

IULIU MANIU AND THE ROMANIAN LEGIONARY MOVEMENT

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Abstract: Iuliu Maniu is regarded as the principal upholder of democracy in interwar Romania. Yet in 1937 he entered into an electoral pact with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the fascist Legionary movement. This article explores links between Maniu, Codreanu and other members of the Legionary movement from the mid-1930s onwards as Maniu fought against dictatorial tendencies within Romania. Maniu sought to guide the legionaries in the direction of democracy and a pro-Western foreign policy which culminated in certain legionaries joining the National Peasant Party in 1944.

Keywords: Maniu; Legionary Movement; Fascism; Romania

As leader of the Romanian National Peasant Party throughout much of the interwar period and the Second World War, Iuliu Maniu sought to steer Romania away from dictatorship and towards democracy. In 1947, Maniu was arrested and tried for treason by the communist authorities. Amongst the charges brought against him were having links with the fascist Romanian legionary movement (or Iron Guard). The prosecutors drew attention to the entry of legionaries into National Peasant Party organizations in 1944, and to Maniu's electoral non-aggression pact of 1937 with the legionary movement's leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Since the communists claimed that the legionaries were the agents of Nazism in Romania, Maniu was accused of encouraging the growth of German influence and fascism in Romania.¹ Maniu was sentenced to life imprisonment and died in Sighet prison in 1953.

The post-communist historical literature dealing with Maniu's life and career have not included any substantial detail on the links between Maniu and the legionary movement leading up to, or beyond, the 1937 election pact. Maniu is portrayed as seeing the pact with Codreanu as a necessary evil to prevent

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¹ Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă (ed.), *Procesul lui Iuliu Maniu. Documentele procesului conducătorilor Partidului Național Țărănesc*, 3 volumes, București, Editura Saeculum I.O., 2001, vol. 2, part 1, doc. 2, p. 10-69; *Ibidem*, vol. 2, part 2, doc. 88, p. 131-51.

King Carol II and the National Liberal government falsifying the elections scheduled for December 1937, but nothing more.²

Romanian archival sources and political memoirs suggest, however, that Maniu had close links with the Legion which extended beyond the signing of the 1937 electoral pact. The sources reveal a genuine sympathy between Maniu and Codreanu based on the common aims of fighting the corruption and dictatorial tendencies of King Carol II and the National Liberal Party. Maniu and Codreanu couched this fight in terms of traditional Christian morality versus contemporary immorality. Following Codreanu's murder in 1938, certain senior legionaries, headed by the movement's new leader, Horia Sima, fled into exile in Berlin, while the vast majority of legionaries remained in Romania operating underground. From this point on, the movement became highly factionalized with divisions appearing, for example, between the *codreniști*, which included those who identified with their deceased leader and contested Horia Sima's leadership, and the *simiști* who followed Sima and were more inclined towards terrorism to achieve their aims.³ In the post-Codreanu era, Maniu continued to have links with the legionaries, especially in his native Transylvania and amongst the *codreniști*, but he also had sporadic contact with Horia Sima either directly or through intermediaries. At all times, however, Maniu made the price of any full collaboration between the National Peasant Party and the Legion dependent upon the legionaries taking the democratic path in domestic policy and the pro-Western path in foreign policy.

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Maniu had risen to prominence as one of the leaders of the Romanian National Party of Transylvania before the First World War, but quickly found himself at odds with the National Liberal Party which dominated the political scene in 1920s Greater Romania. It was largely as a result of the National Liberal government's increasingly authoritarian tendencies (which included electoral manipulation, corruption and economic 'clientism') that the National Party fused with Ion Mihalache's Peasant Party in 1926 to become the National Peasant Party. Maniu became the National Peasant Party's president, and the party came to power under his leadership in 1928. Two years later, Prince Carol returned to Romania from his Parisian exile into which he had been forced by his divorce from his wife, Princess Elena, and refusal to renounce his mistress, Madame Lupescu. Maniu resigned as minister president due to Carol's

² See, for example, Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu. Naționalism și democrație. Biografia unui mare român*, București, Saeculum, 1997, p. 318-25.

³ This division was never clear cut and many legionaries moved between the two groups, but the *codreniști*, which included members of Codreanu's immediate family, hated Sima for carrying out acts of terrorism during Codreanu's imprisonment in 1938 after Codreanu had called for non-violence. The *codreniști* believed Sima's terrorism had precipitated the royal government's decision to murder Codreanu.

continued refusal to seek reconciliation with Princess Elena and give up Madame Lupescu.

With Maniu's departure, rumours of an impending royal dictatorship began to circulate. Carol (now King Carol II) admired the authoritarian regime established by King Alexander of Serbia and the Mussolini dictatorship but was aware of 'the use of parliament for foreign consumption'.⁴ Carol appointed members of the 'camarilla' (a non-constitutional, advisory body to the king consisting of palace favourites) to government posts in order to undermine the parliamentary system.⁵ Within the camarilla, Madame Lupescu emerged as Carol's trusted adviser. Carol sought to exploit divisions within the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party to weaken the parties and create factions in his favour. Carol successfully drove a wedge between Maniu and the National Peasantists Armand Călinescu and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod in order to isolate Maniu.⁶ Călinescu in particular was to become a strong supporter of the king. Within the National Liberal Party, the 'young liberals' around Gheorghe Tătărescu emerged as proponents of the king's plans for dictatorship. Maniu now became the leading spokesman of the opposition to the camarilla and in defence of constitutional government.

The Legion was in origin a pro-monarchist organisation and supported Carol on his return to Romania in 1930. Carol reciprocated by alternately supporting and suppressing the movement during the rest of the decade. In particular, Carol hoped to take advantage of the Legion's influence over nationalist youth to bolster his dictatorial ambitions. He may even have cooperated with the Legion in their assassination of the Liberal minister president, I. G. Duca, who clamped down on the Legion and who did not support Carol's plans for dictatorship.⁷ The dissolution of the Legion which followed Duca's murder in December 1933 was regarded as illegal by all the main political parties and at the trial of Duca's murderers (known collectively as the *Nicadori*) in April 1934, a number of prominent politicians, including Maniu, testified in the Legion's favour.⁸ By 1935 the Legion was taking up an openly anti-Carolist position and in October the first direct contacts were established between the Legion and Maniu for a common stand against the Crown. Codreanu was not to meet Maniu in person until 1937, and it was Nae Ionescu, professor at Bucharest university, who represented the Legion at this meeting.⁹ With a link established, Maniu and Codreanu's criticism of Carol's entourage

⁴ Grigore Gafencu, *Însemnări politice, 1929-1939*, București, Humanitas, 1991, p. 19.

⁵ Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866-1947*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 385.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 383-84.

⁷ Ioan Scurtu, *Carol al II-lea*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2004, p. 164-66.

⁸ Armin Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 1986, p. 258.

⁹ Florea Nedelcu, *De la restaurație la dictatura regală*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1981, p. 185.

was made known in a legionary circular of 26 November 1935.¹⁰ The following year was to see further contacts between Maniu, his supporters and the legionaries, including Maniu's meeting with Ion Moța, Codreanu's second-in-command, at the Athenée Palace in Bucharest in early September.¹¹

The early months of 1937 were decisive in pushing Maniu and Codreanu closer together. On 13 February, the funeral of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, who had died fighting for the nationalist side in the Spanish Civil War, took place in Bucharest. King Carol was affected by the huge legionary and popular presence at the funeral and regarded the Legion as a very real threat to his position. Fearing in particular, the combined strength of the Legion and Maniu, Carol decided to destroy Codreanu and the legionary elite. Carol's minister of public order, Gavrilă Marinescu, drew up a list of thirty senior legionaries, headed by Codreanu, to be assassinated.¹² Having avoided one attempt on his life in 1934 by Carol and his circle, Codreanu now sought an alliance, and direct contact, with Maniu in March 1937.¹³ Maniu's absence from Romania meant that the two were not to meet up until November, but Codreanu's admiration for Maniu and his desire to bind him closely to the Legion was reflected in a circular of September 1937. In this, Codreanu commanded his followers to rally around Maniu and take his advice in the event of his death in the forthcoming election campaign. Codreanu confirmed this following a further attempt on his life in February 1938.¹⁴

General elections had been scheduled for 20 December 1937 by the incumbent National Liberal government under Gheorghe Tătărescu. When the electoral campaign began on 19 November, the Legion immediately began creating a mood in favour of Maniu amongst their supporters, describing him as 'unique amongst the old politicians as a man of character' and arguing that the Legion should follow his policies 'with regard to the moral regeneration of the country'.¹⁵ The first face-to-face meeting between Maniu and Codreanu, together with the dissident liberal Gheorghe Brătianu, took place in late November and the non-aggression pact for the elections was signed by the

¹⁰ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste 1927-1938*, Munich, Colecția Europa, 1981, p. 69-70.

¹¹ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, Bucharest, (hereafter, ANIC), Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr. 3/1936, f. 42.

¹² Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, 10 vols, București, Editura Machiavelli, 1998-2009, vol. 2, p. 77, 151; Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice*, București, Humanitas, 1990, p. 338-39.

¹³ Armin Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien*, p. 311; Zaharia Biolă, *Amintiri și considerații asupra mișcării legionare*, Cluj-Napoca, Biblioteca Apostrof, 2002, p. 51-55.

¹⁴ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr 17/1937, f. 62; Șerban Milcoveanu, *Testament politic a lui Corneliu Codreanu*, in Șerban Milcoveanu, "Cele cinci testamente istorice", București, Crater, 1999, p. 16-26.

¹⁵ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr. 13/1937, f. 25.

three men on 26 November. The pact was not an ideological coalition, but an agreement to prevent electoral misconduct by the National Liberal government and to ensure free elections. The three also agreed that their respective parties should concentrate their efforts against the government during the campaign and not turn against each other. The pact was to last for thirty days.¹⁶ In due course, a number of other parties averse to the dictatorial tendencies of the king and his government signed the pact. Notwithstanding the communists' subsequent accusation that Maniu had collaborated with fascists in 1937, the Romanian Communist Party ordered its members to vote for Maniu in the elections.¹⁷

Despite the government's attempts to subvert the electoral process in its favour on 20 December, the National Liberals failed to win the 40% of the vote necessary to take the majority of seats in parliament. 'From what we know now', wrote the politician Constantin Argetoianu on 22 December, 'the most votes, after the government, are for the Iron Guard – then, very close, the National Peasants'. He noted later on the same day that the Ministry of the Interior had published false results 'with the percentages manipulated for all the parties'.¹⁸ The official statistics were 35.92% for the National Liberals, 20.40% for the National Peasants and 15.58% for All for the Country, the Legion's political wing. With the National Liberals discredited and being totally unwilling to bring Maniu or Codreanu to power, King Carol now set about creating a National Christian Party government, even though the party had only won 9.15% of the vote. Carol's diary entry reveals that he foresaw that this government would be too unstable to remain in power long and then he would be 'free to take stronger measures which would free me and the country from the tyranny ... of party interests'.¹⁹

Carol's assumption was indeed correct since, within days of its appointment, the National Christian government's antisemitic legislation led to Jewish passive resistance within Romania and complaints from the Western powers. Seeing his opportunity to establish a dictatorship, Carol duly installed a new government of 'national unity' on 10 February 1938. The following day, Carol declared the 1923 constitution invalid, declared a state of emergency, and placed public order in the hands of the military. The new constitution of 20 February turned parliament into a rubber stamp for royal decrees and on 30 March political parties were outlawed. In this period, Maniu and Codreanu

¹⁶ Vasile Arimia et al (eds), *Istoria Partidului Național Țărănesc. Documente 1926-1947*, București, Editura Arc 2000, 1994, doc. 35, p. 173-4; *Ibidem*, doc. 34, p. 172-73.

¹⁷ Zaharia Boilă, *Amintiri și considerații asupra mișcării legionare*, Biblioteca Apostrof, 2002, p. 65.

¹⁸ Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 295-97.

¹⁹ Nicolae Rauș (ed.), *Carol al II-lea Regele României, Însemnări zilnice, 1937-1951*, 5 volumes, București, Scripta, 1995-2001, vol. 1, p. 134.

maintained close links. During a meeting on 10 February in Bucharest, the two agreed that in the event of either of their deaths, the followers of the deceased leader should join the remaining leader and give him their unconditional loyalty.²⁰

Armand Călinescu, the new regime's minister of the interior, was in the meanwhile preparing measures against the Legion. The Anschluss of Austria on 13 March intensified his desire to eliminate the Legion since he, like many in Romania, believed the Legion to be Nazi backed and that the Legion would benefit from the Reich's increased influence in South-East Europe. This view of the Legion as a Nazi 'fifth column' was, as we have seen, perpetuated during Maniu's post-war trial. Given Codreanu's openly pro-German position in foreign policy, and that of his successor, Horia Sima, this view seems only too plausible, but Armin Heinen's history of the movement, based on German archival sources, suggests that German support for the Legion during Codreanu's leadership has been greatly exaggerated. Even after his death in 1938, and the flight of legionaries headed by Horia Sima into exile in Berlin, the Germans regarded the authoritarian and increasingly pro-German King Carol as the best guarantor of their interests in Romania.²¹

Codreanu was arrested in April 1938 and sentenced to ten years' hard labour by a military court on 27 May. During the trial, Maniu was an important character witness, pleading in Codreanu's favour. Maniu's statements reveal much about his attitude towards Codreanu, as well as the similarities and differences in their politics. Maniu confirmed that the ideology of the National Peasant Party and the Legion were 'categorically opposed' since the Legion was anti-democratic and antisemitic. Nevertheless, he had discovered in Codreanu personally 'sincerity in his actions, consistency and perseverance, qualities rarely found in our political life and amongst its leaders'. Although he rejected Codreanu's antisemitism, the two were agreed as to the importance of the 'national idea' and that the state had a duty to advance the position of the Romanian majority. Maniu and Codreanu also believed in the need 'to impose in private, social and public life, correctness, honour and Christian morality'.²² These statements suggest that Maniu saw his electoral pact with Codreanu as much more than a necessary evil and that he identified with some, but not all, of the Legion's beliefs and admired aspects of Codreanu's character. Codreanu had, after all, begun his political career in 1931 on a platform of fighting

²⁰ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr. 10/1938, ff. 78-79.

²¹ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 322-45; Rebecca Haynes, *Germany and the Establishment of the National Legionary State, September 1940*, in "Slavonic and East European Review", vol. 77, nr. 4, 1999, p. 700-25.

²² Kurt W. Treptow and Gheorghe Buzatu (eds), *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu în fața istoriei*, vol. 1, 'Procesul' lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Iași, Tipo Moldova, 1994, p. 108-11.

political corruption, even before he became an adversary of the king and came into direct contact with Maniu.²³

Given the degree of sympathy between Maniu and Codreanu, it is unsurprising that Maniu continued to have links with the Legion during Codreanu's imprisonment. In mid-October 1938, the police reported that Transylvanian legionaries were preparing public opinion for 'decisive action' which was to begin with legionaries participating in a rally in Alba-Iulia organised by Maniu, who was also demanding that the government release Codreanu and other imprisoned legionaries.²⁴ Maniu's efforts were, however, to no avail since Codreanu, together with thirteen other legionaries, was murdered by the royal regime on the night of 29/30 November. Maniu's reaction to news of the murders was one of outrage. He sent a letter to the king describing the royal regime as 'a murderous government' and demanded the punishment of the culprits.²⁵ It seems likely that Maniu himself only narrowly missed assassination in November.²⁶

King Carol's suppression of the Legion after Codreanu's murder and the flight of certain senior legionaries headed by Horia Sima into German exile, did not end Maniu's contact with the legionaries left in Romania, who were still active clandestinely. Maniu was especially close to those in his native Transylvania and in December 1938, Maniu gave his National Peasant supporters in Transylvania permission to bring legionaries into the party.²⁷ This, of course, was in conformity with Codreanu's known desire for the legionaries to follow Maniu's advice in the event of his untimely death. It is unclear how many, if any, legionaries joined the party as a result of this gesture but following King Carol's creation of the authoritarian, quasi-fascist National Renaissance Front on 16 December, many legionaries planned to support Maniu's opposition to the new regime.²⁸ Maniu's principled opposition to the National Renaissance Front over the following months won him the admiration of many legionaries throughout Romania.²⁹ It is important to note, however, that by no means all legionaries felt they could cooperate with Maniu beyond the

²³ See Codreanu's maiden speech to parliament which reflected his concern with political corruption: *Cuvântare la mesaj Corneliu Zelea Codreanu în numele Gărzii de Fer*, "Monitorul Oficial", nr. 14, 21 December 1931.

²⁴ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr. 27/1938, ff. 129-30; Ibidem, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 121/1938, ff. 57-60.

²⁵ Zaharia Boilă, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²⁶ Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

²⁷ Vasile Arimia et al (eds), *op. cit.*, doc. 40, p. 188.

²⁸ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr. 26/1938, f. 265.

²⁹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, dosar nr/ 9/1939, ff. 213-14; ff. 221-24.

immediate fight against the royal regime owing to his belief in democracy and his pro-Western foreign policy.³⁰

While Maniu was battling against the National Renaissance Front, legionaries in Romania and in the Berlin-based legionary Command under Horia Sima prepared to avenge Codreanu's murder. On 21 September 1939, a legionary team shot Armand Călinescu, who, as minister of the interior, had been responsible for Codreanu's death. In the repression and murders which followed on 21 and 22 September, the government destroyed the legionary elite which had surrounded Codreanu. Maniu subsequently distributed a circular in which he stated that the king should abdicate and those responsible for the murder of the legionaries punished.³¹ Writing in January 1940, a member of the German legation in Bucharest, stated that most legionaries in Romania currently supported Maniu 'because he is the only person who protested against the shooting of Codreanu and the legionaries, and because he was ready to come to an understanding with Codreanu'.³²

Horia Sima, meanwhile, who had been in Romania for the assassination of Călinescu, once again returned to Berlin, leaving instructions with the legionary Ion Nicolau to contact Maniu 'to discuss collaboration for the future against the common adversary'.³³ It seems unlikely that any agreement was reached between Maniu and Sima. On the contrary, the police subsequently reported that Maniu possessed a copy of Codreanu's will recommending any future leader of the movement 'to resort to the advice of the head of the National Peasant Party'. Maniu and his followers were exasperated that although he knew of the will's existence, 'Horia Sima has refused to take account of its contents'.³⁴

These domestic events were taking place within a grave international situation for Romania. In the late summer of 1939, the Romanian government feared that Bessarabia had been assigned to the Soviet Union under the secret clauses of the 23 August Nazi-Soviet Pact. The subsequent opening of the European war which began with the dismemberment of Romania's Polish ally by Germany and the Soviet Union in September, only served to increase Romanian fears of Soviet expansionism. To make matters worse, during the winter of 1939/40, there was diplomatic coordination between the

³⁰ Ioan Hudița, *Jurnal politic*, 3 vols, București, Institutul European: Editura Fundației Pro, 2002-4, vol. 3, p. 242.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 202-14.

³² Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes, Berlin, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest, IA5, Rumänien, Innenpolitisch, Bd. 9, 4. 1939 – 1. 1940: Aufzeichnung Bukarest den 29 Januar 1940 von Ritgen.

³³ Dana Honciuc-Beldiman (ed.), *Dosar Horia Sima (1940-1946)*, București, Editura Kullusys, 2007, doc. 17, p. 108.

³⁴ Ioan Scurtu et al. (eds), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România*, 7 vols, București, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 1996-2009, vol. 5, doc. 207, p. 308.

governments in Moscow, Budapest and Sofia, all of which harboured revisionist claims against Romania. King Carol now decided to pursue a more pro-German foreign policy and to reconcile internal opponents in defence of Romania's territorial integrity. Believing that the Legion had the full backing of the Germans, Carol's policy of repression was now transformed into one of reconciliation and inclusion of the legionaries into his government. Dr. Vasile Noveanu, legionary leader for Arad county, became the core of a legionary faction within Romania which favoured working together with the king.

Maniu regarded this rapprochement with misgiving, fearing that it would strengthen Carol's authoritarian regime. Maniu therefore sent a message to the Berlin-based legionary Command under Sima, requesting that they support his action against King Carol but that they should accord him (Maniu) 'full confidence and liberty of action in questions of external and internal policy' and to order legionaries in Romania to enrol in the National Peasant Party.³⁵ It is unclear what, if any, response Sima gave to this overture, but he returned to Romania from Germany in early May to carry out a coup against the king, hoping to utilize the twenty-two local organisations in Romania which were under his control.³⁶

Notwithstanding Sima's arrest before he could carry out his coup, international events took a turn in Sima's favour. The capitulation to Germany on 28 May of the Belgian government, whose policy of neutrality during the war had provided the model for Romania's own neutrality policy, brought about the Romanian government's decision to pursue 'active collaboration with Germany in all domains'.³⁷ Sima, who now saw his chance for a legionary, pro-Axis government for Romania, was liberated and on 13 June he gave his consent for the collaboration of the Legion in its entirety with the King. On 28 June, Romania accepted the Soviet Union's demand for Bessarabia and northern Bukovina on the advice of the German government. Later that day, Carol established a German-friendly cabinet, which included Horia Sima, although the king refused Sima's demand that he should establish a government under his (Sima's) presidency.³⁸

With his country diplomatically isolated and now facing possible Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism on top of the loss of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, King Carol turned to the Germans for military support. On 2 July he made the first of a number of requests for a German military mission to be sent to Romania to reorganize the army and air force. Two days later,

³⁵ Vasile Arimia et al (eds), *op. cit.*, doc. 42, p. 195.

³⁶ Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu*, 2 vols, București, Vremea, 2007, vol. 1, p. 172.

³⁷ Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936-40*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, p. 132.

³⁸ Carol al II-lea, *Însemnări zilnice*, vol. 3, p. 224-5.

Carol created a new government with a pro-German minister president and foreign minister. Sima, and two other legionaries, were included in the cabinet but Sima resigned on 7 July, informing Carol that he could not participate in a government which might have to agree to further territorial losses to Hungary and Bulgaria. Sima now busied himself with his supporters and continued to apply pressure on the king for a legionary government.³⁹ It would appear that Sima also had contact with Maniu during the summer of 1940 in order to discuss Hungary's revisionist pressure on Romania, but the outcome of these meetings is unclear.⁴⁰ Maniu was simultaneously strengthening his links with Transylvanian legionaries in order to resist Hungarian demands on Transylvania. Indeed, these legionaries wished to pressurize their leaders in Bucharest to agree to the whole of the Legion joining Maniu's resistance front.⁴¹

The Transylvanian issue was now, however, taken out of the hands of Romanian and Hungarian diplomats who had failed to reach agreement on Transylvania's destiny. Under the Axis' arbitrated Second Vienna Award of 30 August, northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. In his diary entry for that day, Carol wrote that he was considering abdicating as hatred towards him for accepting the Award was inevitable. He anticipated that the opposition against him would be coordinated by 'Maniu and the Iron Guard'. As Carol rightly predicted, on 1 and 2 September, Maniu, Sima and other important figures demanded that he should relinquish power.⁴² The unpopular royal regime, which had barely sustained the loss of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, could not survive the Hungarian annexation of Transylvanian territory since Transylvania had long been regarded as integral to Romanian nationhood and identity.

Between 3 and 6 September a series of popular demonstrations against the Vienna Award, many of them anti-German in flavour, erupted across the country. These were coordinated by the legionaries and their supporters in the army. Maniu's exact role is unclear, but he had been in contact with the British Special Operations Executive during the summer of 1940 and had agreed with them to an anti-German uprising in Transylvania following the Award.⁴³ With King Carol's abdication on 6 September, Maniu's decade-long campaign against the king had succeeded. It was Horia Sima, however, rather than Maniu, who was able to capitalize on Carol's abdication, albeit that the new regime was not the purely legionary government which Sima had long hoped for. Rather, in the National Legionary State, which was proclaimed on 14 September 1940, the

³⁹ See, for example, *Ibidem*, p. 267-70.

⁴⁰ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 251/1940, f. 362; Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri: Cabinet Militar, 1940-1944, dosar nr. 199/1940, f. 14.

⁴¹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 251/1940, ff. 345-6.

⁴² Carol al II-lea, *op. cit.*, p. 293; *Ibidem*, 2 September 1940, p. 295-97.

⁴³ Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous: With S.O. E. in Wartime Romania*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1989, p. 53-54.

Legion was forced to share power with General Ion Antonescu of the Romanian army, who had been invested with dictatorial powers by King Carol prior to his abdication.

It appears that Antonescu had initially intended to form a broadly-based national government. The fact that a single-party National Legionary State was created was due in part to Maniu's unwillingness to share power with the Sima-led legionaries who were antisemitic and in favour of dictatorship.⁴⁴ Maniu was also a supporter of the Western Allies and, although he recognised that it was currently necessary for Romania to be allied to the Axis, he expected that the war would shortly change in favour of the West. He believed it was essential for a part of the Romanian political establishment to act as a reserve for when this occurred and he did not, therefore, want his party to be implicated with the pro-Axis National Legionary government.⁴⁵ When Antonescu brought Romania into alliance with Germany, Italy, and Japan by signing the Tripartite Pact in November 1940, Maniu made his objections known to the General.⁴⁶

It is unclear whether any direct contact between Sima and Maniu took place during the period of the National Legionary State. In any case, although Sima had been skilful in organizing radical elements of the Legion following Codreanu's imprisonment, and at the time of the abdication crisis, he was unable to control the increasingly factionalized legionary movement. Moreover, not all legionaries were committed to the pro-Axis foreign policy endorsed by Sima, or the growing German influence in Romania following the arrival of the German military mission in October 1940. British intelligence at the time noted that 'there are strong Guardist currents which are anti-German'.⁴⁷ In December 1940, the British planned to exploit this division within the Legion by creating a pro-Allied organization in Romania based around Maniu and his colleagues and including 'dissident factions' of the Legion.⁴⁸

As the National Legionary State fell into anarchy during the autumn of 1940, Sima was increasingly at loggerheads with General Antonescu. Their disagreements included Antonescu's tolerance of the existence of the National Peasant and National Liberal parties which Sima deemed incompatible with a Legionary regime.⁴⁹ On the night of 26/27 November 1940, the legionaries

⁴⁴ Dumitru Ciucă (ed.), *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente*, 3 vols, București, Editura Saeculum I.O., 1995-98, vol. 2, p. 53.

⁴⁵ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 137/1940, ff. 148-51.

⁴⁶ Mihai Pelin (ed.), *Mareșal Ion Antonescu. Epistolarul infernului*, București, Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1993, doc. 6, p. 34-36.

⁴⁷ Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries*, vol. 2, nr. 53, 9 October 1940.

⁴⁸ Dennis Deletant, *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2016, p. 78-79.

⁴⁹ ANIC, Fond Președinția Consilului de Miniștri, Cabinet Militar, 1940-1944, dosar nr. 158/1940, f. 2. During the National Legionary State, the political parties were dissolved *de*

expressed their hatred of the older generation of politicians and members of the Carolist regime when they murdered sixty-four members of the former royal government for their involvement in the murder of Codreanu and other legionaries. Later on 27 November, the historian Nicolae Iorga and the National Peasant economist Virgil Madgearu were also dispatched. Consequently, Maniu refused to accompany Antonescu and Sima to the Alba Iulia commemoration of the 1918 union of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December. A fortnight later, Maniu informed General Antonescu that lists of 'condemned' politicians were being circulated by the legionaries and pleaded for the restoration of order.⁵⁰

The legionaries were indeed plotting to massacre politicians and democrats, but the plot was discovered by the military intelligence services. The appointment of the anti-legionary Eugen Cristescu as head of the service by Antonescu signified that a show-down between the General and the Legion was imminent. The legionary rebellion took place between 21 and 23 January 1941 and was put down by the Romanian army, with the assistance of Cristescu's military intelligence services. German tanks, in Bucharest as part of the German military mission, patrolled the streets of Bucharest in a show of support for the general. Maniu now hoped that Antonescu would allow King Michael, Carol's successor, to establish a national government and democratic regime.⁵¹ This was not to be, however, and on 27 January 1941 Antonescu created a new government consisting largely of generals but devoid of legionaries. The National Legionary State was formally abolished on 14 February. Horia Sima, who had escaped arrest following the January rebellion, fled once more to Germany.

The Legion was legally non-existent after 14 February, but since its members were past masters at clandestine activity, its organizations continued to function underground in Romania and maintained links with the exiled Command in Germany. Consequently, the dissolution of the National Legionary State was not the end of relations between Maniu and the legionaries, especially in Transylvania. As early as 11 February 1941, Sima's colleague, and secretary general of the movement, Nicolae Petraşcu (himself a Transylvanian), called on legionaries left in Romania to 'continue to listen to Iuliu Maniu, in the spirit of Codreanu's will of 1938'.⁵² Later that month, following requests from Transylvanian legionaries to join the National Peasant Party, Maniu declared he was willing to accept legionaries provided they fulfilled two conditions:

jure, but the National Peasant and National Liberal parties were *de facto* allowed to exist and their links with foreign diplomats were tolerated by Antonescu.

⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond Preşedinţia Consilului de Miniştri: Cabinet Militar, 1940-1944, dosar nr. 49/1940, f. 27.

⁵¹ Ioan Hudiţa, *Jurnal politic*, vol. 2, Iaşi, Institutul European, Editura Fundaţiei PRO, 2000, p. 238.

⁵² Ilarion Țiu, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

unconditional acceptance of the party's democratic programme and its pro-Western foreign policy.⁵³ Maniu retained contact with members of the movement following the outbreak of the war against the Soviet Union in 1941.⁵⁴

One Transylvanian legionary who approached Maniu in September 1942 was Horațiu Comaniciu, who had been head of the Ciuc county organization in Transylvania from 1935 to 1937. During the National Legionary State, Comaniciu had been manager of Sima's cabinet and prefect of Tutova county. Maniu confirmed his prerequisites for future collaboration as the acceptance of democracy as the foundation for future governments and orientation towards the Western powers in foreign policy. Comaniciu offered to mobilize the legionaries for a change of regime and place its youth at the disposal of the National Peasant Party.⁵⁵ Comaniciu's writings suggest that Maniu's stress on Christian morality as a basis for public life, as well as his personal probity, were important factors in their collaboration. It seems that Maniu invited Comaniciu and his supporters to help him found a new Christian Social Party.⁵⁶

It was not, however, until 26 August 1944, following the coup three days earlier which saw the arrest of Antonescu and the diplomatic and military break with the Axis, that Comaniciu signed a declaration on behalf of the former Legionary Command to the effect that the movement would cease activities. Legionaries were now to enter the parties making up the new National Democratic Bloc. In a letter of response, Maniu wrote that the 'useful energy' of the movement should now be channelled into the political groups which made up the Democratic Bloc.⁵⁷ According to Comaniciu, Maniu had the consent of Britain and the United States to collaborate with the legionaries.⁵⁸ As Horia Sima later pointed out, however, since Comaniciu was relatively marginal to the Legionary movement as a whole, having never had a role of the first rank, he was unable to draw the vast majority of legionaries into the National Peasant Party.⁵⁹ Of the 33,000 or so legionaries in Romania and Germany at the time, only 1,367 of them joined the parties of the National Democratic Bloc up

⁵³ Ioan Hudița, *op. cit.*, p. 31-33.

⁵⁴ Cristian Troncotă et al. (eds), *Documente S. S. I. despre poziția și activitățile politice din România*, 2 vols, București, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2005-6, vol. 1, doc. 155, p. 245-47.

⁵⁵ Horațiu Comaniciu, *In lupta neamului (Amintiri)*, *Consiliul National Roman* [sic], Freiburg?, Coresi, no date of publication, p. 41-47.

⁵⁶ H. Comănicu [sic], *Iuliu Maniu și Mișcarea Legionară*, "Vatra" (Freiburg), nr. 152, October – December 1979, pp. 5-9.

⁵⁷ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Partidului Național Țărănesc*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1994, p. 407-8.

⁵⁸ Horațiu Comaniciu, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁵⁹ Horia Sima, *Prizonieri ai Puterilor Axei*, Timișoara, Editura Gordian, 1990, p. 140.

to October 1946, of which 373 joined the Social Democratic Party, 302 the National Peasant Party and 179 the Romanian Communist Party. The majority of those who did enter the National Peasant Party appear to have been *codreniști*, who were opposed to Sima and his use of terror and believed in taking Maniu's advice in accordance with Codreanu's will and had been doing so throughout the war.⁶⁰

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It is hardly surprising that National Peasant Party politicians who survived into the post-communist era have sought to downplay Maniu's links with the discredited, fascist Legion. Such was the case with Corneliu Coposu, a relative of Maniu's who became his political secretary and was interviewed in 1991. Coposu also made the important remark that Maniu maintained good relations with all political parties.⁶¹ It is, of course, true that Maniu, as a senior Romanian politician, retained close links with leaders of all political persuasions, in his fight against the dictatorial tendencies of the National Liberal governments and the dictatorship of King Carol II. In October 1938 Maniu convened a meeting with other democratic politicians to agree a joint statement demanding that King Carol should return to constitutional government. As he explained, 'I am not a communist, social democrat or guardist [i.e., legionary]. I am a National Peasantist with democratic convictions and am against dictatorship. I do not want a communist or guardist dictatorship. But I will work with guardists, communists, or social democrats to concentrate all forces against dictatorship'. He added that the Legion contained within it 'honourable elements'.⁶²

There was certainly more than mere pragmatism in his relations with Codreanu. The two men shared a common Romanian nationalism, belief in Christian morality and the need to clean up the corruption in Romanian political life. Moreover, Maniu seems to have found much to admire in Codreanu's character, as he revealed in his role as defence witness in Codreanu's trial in 1938. Thus, as Comaniciu writes, for both Maniu and Codreanu, the 1937 electoral pact 'was not just a passing measure. It was more profound than that'.⁶³ What Maniu thought of Sima is less clear. Maniu had clearly expected Sima to abide by Codreanu's will and consult him regularly and

⁶⁰ Constantin Petculescu, *Mișcarea Legionară. Mit și realitate*, București, Editura Noua Alternativă, 1997, p. 230-31; Honciuc-Beldiman (ed.), *Dosar Horia Sima*, doc. 47, p. 275-79.

⁶¹ Corneliu Coposu, *Dialoguri cu Vartan Arachelian*, București, Editura Anastasia, 1992, p. 42-44.

⁶² Arimia, et al (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 187. For Maniu's links with the Communists during the Second World War, see, Cristian Troncotă's introductory study to vol. 2, Troncotă et al. (eds), *Documente S.S.I. despre poziția și activitățile grupurilor politice din România*, p. 25-46.

⁶³ Horațiu Comaniciu, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

was disappointed that Sima did not do so. Sima, for his part, was pursuing a pro-Axis, legionary government under his own leadership and had limited use for Maniu's advice, except perhaps for the period preceding King Carol's abdication when the two men appear to have had direct contact. But Maniu was clearly appalled by the terror which marked the National Legionary State and was ready to tolerate Antonescu's military regime up until 1944 rather than see a return to any form of legionary government.

Perhaps Maniu was naïve to believe that the Legion could be tamed and channelled onto a fully democratic path, and many of his colleagues at the time disagreed with his policy towards the Legion. The movement's strong organization and relative popularity in Romania, however, made it difficult to ignore and, had Maniu done so, there was the risk that the movement might have become the tool of more powerful anti-democratic forces. Such was Maniu's fear in the spring of 1940 when King Carol began his reconciliation with the Legion.

The Communists were, therefore, correct in their accusation at Maniu's trial in 1947 that he and the National Peasant Party had links with the Legion going back into the 1930s. The Communists were, however, deliberately misleading in claiming Maniu had forged these relations because of fascist and 'Hitlerite' sympathies. Maniu remained pro-Western and committed to democracy throughout his period of contacts with the Legion and it was the Legion which was expected to adapt its ideology to his. Consequently, there is evidence of some convergence of views between Maniu and elements of the movement, led by Comaniciu, which might have led to a new form of politics in the form of Christian Socialism, or Christian Democracy, had not the imposition of Communism intervened.

It says much for Maniu's personal integrity that he did not attempt to hide his links with the Legion following his arrest and that even during the Communists' political trials he was brave enough to argue the merits of individual legionaries while condemning the collective violence of the movement. In his testimony during Ion Antonescu's trial, Maniu stated that he 'had found members of the Iron Guard to be very patriotic, honest and well-intentioned'. He added that 'proof of this could be found in the fact that the ruling Communist Party had itself seen fit to accept many former legionaries into the party'. This comment led to an embarrassed hubbub in the courtroom.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Dumitru Ciucă (ed.), *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente*, vol. 2, p. 67.