

TWO INTRIGUING MOMENTS IN IULIU MANIU'S BIOGRAPHY (1919, 1987)

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Abstract. *From the letters exchanged between Hortensia and Octavian Goga in the period from the autumn of 1918 until the autumn of 1919, while Hortensia was a refugee in Genova/Italy and Octavian Goga was in Paris in his position as member of the Council of Romanian National Unity, we find out information about the convalescence and death of Iuliu Maniu's most beloved nephew, Matei Pop, a soldier with the Romanian Legion in Italy which comprised Romanian prisoners from the Austrian-Hungarian army (February 1919). From the memoirs of Ion Traian Ștefănescu, the leader of the Council of Student Associations in Romania (1969), minister of Youth and first-secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Youth Union (CYU) (1969-1974), an activist of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) in Prahova county (1975-1982), first-vicepresident of the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education (1982-1984), and first-secretary of the Sălaj County PCR Committee (1984-1987), we find out about Nicolae Ceaușescu's opinion on the restauration of furniture items belonging to Iuliu Maniu's parents' house in Bădăcin, as well as on the opportunity to open a Iuliu Maniu memorial house. The information delivered and the diplomatic suggestion that I.T. Ștefănescu made to N. Ceaușescu, then on a working visit in Sălaj county (1987), highlight the political vision of a genuine intellectual (I.T. Ștefănescu), as well as a moment of contemplation for N. Ceaușescu - then already ill and overwhelmed by political pressures from both the East and the West, as well as from inside the country – on the fate of political figures in general, including that of Iuliu Maniu, in the last days of his life.*

Keywords: Iuliu Maniu, Matei Pop, 1919, N. Ceaușescu, 1987

A mere incursion into the history writings dedicated to Iuliu Maniu, a central political figure of national history for over half a century (1892-1948), would make any honest and even-minded citizen with at least an average level of culture, who is endowed with common sense and mental balance, to reflect on some key questions: when and for how long is a political figure well-deserved by his nation and when and why the same nation decides to label the political figure as an enemy and traitor of his Country's interests? Who changes the principles and values which decide if one is a hero or a reactionary, in what way and why?

The only certain thing is that a political leader cannot be only good or evil, following only a straight line or a road that is full of twists and turns, led by national interests or personal interests only, dominated by pragmatic or idealistic ambitions, always decisive and direct in their statements or only reluctant and hesitant. A

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political leader may be something of everything, except for a rogue, which is always degrading, unproductive, and, eventually, suicidal for the person and for the Country as well.

Of course, the geopolitical games of the great powers which pressure the small and medium states come here at play and forge the personality of political figures, to include various percentages of the traits above, if they want to remain at the top of the decision-making class for as long as possible. However, people are remembered in the history of a country if they are strong and determined enough to make unhesitating decisions during key moments for the destiny of the nation they represent, with all the inherent risks for their own lives, as well as for the lives of their close family and associates.

With this in mind, during the November 1918 discussions which took place in Arad, Iuliu Maniu decided to completely break any relationships with Budapest and opt for a Union with Romania. He was also the one to accept in 1930 King Carol's return and his proclamation as king, despite being well aware of his temperament and shortcomings. The gain for the country was only partial, with a certain amount of domestic peace in a Europe of turmoil which would become less and less predictable in terms of peace and equity. Iuliu Maniu was then courageous enough to confront the communist ideology and its followers, to stay and fight in his own country, refusing to desert it and choosing to die at home, with the risk of not having a grave for his descendants to pray at. All these decisions were made while sacrificing his personal life, by not having a family of his own and supporting his nephews, led by his love for his Country, as well as by a sense of "nationalism", the word that was used to describe "patriotism" in Transylvania at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when Iuliu Maniu's political career began.

After one decade of Soviet-style internationalism (1948-1958), national and patriotic sentiments begin to re-emerge in our country, in an atmosphere of "controlled liberalism" (1965-1971) and Iuliu Maniu's name is being rediscovered mostly in relation to his decisions of national importance during the years 1918 to 1920, concealed under the form of a critical analysis on history by the National Peasant Party. In 1983, the then University Senior Lecturer Ioan Scurtu published the volume *Din viața politică a României (1926-1947). Studiu critic privind istoria Partidului Național-Țărănesc*¹. Those were times when topics like this had to be approached in a "critical" manner. In the end, the activity of a political party is not very similar to the life of an innocent girl, as there is a lot of prostitution involved.

The year 1990 demolishes all the obstacles surrounding historical writing, since political censorship is abolished. Writing becomes so free that part of the

¹ Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1983, 552 p. The author's first considerations were published one year before in the volume *Viața politică din România (1918-1944)*, Ed. Albatros, Bucharest, 1982, 334 p, - p. 349

historians of the new wave (some of them old historians who have been less prolific by then) are trying to make up for lost time by emphasising all the historical shortcomings of our people. One would clearly wonder how a modern nation like ours was able to prevail, make history and stay alive, with all the wrongdoings for which it can be blamed.

Iuliu Maniu and the National Peasant Party would be a topic of interest for the historians concerned, regardless of generation. Professor Ioan Scurtu revisits the topic based on more elaborate documentary evidence, with a more justified and balanced interpretation.² Continuing on the topic of the valuable volumes dedicated to Iuliu Maniu and the political parties of which he was a leader, it is a pleasure to bring into discussion two writings of Marin Pop, a historian of the younger generation, namely *Viața politică în România interbelică (1919-1938). Activitatea Partidului Național și Național-Țărănesc din Ardeal și Banat*³ and *Iuliu Maniu – Sfinxul de la Bădăcin*.⁴ The young historian debates the activity of the parties led by Iuliu Maniu and the personality of the political leader based not only on archive documents and articles from the press of the time, but also on reports by the most well-known associates of the “Sphinx of Bădăcin”, namely Corneliu Coposu and Grigore Gafencu, who make an inventory of Maniu’s “alleged political mistakes”, his relationships with nationalists from Transylvania, former youth friends with right-wing views, such as: Alex. Vaida-Voevod, Octavian Goga, and the legionnaires, or left-wing National Peasant Party supporters, such as: N.D. Cocea and Mihail Ralea. Maniu also established a relationship with King Carol II and the Jewish community. Iuliu Maniu’s frugal day-to-day life as well as his honest belief in a Central-European democracy were in contrast with the Eastern-Phanariot political life in Bucharest at the time.

By going through years of entire generations of historians who have studied Iuliu Maniu’s personality, one may notice that great statesmen keep coming to the attention of the public even if dictatorships or false democracies (like our original democracy – our note) try to wipe them out of the nation’s memory. Furthermore, it is likely that one dictator or another may come to a point at the end of their political career or even their life when, surrounded by domestic and foreign adversaries, they reflect on the fate of the predecessors they have met, known or even accused of political wrongdoings.

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² *Istoria Partidului Național-Țărănesc*, Ed. Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1994, 488 p; *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea politică*, Ed. Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1995, 299 p. Both printed also in the Republic of Moldova in 2010.

³ Ph.D. thesis defended at the University of Oradea, Ed. Mega și Porolissum, Cluj-Napoca, 2014.

⁴ Ed. Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, 469 p.

As a person who knows Iuliu Maniu from the writings of other fellow historians who specialise in the history of the inter-war period, I am making an attempt at supplementing the biography of the “Sphynx of Bădăcin” with some details resulting from my interest in the history of modern and contemporary Transylvania.

It is widely known that Iuliu Maniu, who stayed unmarried for political reasons,⁵ dedicated his life to his extended family, including his nephews. He was especially close to his sister, Elena Veturia (born 1869), who, in 1886, married the Greek-Catholic priest Ioan Pop, who had a Ph.D. in theology in Rome and was the vicar of Năsăud, and a professor with the Theological Seminary in Gherla, where Demetriu Coroianu, Elena’s grandfather was a rector and a professor. Iuliu Coroianu, the bride’s uncle, the author of the 1892 Memorandum⁶ was one of the witnesses at the wedding.

Ioan and Elena Veturia had four children: Matei, Ionel, Livia, and Clara. The family head’s premature death on 1 August 1901 would convince Iuliu Maniu – already an attorney for the Metropolitan Church in Blaj – to bring along his nephews and nieces, as well as his sister in Blaj. He got involved in raising the children, whom he treated as his own. Maniu was particularly fond of Matei, who was born in Năsăud in 1891, whom he appreciated mostly for his emotional and intellectual qualities. Matei Pop went on to study law at the University of Budapest and the University of Bonn, where he would acquire thorough specialised knowledge, as well as remarkable general knowledge in German culture, which fortunately completed his knowledge of national Romanian culture. Recently an attorney himself, Matei would get engaged to Alma Hodaş, the daughter of Iuniu Brut Hodaş, the manager of *Patria* Bank in Blaj, a well-known local figure, with ancient and deep family roots in the top Romanian elite of Transylvania. Shortly after the engagement, in 1915, both the uncle and the nephew are enrolled in the Austrian-Hungarian army.⁷ In the summer of 1916, both would be dispatched to the Italian front.

The fate of the young Matei Pop was heroic and tragic at the same time. Having been raised in a national, patriotic environment against the background of the political and military turmoil of the year 1917, he would defect from the Austrian-Hungarian army and join the Italian troops. The establishment of the Romanian Volunteer Corps (the Romanian Legion in Italy), comprising Romanian

⁵ Despite being in love with the daughter of a Hungarian pharmacist in from Şimleu Silvaniei, he would sacrifice his love for the benefit of the Romanian nation. He considered it was unthinkable for him to fight for the rights of his nation while establishing a family with a Hungarian ethnic.

⁶ Marin Pop, *Iuliu Maniu – Sfînxul de la Bădăcin*, Ed. Şcoala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, p. 19.

⁷ Ana Maria Borz, *Portret - Dr. Matei Pop eroul de dincolo de granițe (1891-1919)*, published in *Acta Musei Porolissensis* (hereinafter referred to as AMP), The History and Ethnography Section, Zalău, year XLIV, 2022, p. 129-130.

prisoners from the Austrian-Hungarian military units, would convince Matei Pop to enrol as an artillery lieutenant. He would be seriously wounded in the battles on the Italian front, subsequently undergoing surgery on his kidneys while being admitted to a military hospital in Genova. The city, a Tyrrhenian Sea harbour, was also the home of a family of refugees, that of Partenie Cosma, a well-known political figure and executive director of *Albina* Bank (1885-1915), who lived there with his wife and two of his daughters: Lucia and Hortensia Goga. After a long journey following the route Căciulata/Călimănești-Iași-Kishinev-Tighina (Bender) – Odessa - Sankt Petersburg - Haparanda (Finland) - Bergen (Norway) - Kristeanja/Oslo (Norway) - Aberdeen (Scotland/Great Britain) – London – Paris - Milan, the family settled in Genova in the autumn of 1917.⁸ While in hospital, Matei Pop suffered complications from his surgery and later on died as a result.

In the letters exchanged between Hortensia Cosma - Goga and her husband, Octavian Goga, who was in Paris as part of the group of Romanian leaders militating for the recognition of the Great Union, as well as for the establishment of the country's Western border, on 24 February 1919, Hortensia Cosma - Goga wrote the following to her husband: "Poor Gyuluca (Iuliu/Gyula Maniu – our note) will be so unhappy. He was so proud of his nephews and nieces and he has lost the smartest of them all exactly now, when he has achieved his target (the union of all Romanians into one single state – our note). He (Matei Pop – our note) suffered kidney complications, a surgery, and now he has succumbed to bronchopneumonia, pleurisy, and tuberculosis.⁹ He died in solace (at peace with the thought of death – our note) and communionised (on 15 February 1919 – our note). On a rainy day, we have accompanied him to the monumental cemetery (Staglieno – our note), where he received military honours. We also brought flowers for his mother¹⁰ and returned on the following day, when they put him into his grave".¹¹

⁸ Mihai Drecin, Russian Images and Impression in the Correspondence between the Refugee Hortensia Cosma-Goga and Octavian Goga (January-April 1917), published in the volume *World War I. The Other Face of the War*, Edited by: Ioan Bolovan, Rudolf Gräff, Harold Heppner, Oana Mihaela Tămaș, Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, p. 143-150; Mihai D. Drecin, Raluca Lenarth, *Refugiul românilor din teritoriul ocupat în anii Primului Război Mondial. Studiu de caz: Familia Partenie Cosma în Italia (toamna 1917 - toamna 1919)*, published in *Crisia* (Oradea), vol. LI, Supplement no. 1, 2021, p. 166-187.

⁹ Given his general state of weakness as a result of being bed-ridden, he contracted pneumonia and then, tuberculosis.

¹⁰ Meaning that flowers were brought on behalf of the mother, Elena Veturia Pop, who was unable to attend her son's funeral because of the war and the military and political turmoil in Central Europe.

¹¹ The Library of the Romanian Academy – Bucharest, *Fonds: Octavian Goga*, index S11 (101)/CDL XXXVIII, p. 2-3. Letter written in Genova, on 24 February 1919. See also Mihai D. Drecin, Raluca Lenarth, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

Some years later, in 1926, Iuliu Maniu would receive approval for the exhumation of his nephew from the Genovese cemetery, to be subsequently re-inhomed in the family cemetery in Bădăcin.¹²

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For almost seven decades, in 1987 to be more specific, at the height of the communist era, during the last years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship, Iuliu Maniu's name would be uttered again, in the presence of the "illustrious Leader".

N. Ceaușescu was in the habit of conducting "working visits" throughout the country, so he also visited Sălaj county. There, in 1984, Ion Traian Ștefănescu, a faculty member and an intellectual who would become a leader of the students' movement¹³ was appointed as first-secretary and was the potential representative of a younger generation of party activists for a future post-Ceaușescu era.

Due to bad weather, the presidential helicopter was unable to land in Zalău and was re-routed to Șimleu Silvaniei. Ion Traian Ștefănescu and his associates would revise the agenda of the supreme leader's on-site visits and consequently propose the local Furniture Factory for a visit. At one point during the visit, on the factory's production line, N. Ceaușescu notices, besides modern furniture items manufactured for export, several baroque furniture pieces that were fit for an office. When the "supreme Leader" asks about the origin of the pieces, "the manager of the factory told him that they used to belong to Iuliu Maniu. The furniture was acquired in an advanced state of disrepair and the city hall wanted to refurbish it together with other furniture items with the same origin, in order to return it to the former house of the inter-war politician after the relocation of the home for disabled children which was operating on-site. Summoning up his courage, the first-secretary (I.T. Ștefănescu – our note) concluded by saying: 'We'd better take it (the office desk – our note) back to his home (in Bădăcin – our note), as that would certainly be a sign of normalcy; in a way, Maniu would be returning home.' After a moment of thinking, Ceaușescu answered: 'Yes, I agree.'"¹⁴ N. Ceaușescu's gesture would come in addition to his decisions following the requests made by Ion Traian Ștefănescu concerning the cultivation of Romanian national dignity sentiments in Sălaj county. One decision was to accept the construction of an Orthodox church

¹² Ana Maria Borz, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹³ Ion Traian Ștefănescu, *Întâlniri cu Nicolae Ceaușescu*, Bucharest, 2018.

¹⁴ Mihai D. Drecin, *Dialog Nicolae Ceaușescu – Ion Traian Ștefănescu despre monumentele istorice din Sălaj (1987)*, published in the volume *Societate, Cultură, Demografie. Omagiu profesorului Corneliu Pădureanu la împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani*, the Romanian Academy/the Center for Transylvanian Studies, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, p. 528. See the same paper published in English in *Acta Musei Porolissensis (Zalău)*, year XLIV, 2022, p. 273-280

for the Romanians in Ip,¹⁵ a decision made at a time when N. Ceaușescu resolved to demolish other churches in Bucharest, as well as to displace the Soviet Soldier Monument together with the Wesselényi Miklós statuary group¹⁶ from the Zalău town center. The first item would be relocated to the Municipal Cemetery, on the plot assigned to the hero soldiers who had fallen in local battles in 1944, while the other, despite needing “careful dismantling” and transfer to the Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj-Napoca in order to be protected and displayed, is still in place to this day.¹⁷

There may be one explanation for N. Ceaușescu's reparatory gesture in memory of Iuliu Maniu, whom he had never met personally, but whose anti-communist political actions were known to him. In 1987, Ceaușescu was ill and subjected by “enemy friends” both from the East and from the West to increasingly powerful political attacks. It is possible that he was reflecting on the fate that a top political leader may have when both domestic and international circumstances conspire against him. Iuliu Maniu's fate could have served as an example.

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Our intention here was to highlight two separate moments from the life and posthumous remembrance of the great statesman Iuliu Maniu, which may constitute an addition to his biography¹⁸.

¹⁵ As opposed to the Hungarians who had an imposing church dating back to the 19th century in the center of the commune, the Romanians had only one prayer house in the cemetery where the Romanians who had fallen victims to the Hungarian hortyst massacre of September 1940 had been buried.

¹⁶ Local Hungarian nobleman, an owner of large areas of arable land and forests (born 1796 - deceased 1850). Labelled a liberal by the Hungarian historiography, he actually pursued the denationalisation of Romanian villeins by supporting school education in the Hungarian language. His liberalism was limited to the sphere of economics, while supporting the idea of a single Hungarian nation and of a Hungarian state within feudal borders.

¹⁷ Mihai D. Drecin, *Dialog Nicolae Ceaușescu-Ion Traian Ștefănescu...*, p. 527, 529-530.

¹⁸ This study will also appear in Romanian in the tribute volume dedicated to prof.univ.dr. Ion I. Solcanu on his 80th birthday, which will be printed in Buzău, Dsale's birthplace (under print).