

**A PATH TO AN ASCENDING CAREER: THE “DELEGATED PREFECTS”
IN TRANSYLVANIA, 1918–1928¹**

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Abstract

In Romania, in the first decade after World War I, the prefect, in his capacity as chief of the county administration, was the most important representative of the State at the local level. As a political official with a vital role in ensuring electoral success for the governing parties, he was appointed by Royal Decree, upon recommendation of the Ministry of the Interior. Exceptions were made for those designated by the Ministry of the Interior as delegated prefects, usually for a limited period, but with the same responsibilities as permanent prefects. After 1918, the number of delegated prefects in Romania increased; this solution was often preferred for counties considered challenging to manage, including those with a high percentage of ethnic minorities along the border or where the local branches of the governing party were weak. In this article, we focus our analysis on the “delegated prefects” in the 15 counties of Transylvania (the former principality of Transylvania) during the first ten years of Romanian rule. The aim of this research is twofold. Firstly, to provide an overview of the situation, focusing on the legal framework governing the system of delegated prefects. Secondly, to undertake an analysis of this category in terms of educational, social, and professional background.

Key words: prefects, delegated prefects, administrative elites, “regățeni”, Transylvania, interwar Romania.

A modern legal framework, decentralization, the stability of public office positions, and the administration’s independence from the political establishment were topics frequently discussed before World War I and remained subject to ever-growing debate even after the 1918 unification of Greater Romania. Between 1918 and 1925, Romania had no fewer than four administrative regimes, to which we can add the state of siege. Initially, the provisional authorities in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania established, by decree, that the old regulations issued by the previous authorities (Austria-Hungary and Russia) remained in force, with the proviso that the acts excepted should be specified (Sora, 2011: 82). Gradually, in Bessarabia from 1918, and in the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian state from 1920 onward, Romanian (Old Kingdom) legislation was introduced, accompanied by the arrival of civil servants from the Old Kingdom. The unification

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and uniformization of the administration were accomplished by adopting the Administrative Law on June 14th, 1925 (effective from January 1st, 1926). The politicians from the Old Kingdom understood the unification of 1918 more as the integration of the new provinces into an already existing system, raising doubts about its functionality. Irina Livezeanu correctly asserts that “the unification was accomplished largely under the aegis and on the terms of the Old Kingdom, whose institutions played a disproportionate role in the expanded state ... In short, institutionally and politically, the Old Kingdom was the cornerstone of the Greater Romanian state” (Livezeanu, 1995: 29).

In this new territorial framework, the prefect, the government's most important representative at the county level, was envisioned as a symbol of the Romanian state and an instrument of centralization, thereby guaranteeing Bucharest's control (Sora, 2022: 298). In a country that introduced universal manhood suffrage in 1919, the prefect played a crucial role in ensuring the party government's victory in elections, which were largely dominated by “regățeni” (citizens of the Old Kingdom of Romania). It should be noted that all the general parliamentary elections held between November 1919 (the first elections in Greater Romania) and July 1927 were organized under a government led by political leaders from the Old Kingdom. Furthermore, the Romanian Constitutions (1866, 1923) gave the King the right to dismiss the prime minister, appoint a new one, and demand the dissolution of the Parliament. Therefore, with the administration's help, the new government organized elections, which it usually won.

Between December 1918 and April 1920, the Transylvanian Provisional Government (the Governing Council/*Consiliul Dirigent*) nominated the prefects, a title used in the Old Kingdom for county chiefs, which replaced that of *fóispán* (lord lieutenant). On November 11, 1928, to end a period of political unrest, the Regency Council agreed to form the government and take power. The results of the November 1919 parliamentary elections, which were largely free, led to the formation of a coalition government dominated by the Romanian National Party of Transylvania and the Peasant Party of the Old Kingdom. This government, led by Alexandru Vaida Voevod from Transylvania, lasted only until March 1920, when King Ferdinand I decided to rely on General Averescu and the politicians from the Old Kingdom. From March 1920 to November 1928, seven governments came and went, all dominated by parties and political leaders from the Old Kingdom, the longest-lasting being that of Ion I.C. Brătianu (January 1922 – March 1926).

After the Romanian government dissolved in April 1920 the regional autonomous bodies, the Ministry of the Interior (then headed by Prime Minister Averescu) recommended new prefects for Transylvania to the King. Therefore, the nomination of delegated prefects became a way for the Romanian government and the political parties from the Old Kingdom to strengthen their power and authority. It was common for a delegated prefect to be a civil servant or an active officer from the Old Kingdom, who was appointed prefect (“titular”) after some time. Keeping a

delegated prefect in a county for a long period and during critical moments (such as elections) became a strategy to reinforce not only the central authority of the state but also the power of the governing parties.

This article investigates who the delegated prefects were in the 15 counties of Transylvania (the former principality of Transylvania) from December 1918 to November 1928, and why this practice was adopted, including its reasons and outcomes. In recent Romanian historiography, there has been sustained concern about local administration and the agents of central power in the regions that united with Romania in 1918: the prefect (lord lieutenants); the deputy head of a county administration (prefecture director) – *subprefect* in the former counties that belonged before 1918 to the Austria-Hungary/ *director de prefectură* – in the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia, the high-sheriff (district chief), and the *prim-pretor* in the former counties that belonged before 1918 to the Austria-Hungary/ *administrator de plasă* – in the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia). Furthermore, there is increased attention, especially in the counties of the former principality of Transylvania, before and after 1918. There are multiple reasons to favor these areas: the former territories of Austria-Hungary before 1918 allow for more complex comparative research (the imperial period and that of a successor state) and comparisons with other provinces of the Habsburg Empire. In addition, there is a high level of international historiographical interest in the Habsburg monarchy and its post-imperial legacies, the successor states of Austria-Hungary, and the mobility of elites under different political regimes. We can also add that, compared to the Old Kingdom, there are more reference works (dictionaries, encyclopedias), published memoirs, digitized press to date, but also greater local interest in recovering the past through local monographs, biographical studies, dictionaries of local personalities or of the 1918 Romanian Union (Sora, 2022: 299-300). Among the studies focusing on public administration and, in particular, on the members of the prefectural corps in Transylvania before and after 1918, we mention those by Gábor Egry (2017), Judit Pál (2018), Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici (2020, 2022, 2023), Judit Pál and Szilárd Ferenczi (2020), Andrei Florin Sora (2019, 2025), and Zoltán Györke (2025).

The prefect was the county's supervisor of all public services. His responsibilities covered almost all areas of public administration, including maintaining public order and security (as head of the county police) and overseeing the enforcement and application of laws. He was responsible for public health, the conservation of public property, and the preservation of public morality, among other things. The prefect's position was essentially political (Sora, 2022: 305). The loyalty of the prefect towards the governing Party can be easily observed by the practice of resignation from the prefect position a few days after the fall of the government. However, even if he was a political officeholder, to be appointed prefect (permanent/titular or delegate), the candidate had first to meet the general requirements for civil servants: Romanian citizenship, of legal age (at least 21 years

old), medically eligible, no criminal convictions, to have completed military service (for men), and all civil and political rights (Györke, 2010: 84).

The “titular” prefect was appointed by royal decree, following a proposal by the Minister of the Interior, and the prefect delegated to this position, for a fixed or indefinite period, was appointed by ministerial decree. Until January 1, 1926, prefecture directors and district administrators (*administratori de plasă/ prim-pretori*), many of whom became delegated prefects during the period studied, were appointed by royal decree; after that date—which coincides with the entry into force of the administrative law of June 14, 1925—they were appointed by ministerial decree, following from 1909 a national competition organized by the central administration of the Ministry of the Interior (Sora, 2011: 285). Certain exemptions were granted by law or by the Ministry of the Interior to district administrators and sub-prefects in Transylvania and Bukovina until January 1, 1926, and in Bessarabia only in the early years of Romanian rule.

With the adoption of universal manhood suffrage in 1919, the prefects' role as the government's electoral agents increased. This task was at odds with their role as guardians of the legality of elections, a role that was difficult to reconcile with their status as political appointees. As in France, the Romanian prefect was an “election maker” (Karila-Cohen, Tanguy: 2022, 173). The legislative elections, and even the local ones, were the main criteria for assessing the prefect's competence. A poor electoral outcome could lead to the removal of the prefect, who was seen as the main responsible (Sora, 2011: 325-326).

In conclusion, the political subordination of the prefects outweighed professional competence. For the political elite and public opinion, the prefect's authority (including winning the election for the governing Party) depended heavily on prior public service experience, personal persuasion, and status as a reserve or active-duty Army officer. This quality was particularly valued in a society deeply shaped by the experience of the First World War, and the prefect was the chief of the county police, able to give orders to the Gendarmerie and Army units in particular situations. Other essential but not mandatory factors that influenced the nomination and retention of the job were: support from the local party organization; authority and effective leadership to persuade other public officials to support the governing Party; familiarity with the county; and membership in one or more power networks.

Starting in 1864, the prefecture director (*directorul de prefectură*), as his first subordinate, could temporarily replace the prefect. Delegating the prefect's powers to another civil servant was a practice used more intensively after 1895, when not only the director of the Prefecture/sub-prefect in the 1925 Law, but also district administrators (high sheriffs) and high officials from the central administration of the Ministry of the Interior were assigned to serve as substitutes for the prefect for a limited period. However, this practice remained limited until 1918. The nomination of delegated prefects for an indefinite period was more frequent after 1919, both in the Old Kingdom and in the newly integrated Romanian state territories. It became

the norm in the counties of the Old Kingdom during the General Văitoianu government (September 27 – November 30, 1919) to ensure the legality of the first post-war elections. In November 1919, for all 34 counties in the Old Kingdom, delegated prefects were in place; 85% of them were magistrates (judges, court presidents, prosecutors, and advisers at the Courts of Appeal). With this measure, Prime Minister Văitoianu wanted to show that he would organize free elections. The magistrates and other public officials were not party members. Although appointing magistrates as delegated prefects was noticeable in other governments, this strategic choice was new. It was soon exported to the new Romanian provinces with the opposite objective of strengthening the governing party in those territories.

This interim period for a delegate prefect could last from a day to more than a year. From an administrative point of view, this nomination served as a transition between the dismissal or removal of a prefect and the nomination of a new one, especially at the beginning of a new government or when the party leadership, at the local and national levels, had not yet designated a candidate for the post. The delegated prefect had all the duties and responsibilities of the titular prefects, as well as nearly the same authority. He received some benefits from this dignity: the right to use an official car with a driver, a law enforcement escort, an official residence, etc. (if he was not the owner of a house at the county seat). On the other hand, he did not take an oath during the nomination as delegated prefect. Usually, he did not receive the salary of a titular prefect, except for an allowance and other expenses. In many cases, they were paid for their actual job (which explains why the administrative general inspectors did not oppose the appointment as deputy prefects). However, the appointment as delegated prefect was a significant springboard towards becoming a permanent prefect, standing for election to parliament, gaining influence at the local level, and establishing close contacts with Bucharest.

To our knowledge, the practice of delegated prefects (excluding the short periods when the “titular”/permanent prefect was missing and the prefecture director/sub-prefect took over his duties) was used only twice in the territories under the jurisdiction of the Transylvanian Governing Council until the appointment of the Averescu government and the dissolution of this autonomous body (March – April 1920). Even though we did not consider it to be modeled on the delegate prefect system, we must mention the case of Lieutenant Colonel Valer Neamțu, delegate (*girant*) at the Prefecture of the County of Ciuc, but also at the prefecture of the neighboring county of Odorhei (possibly here as the incumbent), both counties with a Hungarian majority. Neamțu, a former officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army, had the responsibility to administer the county of Ciuc until the effective entry into office of the prefect Gheorghe Dubleșiu (appointed in April 1919). However, we cannot say that this provisional leadership was modeled on the system of delegated prefects in the Old Kingdom. After Dubleșiu's appointment, Neamțu was appointed (confirmed) prefect of Odorhei County. The second case is better documented.

Octavian Felecan, first-notary and later sub-prefect in Sălaj County, was delegated at the end of January 1920 (effective February 1) to take charge of the Turda-Arieș prefecture, following the promotion of the prefect Zosim Chirtop to the position of secretary general of the Interior Department of the Governing Council. Felecan became “titular” prefect on May 10, 1920, a few days before the parliamentary elections, which shows, on the one hand, that he accepted political subordination to the People's Party and to Prime Minister Al. Averescu, and on the other hand, the lack of loyal local elements, compensated by the appointment as prefects (delegate or permanent) of persons originating from the Old Kingdom or who had connections with the Romanian state before December 1918, including as employees (Sora, 2025a: 152-154).

The small number of delegated prefects in the territories under the jurisdiction of the Transylvanian Governing Council until April 1920 is due to at least four reasons: the delegation to the function of *főispán* (prefect) was not used in Hungary before 1918; the continued validity of Hungarian administrative laws; there is a pool of capable, well-trained people who have a good relationship with the leadership of the Romanian National Party; we have continuity in the leadership of the province. Even though the *főispán* was like the Romanian prefect, a political appointee of the government, he represented more local interests than in the Old Kingdom and offered greater stability in this role. The prefects of the Governing Council were important local figures (known before 1918 for their opposition to the Hungarian government), members of the Romanian elite, and embedded in local networks. For those reasons, Averescu and the People's Party tried to recruit some prefects of the Governing Council.

Shortly after the dissolution of the regional bodies in April 1920, General Averescu's government assumed total control of county administration, including the appointment of prefects in counties that had belonged to Austria-Hungary before 1918. We should mention that since the beginning of Romanian administration in Bessarabia, the prefects have been appointed by the Romanian government. The People's Party (the Governmental Party) did not yet have local organizations, leaders, and members in all Transylvanian counties for future elections. The Parliamentary elections scheduled for May 1920 were postponed in Transylvania, taking place on June 4th (for the Assembly of Deputies) and June 6-7 (for the Senate). The government used this delay to recruit (former) leaders and members of the Romanian National Party and ensure they had loyal prefects.

The People's Party/the Government sought the support/adhesion of the “titular” prefects, negotiating with many of them. The first changes in the prefect dignity were made a month after the Averescu government's nomination. Only five of the 15 prefects of the Governing Council in the Transylvanian counties continued to organize the Parliamentary Elections for the People's Party, Felecan being appointed permanent prefect. The “titular” prefects named by the Governing Council who did not accept membership in the People's Party either submitted their resignations or were dismissed. Six new prefects were appointed by Royal Decree

(as titular), and another four were appointed as delegated prefects (Petru Meteș, magistrate – Alba de Jos County; Mihail R. Sturdza, diplomate from the Old Kingdom – Cojocna County; Vasile Ianza, subprefect – Hunedoara County; Valer Neamțu – Târnava Mică County). As in the Old Kingdom and Transylvania, prefects were often significant members of the ruling political formation. Indeed, in the spring of 1920, some prefects appointed or retained by the Averescu government also established local branches, as Victor Moldovan recalls in the case of prefect Virgil Al. I. Popescu presided on May 13, 1920, at the Constituent Assembly of the People's Party in Bistrița-Năsăud County (Moldovan, 2016: 103).

What were the main reasons for appointing delegated prefects (especially regarding the 15 Counties of Transylvania from April 1920 to November 11, 1928)?

Usually, after the dissolution of the Parliament, the new government promptly organized elections. This policy aimed not only to legitimize the King's designation of the new prime minister but also to prevent time for growing discontent and for the opposition to join forces. Therefore, a new government was in a rush to appoint new prefects, even if they did not always have the candidates' or the local leaders' consent. As in other parts of Romania, the system of appointing delegated prefects continued after May 1920. The longest term of office for a delegated prefect in the counties of Transylvania during the period 1918–1928 was that of Ioan Tulbure, who served as delegated prefect of Făgăraș County between April 1 and November 20, 1926, although this was briefer, for example, than the mandate of Vasile Boneu, chief notary and delegated prefect of Arad County between April 1, 1926, and June 7, 1927. In fact, during the period surveyed, in the 15 counties of Transylvania, unlike in other regions of the country, terms of office for prefects were shorter.

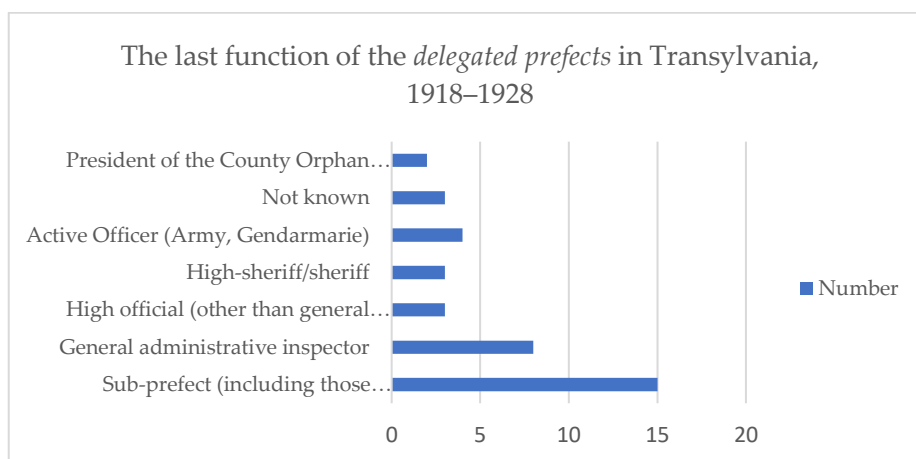
When there was no favoured candidate for the future chief of the county, or when local leaders and those from the National Executive Committee of the Government Party did not agree on the nominee, the appointment of a delegated (interim) prefect seemed a good solution. The system of delegated prefects was a powerful and effective way to consolidate the central administration's and Old Kingdom politicians' control over the new territories. From December 1918 to November 1928, around 30 % of the total number of nominations and confirmations as prefects were delegated. However, except the Știrbey government, the other governments in power between March 1920 and November 1928, all dominated by the political elites of the Old Kingdom, did not use the delegated prefects practice as an instrument to appoint at the head of the Transylvanian counties people from the Old Kingdom or Transylvanians with pre-1918 ties to the Romanian state.

A weak government at the national level (for example, the Știrbey government in June 1927) or at the regional level – in our case study, Transylvania (for instance, the second Averescu government or Take Ionescu government) – prefers to use more of the system of delegated prefects, especially in the moments to prepare the parliamentary elections. This was used in moments when there was a

lack of people capable of winning the polls and being faithful to those who appointed them, appreciated, respected, or little feared by the administration and citizens, but also accepted by the partisans and party members in the territory. It was easier to appoint a delegated prefect, a higher civil servant (general administrative inspector), a magistrate, or the prefecture director.

The Știrbey government chose not to appoint permanent prefects in any county. The appointment of delegated prefects with experience in local (not all in the same county) or central administration could have been a transitional measure, but it also showed a lack of political support at the local level, given that most of the prefects of the Averescu government had resigned or were about to do so. In addition to prefecture directors (sub-prefects) and district chiefs, a substantial number of active military personnel — commanders of gendarmerie brigades (in Brașov County: Lieutenant Colonel Paul Ionescu, from the Rural Gendarmerie; in Someș County: Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Ștefănescu, commander of the 5th Gendarmerie Regiment in Cetatea Albă) — or from the central administration of the Ministry of the Interior (directors, general administrative inspectors, such as Paul Goma or Julien Peter). This preference for appointing delegates also meant that nine of the 17 prefects (two appointments in two counties) appointed between June 5 and June 20, 1927, were originally from the Old Kingdom.

On the contrary, although the government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu continued to use the system of delegated prefects, the PNL—the first party with nationwide organizations (1921)—had established strong local organizations in Transylvania, some with the support of Transylvanians with whom it had close ties before 1918 and who had lived for a time in the Old Kingdom (Alexandru Lapedatu, Solomon Haliță, Alexandru Iteanu, Petru Meteș). We observe a similar pattern in the Averescu III government, even though in March 1926 the People's Party did not have strong organizations in many counties; it relied on people with whom Averescu had collaborated between March 1920 and December 1921.



Until the 1925 law came into effect, the admission criteria for candidates for the prefect position were specific to public functions: Romanian citizenship and not being deprived of civil and political rights. It should be noted that in the Old Kingdom, many of the prefects had higher education, given the prestige and power of the position, and were recruited mainly from among the local elite. The position of prefect served as an escape route for people considered administratively qualified but without a university degree in law or State/Administrative sciences. The increase in the number of central government agents in the territory with a degree in law or state/administrative sciences was aided by contributions from Transylvania and Bukovina. From January 1, 1926, the legal minimum age to be nominated as a prefect (30 years old) and to hold the position was a diploma from a state-recognized higher education institution (from 1929, a university degree). Still, again, the law of June 14, 1925, followed by others, maintained certain or modified exemptions for prefects who had held this position for more than one year (1929 Law - for MPs more than three terms) for a fixed or indefinite period (Sora, 2011: 240-241).

Instead, starting in 1892, their subordinates (prefecture directors and district chiefs) were required to have a degree in law or state sciences. Still, exemptions from the law were granted. Especially after 1908, the percentage of the deputy head of a county administration (*director de prefectură*) and high sheriffs/district chiefs (titles used: *subprefect* before 1904; *inspector comunal* between 1904 and 1908, *administrator de plasă* after 1908) increased substantially, and we also witnessed a gradual professionalization, aided by greater stability in office (Sora, 2011: 230-246). By a ministerial decision of January 3, 1922 (published on January 6, 1922, in the *Monitorul Oficial/Official Gazette*), the admission requirements for the “aptitude and capacity exam for access to the position of district administrator” were: “a degree recognized by the State as a doctor, graduate in law or political science, doctor of medicine, but with two years' experience as a district doctor, engineer with at least two years' seniority in the civil service; captain or lieutenant recently placed in reserve, well noted by his superiors; former rural gendarmerie officer; first-class municipal notaries with at least four years' seniority in this grade, provided they have completed notary school.” (Sora, 2011: 237).

During the interwar period, a larger percentage of prefects in the former territories of Austria-Hungary held higher-education degrees than those in the Old Kingdom and, in particular, in Bessarabia (Sora, 2011: 291). Between the Old Kingdom and Transylvania, the differences in higher education degrees (generally in law) were not substantial, but they were greater regarding the number of doctors of legal sciences, which was higher in Transylvania. Given that many of the delegated prefects in Transylvania are recruited from among general administrative inspectors, Prefecture high sheriffs, chief notaries, and magistrates, the number of higher-education graduates (especially in law) approaches 100%, if we exclude military personnel. Among those with higher education but without a law degree, we first mention Gheorghe Baiulescu, a medical doctor. On the other hand, we can

equate (as the legislation of the time often does) graduation from a higher officer school with a degree in higher education.

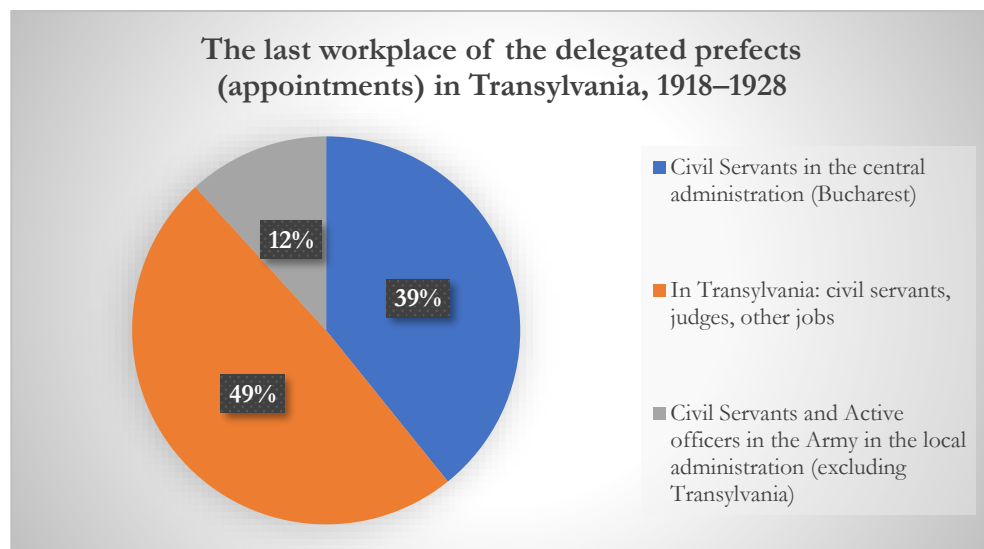
The Romanian governments, dominated by politicians from the Old Kingdom, in addition to appointing prefects, sub-prefects, and district administrators from these regions to the new provinces (Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania, Banat, Crișana), were more open to recruiting people who were originally from or had previously worked in the Old Kingdom. The rise of the Old Kingdom natives to positions of power at the local level was much more intense in Bessarabia and less so in the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, due to local resistance, the greater influence of the Romanian elites, and the greater presence of people with higher legal education, some of whom had worked in local administration before 1918 or were employed by the new Romanian regional bodies. In the first years after 1918, there was a logical argument (not always correct): civil servants, officers, and politicians of the Romanian state before 1918 (some of whom were born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but had careers in the Old Kingdom) were familiar with Romanian legislation. In addition to these considerations, another, often decisive, reason was that these men were loyal, first and foremost, to the political networks in power (from the Old Kingdom) and were already integrated into them.

Especially in Transylvania, instead of proposing candidates from the Old Kingdom as permanent prefects or local people with no political support in the county (even though they claimed to be supporters of the ruling party), the governments chose in many cases to appoint delegated prefects who were civil servants from local administrations (whether in the same county or not), such as sub-prefects/Prefecture directors, chief administrators, sheriffs (*pretori* – deputies of *prim-pretor* in Transylvania) or presidents of the County Orphan Court. In addition, magistrates or higher officers in the Gendarmerie or the Army were also appointed as delegated prefects. Some of these individuals could have other career aspirations, such as becoming later MPs or government members, especially the magistrates. In contrast, others, such as sub-prefects, were required by law to accept promotion as prefect delegates.

The selection of senior officers (including retired generals) or general administrative inspectors as prefect delegates has become increasingly common at the head of Prefectures. In contrast, in both cases, many delegated prefects had fewer ties to the county. This feature is more evident in Bessarabia than in Transylvania or Bukovina. The activity of delegated prefects was not limited to carrying out government orders and securing electoral victories for government candidates, but was also shaped by their undeclared political options, friendships, kinship ties, and patronage and clientelism networks. For general administrative inspectors, there is no clear path to advancement. This post was more significant within the Ministry of the Interior hierarchy than the prefect's, but the prefect's real power was greater. It could more easily influence local politics and economic interests. Preserving regional

influence could be an answer to the choice of general administrative inspector Gheorghe Baiulescu, former prefect of Brașov (January 1919 – December 1920), to be appointed as the delegated prefect of the county of Brașov twice during the studied period (December 1921 – January 1922, February – July 1923). These are the only appointments of general administrative inspector Baiulescu as delegated prefect. Another preference of a general administrative inspector for counties in the former Austro-Hungarian territories is Julian Peter (in Ciuc, Turda-Arieș, Maramureș, Bihor, and Sălaj Counties), born in Switzerland but married to a Romanian woman from Transylvania (see Peter's biography in Chinezu, 2011: 72-75).

In the new provinces, divergences between the *regățeni* (inhabitants of the regions of the Old Kingdom) and the local elites were caused not only by a lack of trust at the leadership level or by competition for positions, but also by clashes of different mentalities, traditions, and administrative education backgrounds. The degree to which the administrative agents of the Old Kingdom were spread across the country varied from region to region: highly visible in Bessarabia, limited in Bukovina and Transylvania. In this last province, few prefects and delegated prefects were born in the Old Kingdom. However, we need to add to this all those born in Transylvania who, before 1918, held a job in the Old Kingdom (for example, the general administrative inspector Septimiu Mureșanu) or/and/or supported Romanian interests during the war.



We have identified three high sheriffs (*administrator de plasă/prim-pretor*) who were appointed as delegated sub-prefects on the same day or a few days after assuming duty as delegated prefects. Furthermore, Virgil Bărcănescu, *administrator de plasă* in the county of Vlașca (Old Kingdom, in the proximity of Bucharest), was

nominated on June 8th, 1927, by the government of Barbu Știrbey to be delegated sub-prefect of Mureș County. In this post, he was empowered as a delegated prefect. Four months later, he was appointed permanent prefect by Ionel Brătianu in a county (Mureș-Turda) with fierce opposition against the National Liberal Party and a substantial Hungarian minority.

On April 15, 1920, Petru Meteș (1886–1946), the first President of the Court of Law in Brașov, was selected by the Governing Council to fill the office of prefect for Alba de Jos County. Six months later, he was transferred by the Averescu government and appointed prefect of Cojocna (Cluj) County. On January 1, 1921, he was appointed by a Royal Decree as a permanent prefect, indicating his political involvement within the governing Party (the People's Party), which lacked leaders and members in Transylvania. Through this position, which gave him greater public visibility and enabled him to build a support network, Petru Meteș seems to have sought an entry into politics. He succeeded in retaining his rank as prefect under the brief government of Take Ionescu (December 1921 – January 1922) and, with the help of Alexandru Lapedatu, in the first year of the Ion I.C. Brătianu Cabinet. In February 1923, he chose to run for the Chamber of Deputies in the Ighiu constituency in Alba de Jos County as the government (National Liberal Party) candidate. The opposition press fiercely attacked his candidacy, mentioning his “anti-Romanian” deeds before 1914. With the help of the local authorities, Petru Meteș won the elections. He served as deputy between 1923 and 1926 (see Meteș's biography in Sora, 2025b).

At first glance, the strangest nomination seems to be that of the diplomat Mihai Sturdza. From an influential noble family of the Old Kingdom, he was a member of the commission charged with enlisting Romanian soldiers from Austro-Hungarian Army prisoners of war in Italy to volunteer for the Romanian Army. In his memoirs, he mentions that in April 1920, he put his diplomatic career on hold, being appointed delegated prefect of Cojocna county and Cluj city: “where I thought that more subtle methods and more diplomatic attitudes could lay the foundations for a beginning of reconciliation between Romanians and the most important national minority” (Sturdza 1994: 61). Later, he became the first secretary of the legation in Budapest. In the opposition press, he is viewed as a traitor because his best friends in Cluj were Hungarian nobles (*Cine sunt purificatorii*: 1). We believe that the nomination as delegate prefect of Cojocna County was part of Sturdza's strategy to obtain the post in Budapest and was endorsed by the Averescu government due to his previous post in Italy and the ties he had forged with various Transylvanian political leaders.

On the other hand, high civil servants from the central administration in Bucharest who acted as delegated prefects did so for many reasons. Firstly, it was a part of their job description, especially for the general administrative inspectors. Secondly, some had political interests in these counties because of family and friends. Thirdly, for some, it was a promotion. Fourthly, their political and administrative careers were not yet complete, and they still hoped to become (again) MPs or be

appointed Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior or State Secretary. Last but not least, they received an allowance for the period spent in the territory.

Conclusions

A Path to an Ascending Career? We can note a visible trend following the nominations: around 30 % of the prefect nominations were delegated. This percentage seems lower than in the other regions of Romania, such as Bessarabia and the Old Kingdom. The most obvious examples are the five delegated prefects who later became permanent prefects. The practice of appointing delegated prefects reveals the tension between centralization and local political realities in the early years of Greater Romania. The delegated prefects were often appointed in counties without a solid local organization of the ruling parties, allowing time to find the right candidate or even to evaluate the appointed delegate. In this regard, the nomination as delegate to the head of a county was a good way to evaluate the individual's loyalty to the Party and to those who facilitated the appointment, especially for those from the public administration (prefecture directors/sub-prefects, high sheriffs). However, favourable factors that contributed to becoming a prefect included public visibility, political and/or administrative experience, legal training, integration into networks of influence and patronage, and membership in or sympathy for the governing Party. This applied to both permanent and delegated prefects. Even if their presence at the local level was short-lived, it facilitated greater public visibility and integration into a network of influence. This network allowed them to establish connections with decision-makers in Bucharest, such as politicians and high-ranking officials, whom they may have previously known through their professional journeys in other countries.

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