

ALEXANDRU VAIDA VOEVOD: FROM SPA MEDICINE TO FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF GREATER ROMANIA – 150 YEARS SINCE HIS BIRTH

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Abstract. Alexandru Vaida Voevod, a physician and politician who served three times as prime minister of Romania (1919–20, 1932, 1933), was a leading spokesman for the union of Transylvania with the Old Romanian Kingdom (Moldavia and Wallachia). In 1896 he was a member of the Committee of the Romanian National Party, representing the pro-Habsburg group. Between 1906 and 1918 he was a deputy in the Budapest Parliament. After 1918, he became a member of the Governing Council and Prime minister on December 9, 1919. During the Interwar period, he held the position of Prime minister as well as Minister of internal and foreign affair in several governments and President of the Council of Ministers. He died in Sibiu on March 19, 1950

Keywords: Medical studies, Carlsbad, Political leader, Unionist, Prime minister of Romania

Alexandru Vaida Voevod or Vaida Voievod (February 27, 1872 - March 19, 1950) served as the 28th Prime Minister of Romania, becoming first Prime Minister of Greater Romania, succeeding General Arthur Văitoianu (1864-1956). He was born to a wealthy Greek-Catholic family in the Transylvanian village of Bobâlna (Olpret, or Alparét, Austria-Hungary).

Vaida Voevod went with his brother to study in Vienna, where he enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine. After finishing his studies, in 1901, he married Elena E. Safrano, who bore him four children. With a doctor's degree in medicine, he moved to Carlsbad (Karlsbad), Karlovy Vary, where he worked for a brief period as a balneologist. Carlsbad was a favorite destination for many Romanians at that time. Karlovy Vary is located about 106 kilometers (66 miles) west of Prague. It lies at the confluence of the Ohre (which flows across the city) with the Tepla and Rolava rivers. The origin and development of Karlovy Vary has always been inseparably linked with the beneficial effects of its local thermal mineral springs. More than 80 mineral springs arise here. The 15 so-called large ones, whose temperatures vary between 34 and 73 degrees Celsius, are used for spa purposes. Vary as a small spa settlement was founded most likely around 1349. According to legend, Charles IV organized an expedition into the forests surrounding modern-day Karlovy Vary during a stay in Loket. It is said that his party once discovered a hot spring by accident, and thanks to the water from the spring, Charles IV healed his injured leg. An important political event took place in the city in 1819, with the issuing of the

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Carlsbad Decrees following a conference there. Initiated by the Austrian Minister of State, Klemens von Metternich (1773- 1859), the decrees were intended to implement anti-liberal censorship within the German Confederation².

Due to publications by physicians such as David Becher (1725-1792) and Josef von Löschner (1809-1888), the city developed into a spa resort in the 19th century and was visited by many members of European aristocracy as well as celebrities from many fields of endeavor. It became even more popular after railway lines were completed from Prague to Cheb in 1870. The treatment prescribed by David Becher was further developed by a number of Carlsbad spa doctors in the first half of the 19th Century. Noted physicians include Jean de Carro (1770-1857), Rudolf Mannl (1812-1863), and Eduard Hlawaczek (1808-1879).

The society that gathered in Karlovy Vary in the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th Century acquired a more and more international flavor. Besides aristocracy, the elite of European culture also came to Carlsbad. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe characterized the cosmopolitan thermal spring town as the “chessboard of Europe” around 1800. The visits of celebrities has always been a tradition specific to Carlsbad and significantly marked the history of the town. The most noteworthy visitors at the turn of the 19th Century, besides Goethe, included Friedrich Schiller, Theodor Körner, Ludwig van Beethoven, Frederic Chopin, and Nicolo Paganini. The number of visitors rose from 134 families in the 1756 season to 26.000 guests annually at the end of the 19th century. By 1911, that figure had reached 71.000, but the outbreak of World War I in 1914 was disrupting the tourism on which the city depended³.

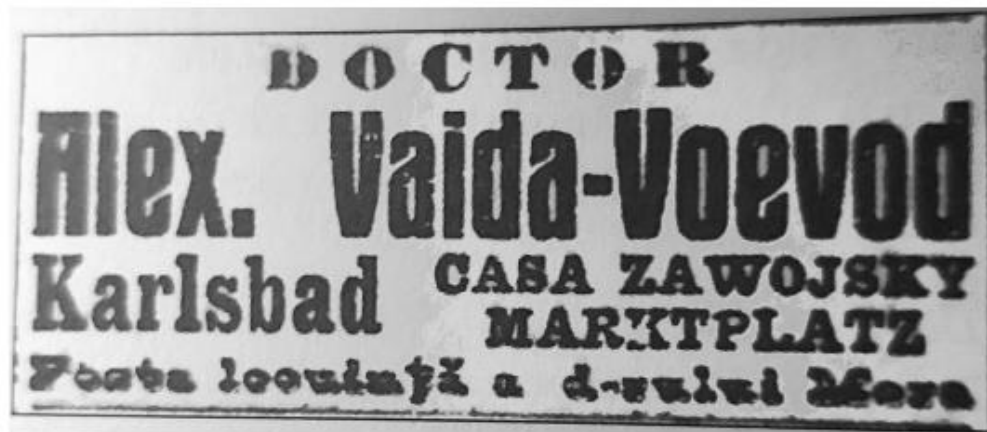
Play writer Gheorghe Asachi (1788-1869), was one of the early Romanians who visited Carlsbad: *“The way of attending a spa cure in Carlsbad is original. The guest has quarters for meals only. From around 5 in the morning until 9 in the evening, everyone is standing at the springs, where everyone, according to their turn to come, drinks the prescribed water and walks around in the shade or, in the rain, under the galleries. Lunch is done in the gardens, kiosks placed on the rocks, in the forest, or at the cafes lined up on the street called Vize (Meadow), which looks like a salon decorated with warehouses on both sides, and in the middle there are hundreds of tables with guests, and all these they take place with the accompaniment of harmonious orchestras during the day”*⁴.

² Stanislav Burachovic, Stanislav Wieser. Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad). *Der berühmteste Kurort Böhmens*, Knihcentrum, Praga, 1998.

³ Idem

⁴ “Modul curei și a petrecerei în Karlsbad este original. Oaspele are cvartiră numai pentru mas. De la 5 oare dimineața până la 9 sara toată lumea e în picioare, pe la izvoare, unde fiecare, după rândul venirii, bea apa rănduită și se preumblă la umbră sau, pe ploaie, sub galerii. Degiurnarea se face au prin grădini, chioscuri așezate pe stânci, în pădure, sau pe la cafelele înșirate pe strada numită Vize, ce samănă unui salon împodobit cu magazii din ambe laturi, iar pe la mizloc sunt sute de mese cu oaspeți, și toate aceste

Before Carlsbad, Vaida Voevod was practicing medicine in Vienna at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus, and came into contact with personalities and their work like Vinzenz Priessnitz, Karl von Noorden, Edmund von Neusser, Wilhelm Schlesinger. He went into spa medicine first in Bad Hall, but in 1899, he started his practice in Carlsbad, and his name as doctor was acquainted by the municipality and listed in the info brochures of the Spa. In 1911, his practice was located in the downtown, in the Zawojski House, am Marktplatz, inheriting the patients list of another Romanian physician, Iuliu Traian Mera (1861-1909), who wrote fairy tales (*Din lumea basmelor*, 1906). The balneological treatment offered in Carlsbad was rich in options and medically advanced, from hygiene to steam baths, hydrotherapy, use of galvanism and electricity, and dietary hygiene. Other Romanian doctors were mentioned along Vaida Voevod, such as Grigore Graur (Brauer, brother of director of “Adevărul”, Constantin Graur), Romulus S. Crăciun, Nicu (Moritz) Cahanescu, Hermann Blumenfeld, Arthur Fischmann, Isidor Müller, Eugen Marcovici, I. Wassermann, I. Popper, all advertised in Bucharest by the newspaper “Adevărul”⁵.



Press advertising for Dr. Vaida Voevod in Adevărul, 1911-12

Romanians did frequent Carlsbad, especially personalities from the literary sphere. For example, among those with many outings at the restaurants and in the parks were George Coșbuc and I.L. Caragiale. “Lencica” Vaida Voevod, his wife, had a great sympathy for Coșbuc, a man who was naturally distinguished by his tender style and sentimentalism. On the other hand, Caragiale “*was an extreme observer of the conventional ceremony and of the forms of social routine, but I was delighted by his subversive sarcasm, which he so aptly used to characterize people*”

se petrec cu acompaniamentul orquestrelor armonioase în cursul zilei.” Gh. Asachi. Jurnalul călătorului moldovean, în *Albina românească*, Iași, între 25 sept. și 4 decembrie 1831.

⁵ Radu Mârza. *Călători și pacienți români la Karlsbad. O istorie culturală a mersului la băi pe la 1900*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2022, pp. 69-100; Radu Mârza. *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului. O încercare de istorie culturală (1830-1930)*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2020.

and states. When the men were alone, the two great masters competed in their opinions on the production of modern art and literature”, commented Vaida Voevod in his Memoirs⁶. Caragiale was visiting Carlsbad in 1909-1911, exchanging a correspondence with literary historian Paul Zarifopol (1874-1934): “Dear Doktor, I will leave for Wednesday morning 9.20 am, [from Berlin] through Dresden to Carlsbad. Would you be such a kind sweet person and take the train directly from Leipzig to Carlsbad, 9.30 from Dresden Bahnhof. From Dresden on, visit me in the Dining car (Speisewagen), where I will stay all around. Three days spent at spa, in Carlsbad, with Dr. Vaida and G. Coșbuc will only do well to all of us”⁷.



George Coșbuc, Elena “Lencica” Vaida Voevod, Dr. Demetriu Ciuta, Dr. Al. Vaida Voevod, and Ion Luca Caragiale, in Carlsbad, June 1911. Mircea Vaida Voevod archive

Another writer of the time with which Vaida Voevod had connections in Carlsbad was Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea (1858-1918), Mayor of Bucharest (1899-1901), Minister of Public Works (December 29, 1910 - March 27, 1912), Minister of Industry and Trade (since July 10, 1917), as deputy. “He was my «client». He had

⁶ Liviu Maior (ed.). *Alexandru Vaida Voevod între Belvedere și Versailles (Însemnări, Memorii, Scrisori)*. Cluj Napoca, Ed. Sincron, 1993, 296 p.

⁷ “Schöneberg bei Berlin. Stimate domnule Doktor, eu mâine miercuri dim. 9.20 plec prin Dresda, la Karlsbad. Vrei să fii băiat de zahăr? Urcă-te în zutul direct Leipzig-Karlsbad, 9.30 früh, la Dresdnerbnf. În Dresda, vino de-a dreptul în Speisewagen, unde mă aflu declarat în permanență. O cură de trei zile la Karlsbad la Domnul Dr. Vaida și G. Coșbuc, cred că ne va prii”. Ion Luca Caragiale. *Opere, vol. VII, Corespondență*, ediție îngrijită de Șerban Cioculescu, București, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă “Regele Carol al II-lea”, 1942, pp. 175, 507.

stomach aches due to rotten cheese and wrote one of his dramas in bed. «I knew that the cheese was rotten» the writer said «but I was forced to swallow it, because there were two ladies who were watching me at the neighbouring table». Under my care, Barbu Șt. Delavrancea recovered in a couple of days”, Vaida Voevod assures in his Memoires⁸.

In 1906, Vaida Voevod joined a group of Romanian nationalists in the Budapest Parliament (the Romanian National Party of Transylvania and Banat), becoming an important opponent of the Hungarian governmental policy of magyarization, and fought for the right of Transylvania to self-determination. Initially, Voevod was supportive of a plan to federalize the domains of the Habsburgs along the lines of a sort of ‘United States of Greater Austria’, and was close to Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Disappointed by the Austrian cause after Franz Ferdinand’s assassination in Sarajevo, he turned towards an advocacy of Transylvania’s union with Romania; he and his party presented a demand for self-determination along Wilsonian principles to the Hungarian legislative in October 1918. In December 1918, after Hungary surrendered in World War I, he was part of the Transylvanian council that proclaimed the union with Romania, and was, alongside Vasile Goldiș, Iuliu Hossu, and Miron Cristea, a member of the Transylvanian group of envoys that presented the decision to King Ferdinand I in Bucharest⁹.

Vaida Voevod joined the Romanian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and was one of its most prominent members throughout the negotiations, as an organizer of press campaigns. During the conference, he joined the Masonic Grand Orient de France in order to secure a more advantageous position for his country¹⁰.

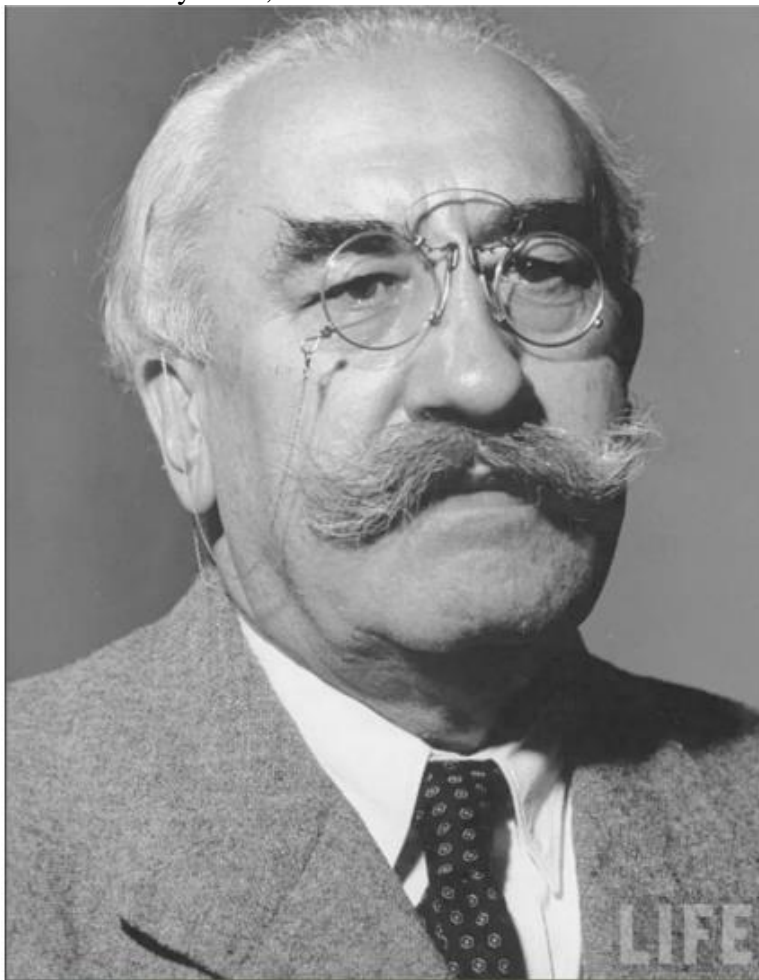
The elections of November 1919 were successful for his party, and he replaced the National Liberal Ion I. C. Brătianu as Prime Minister and Nicolae Mișu as minister for Foreign Affairs. He secured the demarcation lines by ordering Romanian troops to fight off the Bela Kuhn, Hungarian Soviet Republic. However, his radical approach toward the land reforms made King Ferdinand dissolve his government in March 1920, to be replaced by one formed by General Alexandru Averescu’s People’s Party (a populist movement that had attracted Brătianu’s conditional support). Vaida Voevod’s party emerged as the National Peasants’ Party in 1926, where he served as its leader. He was also, twice, Interior Minister (1928-1930 and 1932). Vaida Voevod’s second cabinet existed from 11 August until the 17 October

⁸ “El a fost «clientul» meu. A avut dureri de stomac din cauza unei brânze stricate și de aceea și-a scris una dintre dramele sale, din pat. «Știam că brânza este putredă», a spus scriitorul «dar am fost forțat să o înghit, pentru că erau două doamne care mă priveau atent de la masa vecină». În grija mea, Barbu Șt. Delavrancea și-a revenit în câteva zile.” *Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Memorii*, prefată, ediție îngrijită, note și comentarii de Alexandru Șerban, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1994-1998.

⁹ Glenn E. Torrey. *România în Primul Război Mondial*, București, Meteor Press, 2014; Contele de Saint-Aulaire. *Însemnările unui diplomat de altădată. În România: 1916-1920*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2016.

¹⁰ Margaret MacMillan. *Făuritorii păcii. Șase luni care au schimbat lumea*, București, Ed. Trei, 2018.

1932; he resigned and was succeeded by Iuliu Maniu. After Maniu resigned as Prime Minister in January 1933, Vaida Voevod returned as Prime Minister¹¹.



Alexandru Vaida Voevod in 1938. Life Magazine archive

“Vaida and his supporters, who formed the National Peasants’ Party’s right wing, were acting more like Liberals than Peasantists. They ended strikes by oil workers in Ploiești and by railway workers in Bucharest in February 1933, dissolved Communist Party front organizations and all other ‘anti-state’ organizations, and proclaimed martial law in a number of cities.”¹²

Nonetheless, the problems posed by his new cabinets (in 1932 and 1933) - the Legionary Movement’s intimidation of the political scene, and Vaida Voevod’s

¹¹ Florin Constantiniu. *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*. București, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, 2008; Mihai Racovițan. *Alexandru Vaida Voevod între Memorand și Trianon (1892-1920)*, ediția a II-a, Sibiu, Ed. Tipotrib, 2000, 253 p.

¹² I.G. Duca. *Memorii*, vol. I, București, Ed. Expres, 1992.

own far right attitude (which began to manifest itself in measures of repression encouraged by the Legionaries), led to a split between the Prime Minister and his Party. His second government fell because of Armand Călinescu, who was a staunch opponent of the Legionary Movement. On 25 February 1935 Vaida Voevod created his own right-wing movement, the Romanian Front, which survived through the increasingly authoritarian regime of Carol II, the National Legionary State, Antonescu's regime and most of World War II. It was dissolved after 1944 when Communist Party gained influence with Soviet backing. Nevertheless, the party never eluded obscurity in front of competition from the Legionaries, and its members were victims of the repression carried out by the communist regime after 1948¹³.

In March 24, 1945, he was arrested by the communist Securitate in Sibiu. On the same day, a local pro-communist newspaper, *România viitoare* fought him in the purest Bolshevik style: under the title "Dr. Alex. Vaida Voevod was finally arrested" it was running an accusation that was the basis for his prosecution by the Securitate: "The sinister figure of the corrupt and reactionary politician of Romania, a lamentable part of all the so-called «nationalist» regimes, profiting from the sweat of the peasant and worker of this country, Dr. Alex. Vaida Voevod was finally arrested and is meditating deeper than he had done before in the well-lined armchairs of various ministries and councils. He will be given enough time to remember with his smoking pipe between his teeth, twirling his moustache aged by all of his misdeeds and sins"¹⁴. He was accused of the deaths of the miners in Lupeni and of the workers from Grivița, and even for the victims of the battles of Mărăști and Mărășești (!?). He was also accused of being the "godfather of the Iron Guard monster" who had used political assassinations in the Interwar years. And in the end, Vaida Voevod was labeled a supporter of Hitler and accused of jubilation at the loss of Transylvania (!?), for which he had struggled to ensure its unification with Romania only two decades prior: "*Stigmatized by a free and conscious nation, the Olpret castellan will no longer find a consolation this time in reading the insipid Mein Kampf of the demented Hitler, as some now say that he was comforted by the loss of North Transylvania*"¹⁵. The day after his arrest, a search was made. The report of the Sibiu Securitate showed he had just a few things for everyday use: "notebook / memoirs; a geographical atlas / Der Kleine Weltatlas; a book with various letters and notes, *Luptele și jertfele pentru Ardeal* (The fights and sacrifices

¹³ Alexandru Vaida Voevod. *Scrisori de la Conferința de Pace. Paris-Versailles 1919-1920*. Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Multi Press Int., 2003; Liviu Maior. *Un părinte fondator al României Mari: Alexandru Vaida Voevod*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Școala Ardeleană, 2018.

¹⁴ Liviu Maior. *Alexandru Vaida Voevod, putere și defăimare*, București, Ed. Rao, 2010; Mircea Vaida Voevod (ed.). *Alexandru Vaida Voevod văzut de contemporani. Evocări aniversare și mărturii despre unul dintre făuritorii Marii Uniri*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Risoprint, 2018.

¹⁵ Ministerul Administrației și Internelor. Arhivele Naționale - Serviciul județean Sibiu. Fondul personal Alexandru Vaida Voevod. Nr. Inv. 432.

for Transylvania); then another booklet with various letters and notes; two more notebooks with various notes; and a radio / Telefunken”. On March 30, 1945, quaestor Gheorghe Crăciun, a Soviet-born zealous Securitate officer, drew up the verbatim report accusing Vaida Voevod and demanding his harsh punishment: “[...] the guilt of Dr. Al. Vaida Voevod who committed serious acts against the working masses, organizing the assassination of innocent workers who, in Lupeni and Grivița, dared to manifest for the democratic ideas they had. Guilty of the disaster of the country through bad propaganda by deceiving the people”¹⁶. In 1946, he was put under house arrest in Sibiu, where he spent his last days until 1950.



Busts of Vaida Voevod in Bistrița-Năsăud (2017) and Alba Iulia (2018)

¹⁶ Idem; <https://europecentenary.eu/>, accessed 27 February 2022.



Busts of Vaida Voevod in Bobâlna, Olpret (2015) and Sibiu, 'Dintre Brazi' Church (2018)



Bust of Vaida Voevod in Sibiu, Astra (2018)¹⁷. Medallion by G. Stănescu, Interwar period

¹⁷ Ion I. Solcanu (autor-coord.), *Enciclopedie Centenarul Războiului de Întregire și al Marii Uniri (2014-2020). Bibliografie manifestări științifice monumente și însemne commemorative*, București, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic Gold, Ed. Academiei Oamenilor de Știință, București, 2022, 1756 p., VI.19, VI.27, VI.44, VI.51, VI.52. (volum de semnal)