

Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century

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The Attitude of the Weekly *Graiu Românesc* (Romanian Voice) from Pančevo Towards the Yugoslav Dynasty and State

Abstract: The weekly *Graiu Românesc*, the organ of the Romanian Party in the Kingdom of SCS, played a notable role in the political, cultural, and national life of the Romanian national minority in the Kingdom of SCS during 1923–1926. The owner and long time editor-in-chief was Ioan Jianu, a deputy of the Romanian Party in the People's Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This publication featured information of vital importance to the Romanian minority in the Yugoslav state, primarily concerning the work of the Romanian Party, the activities of Romanians in Banat, as well as domestic and international news. This paper seeks to present several aspects of the editorial board's attitude towards the Yugoslav state and dynasty, and the position of Romanians within it.

Keywords: Romanians in Banat, Romanian Party, journalism, national minority, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

After the end of World War I, several major monarchies in Europe collapsed, with their territories becoming part of new nation-states or being annexed to their respective national homelands. Among these, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy holds a special place; however, its collapse is not the subject of this study. We are concerned here only with the consequences of this collapse for Banat, as a geographical and civilizational region, which, by decisions made at the Paris Peace Conferences, was divided between two states claiming its territory: the Kingdom of SCS and the Kingdom of Romania. A small portion of northern Banat also became part of Hungary. Given the ethnically and confessionally diverse population of Banat, the new borders could not fully satisfy the aspirations of all national communities (in this case, Serbs and Romanians in Banat) to have the places they inhabited included in their respective nation-states. Thus, in the eastern Banat territories assigned to Romania, a significant Serbian minority remained, while in the

western Banat (the so-called „Yugoslav Banat”), now part of the Kingdom of SCS, there was a Romanian minority numbering around 70,000 people. In the new state, until the border demarcation in Banat was finalized and tensions surrounding it subsided – especially until the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921 – the Romanian minority in Yugoslav Banat, as a non-Slavic group, did not enjoy full rights. These included participation in agrarian reform, which benefited only peasants of Slavic origin benefited; political rights, such as the right to vote in the 1920 elections for the Constituent Assembly, and others.

The relaxation of tensions on the Yugoslav–Romanian border in Banat following demarcation, the conclusion of bilateral treaties, the creation of the Little Entente, and the dynastic marriage between Alexander Karađorđević and Maria Hohenzollern all contributed to the improvement of the Romanians’ position in the „Yugoslav” Banat and led, among other things, to their inclusion in the political life of the Kingdom of SCS. In February 1923, prior to the National Assembly elections, the Romanians in Banat organized and founded the Romanian Party in the Kingdom of SCS.¹ In the parliamentary elections held that year, the party secured one seat in the National Assembly, filled by Dr. Ioan Jianu. The Romanian political leadership also decided to launch a weekly publication titled *Graiul Românesc* (The Romanian Voice), which was to be published in Pančevo and inform its readers about the Party’s activities and other matters relevant to the Romanian minority in Banat.²

Graiul Românesc was a Romanian-language weekly published in Pančevo between 1923 and 1926. The owner, publisher, and first editor-in-chief was Dr. Ioan Jianu, Secretary General of the Romanian Party in the Kingdom of SCS and its parliamentary representative (1923–1925). The newspaper began publication on March 4, 1923, as a four-page edition with a print run of 1,000 copies. Regular columns included: „Political Situation,” „Domestic News,” „News from Romania,” „News from the World,” „Advice for Farmers,” and „Medical Advice.” The initial editorial board included, alongside Ioan Jianu, Romulus Roman (a teacher in Dolovo), Marcu Baldovina (a priest in Dolovo), Ioan Miter (a priest in Orešac), and Ștefan Putnic. The first issues outlined the reasons for the political organization of Romanians, called for participation in the elections, explained electoral laws, and reported on campaign activities and election results in Romanian-populated areas.

The weekly regularly covered election rallies and other events organized by the Romanian Party in Banat villages. Clergy members played a prominent role in these events as respected speakers and influential figures,

¹ Gligor Popi, *Rumuni u jugoslovenskom Banatu između dva rata (1918–1941)*, (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1976), 55.

² Mirča Maran, *Kulturni razvoj Rumuna u Banatu 1918–1941*, (Pančevo: Istorijski arhiv u Pančevu, 2005), 122.

many of whom also held positions within the Party and the newspaper's editorial board.

Three key issues consistently addressed by the editorial board throughout the paper's run were: the establishment of municipal self-governance, the revision of the agrarian reform to include landless Romanian peasants, and the resolution of educational rights in the Romanian language. The paper also featured extensive coverage of Romanian cultural societies, other cultural activities, and political developments concerning the Romanian Party.

Beginning in April 1924, Ioan Erina, a writer from Pančevo, took over as editor-in-chief. Following the departure of Dr. Ioan Jianu to Timișoara in 1925,³ *Graiul Românesc* ceased to be the Romanian Party's official publication in 1926 and became an „Independent Weekly Newspaper” under Erina's ownership. He was also writing most of the texts.⁴ Although the format largely remained the same, the paper lost reader support due to its editorial stance, which increasingly criticized Romanian intellectuals and Party leaders, often without substantiation. Personal conflicts between Erina and Party leadership, who still retained popular support, seems to have played a role. Erina's growing alignment with Ljubomir Davidović's Democratic Party likely further alienated the readership, who largely backed the Romanian Party. The newspaper ceased publication in the first half of 1926, likely due to financial difficulties and a declining subscriber base. Its closure left a gap in journalistic representation for Romanians in Yugoslav Banat, which lasted until the founding of the weekly *Nădejdea* in Vrșac in 1927.

Throughout its run, *Graiul Românesc* paid close attention to the political situation in the country, providing readers with concise reports from the Assembly, information on political developments, and the Romanian Party's relationships with other political actors. News about the Karađorđević dynasty was also frequent, with the editorial board and much of the Romanian Party embracing the dynasty as their own. In the first issue,⁵ the board published two letters from the Congress of Romanians in Yugoslav Banat, held in Alibunar - the founding event of the Romanian Party - addressed to the „Marshal of the Royal Court” and to Prime Minister Nikola Pašić. These letters show that, after years of distrust toward the Yugoslav state and dynasty, Romanian leaders had abandoned aspirations of annexation to Greater Romania and had accepted Yugoslav authority, though they continued to maintain strong emotional and cultural ties with Romania. The first letter read:

³ Gligor Popi, op. cit., 144.

⁴ Mircea Măran, „*Graiul Românesc* din anul 1926”, in: *Tradiția*, Novi Sad, br.2 (6), 1996, 12.

⁵ *Graiul Românesc*, Pančevo, no. 1 of 4 March 1923, 2.

To His Majesty King Alexander I, King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
Your Highness,

The Romanians in the Kingdom of SCS, who gathered today in Alibunar at their first Congress for the purpose of founding the Romanian Party, unanimously greet Your Highness as a sign of loyalty to Your Highness' Dynasty, which, after a hundred years of struggle, possesses a noble tradition and has triumphed for the benefit of humanity, and ask for your gracious protection.

On behalf of the Congress,
President Dr. Aurel Novac.

The second letter to Pašić was similar in tone:

Mr. Nikola P. Pašić,
President of the Council of Ministers, Belgrade.

On the occasion of the First Congress in Alibunar, the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat affirm their patriotic duty, extend heartfelt gratitude to the Prime Minister for civil liberties, and express their unwavering devotion and loyalty to the great and common homeland, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

On behalf of the Congress,
President Dr. Aurel Novac.

Among members of the royal family, the paper paid particular attention to Queen Maria. It is evident that both the editorial staff and the Romanian elite in the Kingdom of SCS held deep affection for her, likely due to her ties to Romania's ruling dynasty. Short reports on Queen Maria's activities appeared regularly. Already in the first issue, readers were informed that „our Queen Maria is diligently studying the Serbian language and literature” with Professors Dr. Bogdan Popović and Dr. Todor Georgijević. Subsequent issues reported on her visit to the Savamala Girls' Gymnasium in Belgrade, where she was welcomed by the entire teaching staff and students,⁶ her recreational outings by car or yacht, and a visit from the Romanian Queen Mother to the Yugoslav royal court.⁷ One particularly notable event reported in the paper was the royal couple's visit to Romania on June 5, 1923, following their attendance at horse races and a military inspection in Zaječar. They were expected to remain in Romania until June 22 before returning to Bled, where they would receive a return visit from Queen Maria's parents, the Romanian monarchs.⁸ However, as the paper reported in one of the subsequent issues, King Aleksandar returned to Yugoslavia earlier than planned, „due to the outbreak of civil war in Bulgaria, in order to take the necessary measures to secure the state bor-

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 3, 18 March 1923, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 4, 25 March 1923, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 15 of June 10, 1923, 3.

ders.”⁹ As the lead news item in the July 29, 1923 issue, the newspaper published information about Queen Mary's pregnancy¹⁰ - a topic that would remain prominent in nearly all subsequent editions of the weekly. News of the Crown Prince's birth appeared on the front page of the September 9 issue,¹¹ where the editorial staff expressed their joy with the following announcement:

Today we received from Belgrade the joyful news of the birth of our Crown Prince, who was born on September 6 at two o'clock after midnight in the Royal Palace in our capital, Belgrade.

...

Great joy and delight reign throughout the country on the occasion of God's blessed gift. (...) Long live His Majesty King Alexander I! Long live Her Majesty Queen Mary! Long live our Crown Prince!

Graiul Românesc also reported on public reactions to the birth of the Crown Prince in its later issues. The paper paid particular attention to the baptism of Crown Prince Petar, covering it in a more extensive article that conveyed loyalty to the state and to the Karađorđević dynasty. The article concluded with the following words:

Long live His Majesty King Alexander I! Long live Her Majesty Queen Maria! Long live and reign our Crown Prince! Long live the Karađorđević dynasty!

The pages of this weekly also contain numerous other reports on members of the royal dynasty, primarily concerning the activities of King Aleksandar, but also of Prince Đorđe, who is mentioned in several brief articles. In the issue of 5 August 1923, it is noted that Prince Đorđe had returned to Belgrade from abroad and would reside in his own house on Jevrem-ska Street.¹² The King's brother also visited, among other places, Vršac, where he stayed as a guest of Konstantin Mandukić, a major vineyard owner.¹³ Due attention is also paid to the wedding of Prince Pavle.¹⁴

Such brief reports on the activities of members of the Karađorđević dynasty can be found in almost every issue of the weekly, as evidence that the Romanian Party, at least officially, accepted the Yugoslav monarchy as its state and the Karađorđević dynasty as its own, without relinquishing its sympathy for the mother country of Romania and its Hohenzollern dynasty. We will not dwell on them further, but will continue to address content concerning the political life of the Yugoslav state in that period.

⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 16 of June 17, 1923, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 25 of July 29, 1923, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, No. 28 of September 9, 1923, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, No. 23 of August 5, 1923, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, No. 25 of August 19, 1923, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 35 of October 28, 1923, 3.

In some issues, articles more extensive than those about the Karađorđević dynasty provide information and commentary on political life in the Kingdom of SCS., alongside regular coverage of the Romanian Party and its activities, which are discussed in virtually every issue of this weekly. This is unsurprising, as *Graiul Românesc* was the newspaper of the Romanian Party in the Kingdom of SCS., and its primary purpose was to present the role of the party in the Kingdom's political life. It also includes information on the Kingdom's foreign policy - for example, the completion of the demarcation with Hungary on 1 March 1923, the export of Yugoslav goods abroad,¹⁵ and the Yugoslav-Romanian agreement on navigation on the Bega River, to be implemented based on a statute to be signed in Belgrade by Yugoslav and Romanian officials.¹⁶

The most frequently published news concerned the work of the National Assembly and the Romanian Party's stance towards individual political parties or prominent individuals involved in political life. Thus, during the 1923 election campaign, the Romanian Party leadership entered into negotiations with the Radicals for electoral cooperation in southern Banat, whereby Romanians would vote for the Radicals and not submit their own separate list,¹⁷ but would instead have one candidate on the Radical list. The negotiations failed because the Romanians demanded two candidates. Tensions between the Romanian and Radical parties escalated after the publication of an article in *Banatski Radikal* from Pančevo, in which Romanians were described as irredentists and chauvinists, which supposedly could be seen at public gatherings and in churches, where priests were said to curse those who did not vote for the Romanian Party. The article also claimed that Romanians had „openly come out against the Radical Party” and had given a significant number of votes to the Democrats.¹⁸ The Romanian Party's newspaper published an article denying the claims made by *Banatski Radikal* and threatened legal action. In the following issue, *Graiul Românesc* published a retraction from *Banatski Radikal*, in which the editorial staff distanced themselves from the earlier article - written by a certain Argus - stating that „the Romanian Party and its leaders cannot in any way be blamed for some excesses of individual voters.”¹⁹ On the contrary, the Radical editorial asserted that the Romanian Party leadership had maintained close cooperation with the Radicals, both locally and in Belgrade, before and during the elections.²⁰

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 3 of March 18, 1923, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 4 of March 25, 1923, 3.

¹⁷ Gligor Popi, *Formiranje, razvoj i delovanje Rumunske stranke (1923-1929)*, (Novi Sad, 1974), 326.

¹⁸ *Graiul Românesc*, no. 6, April 8, 1923, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 7, April 15, 1923, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Relations with the Radicals and attitudes toward the Assembly and this party are also discussed in one of the subsequent issues of *Graiul Românesc*,²¹ reporting on the government crisis following Prime Minister Nikola Pašić's resignation and the problems in relations with Radić's HRSS. The article's author, likely the newspaper's owner Ioan Jianu, claims that the Romanians, along with Muslims and Germans, sought cooperation with the strongest parliamentary party - the Radicals - and that „we can say that we are accepted with open arms by the big politicians in Belgrade, while those from our region are trying to trip us up, to denigrate us.”²² This evidently refers to the *Banatski Radikal* incident, which disrupted local Romanian-Radical relations, though the Romanian Party clearly sought cordial relations with the Radical leadership. Furthermore, regarding the Assembly's work, *Graiul Românesc* blamed dysfunction on the Democrats and HRSS, who failed to find common ground with the Radicals.²³

One significant event regarding relations between the Romanian Party and the Kingdom's authorities was a July 1923 meeting in Belgrade, extensively reported by *Graiul Românesc*.²⁴ The Radical Party was represented by Minister of Justice Lazar Marković, Minister of Finance Milan Stojadinović, and deputies V. Andrić, V. Janić, and D. Grgin. The Romanian Party was represented by Ioan Jianu, who thanked the Radicals for their attention to Romanians in Banat, recalling the joint struggle recently waged by Serbs and Romanians against the Hungarian regime. Jianu listed the main grievances as the Romanians' exclusion from the Constituent Assembly elections and the agrarian reform. He emphasized that the Romanian Party would cooperate with the Radicals but insisted that the Romanians' fundamental demands be met.

In addition to Jianu, other Romanian Party leaders also participated in the talks: Dr. Aurel Novac, Archpriest Traian Oprea, priests Guga and Șdicu, and landowner Nicolae Meda. The Romanians' demands addressed three major issues: local self-government, i.e., that voters in Romanian-majority settlements elect local authorities through universal suffrage; revision of agrarian reform to allocate land to poor Romanian peasants; and resolution of the church-school question based on reciprocity. As will later be shown, almost none of these demands were fulfilled, except for the resolution of the school issue through the 1933 Yugoslav-Romanian School Convention.

Graiul Românesc regularly informed its readers on topics concerning the monarchy and the state, the Romanian Party's relations with state authorities, and vice versa. This editorial line continued after Ioan Erina became editor-in-chief, while Ioan Jianu remained the paper's owner. Erina, however,

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 8, April 22, 1923, 1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 9, April 29, 1923, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 22, July 29, 1923, 2.

was more aligned with the Democratic Party, which would eventually influence the newspaper's editorial policy, particularly after Jianu emigrated to Romania. While a complete 1925 collection has not been located, ten preserved issues in the City Library in Vršac still list Jianu as owner. The last preserved issue from that year, no. 39 of 1 November, lists Jianu as owner and Erina as editor-in-chief, contradicting claims that the paper ceased publication in early 1925 upon Jianu's departure to Romania.²⁵ The content of the newspaper preserved indicates that its politics of supporting the Radicals is still largely unchanged, because it continued to report on party activities, at least in the issues preserved.²⁶ Among other things, there was praise for Prime Minister Pašić, "made our political life livelier and more interesting"²⁷ upon his return to the capital. Issue 38 features an extensive report on a session of the Radical Party's district committee, showing that the newspaper maintained its earlier political orientation. There is still no mention of the Democrats.

Nonetheless, with Jianu's departure, the paper collapsed in early 1926. Erina, as the new owner, entered openly into cooperation with the Democrats, and criticism of the Romanian Party leaders appeared in *Graiul Românesc*. Although publication continued in early 1926, only two issues (nos. 6 and 9) have been preserved. The paper likely shut down soon afterward, having lost the support of its readership, composed largely of Romanian Party supporters in Banat.

Even after the closure of *Graiul Românesc*, Ioan Erina, then working as a secretary in Mihovil Tomandl's law office in Pančevo, persistently advocated for Romanian cooperation with Ljuba Davidović's Democratic Party, of which he was a member. Ahead of the 1927 elections, acting on instructions from party superiors, he launched *Democratul* (The Democrat), a Romanian-language organ of the Democratic Party's Local Committee in Pančevo.²⁸ That same year, another Romanian-language weekly, *Nădejdea* (Hope), began publication in Vršac as the new organ of the Romanian Party. It launched harsh attacks against the former editor of *Graiul Românesc*, calling him a traitor and mocking him as „Judas Erinović”²⁹ or the „Grammarian from Omoljica.”³⁰ Criticism of Erina continued throughout the 1927 election campaign, after which *Democratul* ceased publication. Publicist and journalist Ioan Erina committed suicide shortly thereafter, bringing to an end the career of one of the most controversial figures in interwar Banat Romanian political and journalistic life.

²⁵ Gligor Popi, *Rumuni u jugoslovenskom Banatu...*, 144.

²⁶ *Graiul Românesc*, no. 38, October 25, 1925, 1–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 37 of 18 October 1925, 1.

²⁸ A total of eight issues of this journal were published, between 5 June and 11 September 1927.

²⁹ *Nădejdea*, No. 21/1927, 3.

³⁰ He was born in Omoljica, a village near Pančevo, and he received this nickname because there were grammatical errors in his texts. *Ibid.*, No. 22/1927, 2–3.

The closure of *Graiul Românesc*, for which many Romanian Party leaders blamed Dr. Ioan Jianu, who had emigrated to Timișoara for personal reasons, and Ioan Erina, who joined the Democrats, left a vacuum in Romanian journalism in Yugoslav Banat. It took a year for new newspapers to emerge, but they were ideologically opposed to each other. Even after *Democratul's* swift closure, factional struggles within the Romanian Party leadership persisted in the ensuing years, only temporarily subdued by the 6 January dictatorship, before reemerging even more fiercely in the 1930s.

Summary

With the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the First World War, the Banat region was divided among the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS), Romania, and Hungary. In the portion that became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a significant Romanian national minority remained, numbering nearly 70,000 people. In the early postwar years, relations between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania were strained due to disputes over the demarcation of the Banat, which also negatively affected the status of the Romanian population in the so-called Yugoslav Banat. This minority was denied the right to participate in elections for the constitutional assembly and was excluded from the agrarian reform. Relations began to normalize after the final delimitation of the border, the establishment of the Little Entente, and the dynastic marriage between King Aleksandar Karađorđević and Queen Maria of Hohenzollern. In this new context, the Romanian elite in the Kingdom of SCS began to organize, accepted the Kingdom as their own state, and participated in the various social and political movements present in the country. Politically, the Romanians formed the Romanian Party in the Kingdom of SCS, which secured one seat in the National Assembly in its first electoral contest in 1923. At the founding assembly of the Romanian Party in Alibunar, it was decided, among other things, to launch a party newspaper titled *Graiul Românesc* (The Romanian Voice), which was published weekly in Pančevo. During its first year, the editor-in-chief and owner was Dr. Ioan Jianu, a lawyer from Alibunar, who also served as the party's general secretary and Member of Parliament. The paper adopted a consistently favorable stance toward the Karađorđević dynasty, especially Queen Maria, as well as toward the Yugoslav state authorities. In 1924, editorial leadership passed to publicist Ioan Erina. While Jianu remained the owner, Erina maintained the newspaper's existing editorial policy, which aligned with the Radical Party, covered Romanian Party activities, and reported on other important developments concerning the Romanian national minority. In addition to political content, the paper included cultural reports, news from Romania, and international affairs. After Dr. Jianu left the Kingdom, ownership of the weekly passed to Erina, who radically changed its editorial direc-

tion. He aligned himself with Ljuba Davidović's Democratic Party, became its member, and began openly criticizing leaders of the Romanian Party. As a result, the newspaper lost its readership base, which remained loyal to the Romanian Party, and was soon shut down due to financial difficulties. Erina later attempted to continue his political agitation on behalf of the Democrats by launching *Democratul*, the organ of the Democratic Party local committee in Pančevo. This move provoked strong backlash from the new organ of the Romanian Party, *Nădejdea* of Vršac, which subjected Erina to sharp criticism, insults, and ridicule. After the 1927 election campaign, *Democratul* ceased publication. Erina faded from public life and soon after died by suicide.

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