode marked his separation not only from King Carol II, but also from Alexandru Vaida Voevod, an old friend and member of the National Peasant Party.²⁷ The same author mentions the conflict between Maniu and the King as an important element of the interwar political life and perceives it as a symbolic confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism.²⁸

On 21 November 1937 Maniu was reinstated president of the National Peasant Party following the resignation of Ioan Mihalache. This is also the time when Maniu took a highly controversial decision which would later have serious implication for him as a politician. He established contacts with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Iron Guard, and signed a nonaggression pact between the National Peasant Party, the Iron Guard, the National Liberal Party and the Agrarian Party on the backdrop of suspicions of election fraud by the Liberals. However, the National Peasant Party fared modestly in the 1937 elections; most authors agree that the pact was more favorable to the King than to Maniu. On the other hand, the Iron Guard, encouraged by the favorable result it obtained, began an offensive pursuit to power.²⁹ After the establishment of the communist regime in 1947, Maniu was accused of signing this pact and labeled as a fascist and terrorist because of his association with the Iron Guard. However, the post-1989 Romanian and Western (for example Armin Heinen) historiographies cleared Maniu's name in relation to this episode.

Maniu's role decreased dramatically and irreversibly once with the establishment of the authoritarian monarchy on 10 February 1938. Its main feature was the abrogation of the party system. Albeit Maniu was one of the most vocal leaders at the time, the impact of his actions decreased considerably. Additionally, the communist period brought the traumatic experience of trial and prison to Maniu.³⁰

Conclusions

THE RESULT of the 1918 Great Union was the establishment of the nation-state. In order for the state to become politically and administratively functional, a number of homogenizing and centralizing strategies were promoted. The emerging national political elite included provincial leaders who had a solid political background and enjoyed prestige. Some of them would gradually become first-rate national leaders, and Iuliu Maniu certainly is the best example.

The assessment of Maniu's political activity within the national state reveals his rise to prominence in the democratic regime, his political decline once with the establishment of the authoritarian regime and finally his trial and imprisonment following the advent of the communist regime. Notably, his career as a national leader

overlaps the establishment and consolidation of the Romanian modern state. Also noteworthy are his association with the National Peasant Party, whose president he became, and the dynamic of his relations with his two political rivals – the Liberals and King Carol II – throughout the interwar period.

What distinguishes Maniu from other politicians is his passionate and firm manner of conducting politics, many times proving inflexibility and determination in his political actions underpinned by solid principles. As previously suggested, Maniu shares many features with the modern and charismatic leaders. He is undoubtedly a legitimate leader, earning his political positions as a result of democratic elections or appointments. His outstanding personal value doubled by substantial political experience as party president and Prime Minister place him in the sphere of first-class leadership and certify him as a charismatic leader.

Maniu's entire political career qualifies him as a remarkable politician: a regional leader whose activity was closely connected to his native province and who steadily became a national leader through his endeavors related to the creation and consolidation of the modern Romanian state. He is an example that best illustrates the manner in which the provincial political elite integrated into the national one after 1918. Loved and contested, blamed and rehabilitated, Iuliu Maniu remains a powerful figure within the interwar Romanian political elite.



Notes

1. For the status of the national minorities in Romania after 1918, see Cătălin Turliuc, "The Legal Status of National Minorities in Interwar Romania, 1918-1923. Formation and Transfer of Normativity," *Transylvanian Review: Identity Projects and Processes in the Romanian Space, 19th-20th Centuries*, XIX, Supplement 4 (2010): 53-64.
2. Jacques Coenen-Huther, *Sociologia elitelor* (Iassy: Polirom, 2007), 13-14.
3. John Scott, "Transformations in the British Economic Elite," in Mattei Dogan, ed., *Elite configuration and the apex of Power* (Leaden- Boston: Brill, 2003), 157.
4. Sever Stoica, *Iuliu Maniu* (Cluj: Institutul de Arte Grafice, Tipografia Mayer, 1932), 12.
5. Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu naționalism și democrație, biografia unui mare român* (Bucharest: Saeculum, 1997), 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 9.
7. Ioan Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea politică* (Bucharest: Enciclopedica, 1995), 9.
8. Apostol Stan, 12.
9. *Ibid.*, 14.
10. Sever Stoica, 24.
11. Ioan Scurtu, 12.
12. Apostol Stan, 20.
13. Andrea Dobeș, *Iuliu Maniu un creator de istorie*, (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2003), 8-9.

14. Ioan Scurtu, 23.
15. Max Weber, *Politica o vocație și o profesie* (Anima, 1992), 9.
16. William H. Swatos, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, available at <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/charisma.htm>, accessed 23.10.2011.
17. Victor Isac, ed., *Iuliu Maniu, Testament moral-politic* (Bucharest: Gândirea Românească), 32.
18. Ioan Scurtu, 29.
19. *Ibid.*, 34.
20. *Ibid.*, 43.
21. *Ibid.*, 45.
22. Aurel S. Morariu (ed.), *Iuliu Maniu, Trei discursuri* (Anima, 1991), XVI.
23. Ioan Scurtu, 50–53.
24. Apostol Stan, 203.
25. Ioan Scurtu, 64–66.
26. *Ibid.*, 68.
27. *Ibid.*, 72–73.
28. *Ibid.*, 78.
29. *Ibid.*, 86–92.
30. Andrea Dobeș, 10–11.

Abstract

The Integration of Regional Leadership after the Great Union The Case of Iuliu Maniu

After World War I, Greater Romania was formed as a national state by incorporating the provinces which had previously been under foreign domination. In the period following the Great Union of 1918, a series of strategies for political and administrative homogenization and centralization were promoted. The national elite included important members of the provincial elite with valuable political experience and looking to preserve their positions and rise to national prominence. This article examines the integration of the provincial political elite into the national elite through the case study of Iuliu Maniu. Focusing on the examination of his political activity within the national state, the article reveals his transformation into a major national leader by pointing out his main political positions and actions from the rise of his political career in the democratic regime to its decline in the authoritarian regimes. The article concludes that Maniu is the best-known example of a provincial political leader who rose to national prominence.

Key words

policy, union, leadership, nation, Transylvania