

Administrative Organization of Ismail County in the Composition of Lower Danube Land (1938–1940)

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Abstract.

Relevance. The study of the 1938–1940 period in the history of Ismail County provides relevant insights into the evolution of territorial organization in the interwar Romanian space and contributes to understanding the relationship between administrative centralization, regionalization, and the functionality of local administrative structures.

The purpose of the study is to examine the specific features of a territorial reorganization model dominated by administrative centralization, using Ismail County as a case study.

Results. The experience of administrative reorganization in Romania during the period 1938–1940 elucidates the limitations of a centralized model of administrative regionalization. In the case of Ismail County, administrative reorganization overlapped with major political and territorial transformations that affected the county's institutional stability. Examining the case of Ismail County within the Lower Danube Land provides insight into the practical implementation of this reform, the principles guiding territorial delimitation, and the functioning of local administration during a short but significant episode in Romania's administrative history.

Conclusions. The subnational administrative system established by the Administrative Law of 1938 reinforced the centralizing tendencies of the state and reduced the autonomy that counties had previously exercised in managing local affairs. At the same time, the reform introduced several key principles for territorial organization, such as the economic viability of administrative divisions, the accessibility of transport routes, and the cohesion of local communities. Although the regional structure of the Lands existed only for a short period, these principles continue to hold relevance in contemporary debates on administrative-territorial reform. The case of Ismail County thus highlights both the objectives and the constraints of administrative modernization pursued under Romania's interwar authoritarian regime.

Keywords: administrative reform, Ismail County, Lower Danube Land, interwar Romania

Адміністративний устрій Ізмайльського повіту у складі Нижньодунайських земель (1938–1940)

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Анотація.

Актуальність. Вивчення періоду 1938–1940 років в історії повіту Ізмаїл надає релевантні уявлення про еволюцію територіальної організації в міжвоєнному румунському просторі та сприяє розумінню взаємозв'язку між адміністративною централізацією, регіоналізацією та функціонуванням місцевих адміністративних структур.

Мета дослідження полягає у вивченні специфічних особливостей моделі територіальної реорганізації, що характеризується домінуванням адміністративної централізації, на прикладі повіту Ізмаїл.

Результати. Досвід адміністративної реорганізації в Румунії у період 1938–1940 років висвітлює обмеження централізованої моделі адміністративної регіоналізації. У випадку повіту Ізмаїл адміністративна реорганізація накладася на значні політичні та територіальні трансформації, що вплинули на інституційну стабільність повіту. Дослідження випадку повіту Ізмаїл у складі Нижньодунайського цинуту дозволяє отримати уявлення про практичну реалізацію цієї реформи, принципи, що визначали територіальне розмежування, а також функціонування місцевої адміністрації протягом короткого, але значущого епізоду в адміністративній історії Румунії.

Висновки. Субнаціональна адміністративна система, запроваджена Адміністративним законом 1938 року, посилила централізаційні тенденції держави та зменшила автономію, яку повіти раніше здійснювали в управлінні місцевими справами. Водночас реформа закріпила низку ключових принципів територіальної організації, таких як економічна доцільність адміністративних одиниць, доступність транспортних шляхів і єдність місцевих громад. Хоча регіональна структура «цинутів» існувала лише протягом короткого періоду, ці принципи й досі зберігають актуальність у сучасних дискусіях щодо адміністративно-територіальної реформи. Таким чином, ситуація в повіті Ізмаїл висвітлює як цілі, так і обмеження адміністративної модернізації, здійснюваної в умовах авторитарного режиму міжвоєнної Румунії.

Ключові слова: адміністративна реформа, Ізмайльський повіт, Земля Нижнього Дунаю, міжвоєнна Румунія

Introduction.

In Romania, after the coup d'état of 10 February 1938, a regime of monarchical authority was established, that introduced the state of siege and the censorship, political parties were banned and many politicians were arrested. The King announced that he had formed a government of people "free" from party activity, which would "depoliticize the administrative and household life of the state, and make constitutional changes to suit the new needs of the country". On 27th of February 1938, a new Constitution was promulgated at a ceremony held at the Royal Palace in the presence of all the members of the government (Scurtu & Otu, 2003, p. 391-392). Carol II also founded a new party, the National Renaissance Front, open to all citizens. All state officials were required to be members of this party to keep their positions. This was the first mass party in Romanian history (Academia Română, 2007, p. 603).

To strengthen the power of the monarch and his discretionary control over the administrative system of the state, a new administrative law was adopted, establishing a new administrative entity in Romania - the Land (rom. Ținut).

Based on available archival documents, in this study, we have elucidated how Ismail County, which was part of the newly created administrative entity - Lower Danube Land - in the period 1938–1940, was organized administratively.

Thus, the object of the research is the way in which the territorial-administrative delimitation of Ismail County as an integral part of Lower Danube County was carried out. The counties of Romania were established in 1938 and aimed, where possible, to reunite counties from different historical provinces (Carol al II-lea, 1938, p. 3778-3779).

The main method of data collection was a qualitative analysis of the legislation of the period under investigation, the documents drawn up by the Romanian administrative authorities, the statistical data reflecting the situation in the period under examination, the data contained in the literature of the period under examination and of contemporary literature.

Analysis of the historiography of the problem.

The issue of the administrative organization of Ismail County within the Lower Danube Land has not been sufficiently clarified in the scholarly literature. In most cases, researchers have addressed the specific features of Ismail County's administrative structure during the years 1938–1940 only tangentially. Academic research has primarily concentrated on more general inquiries concerning the political, economic, and social evolution of Bessarabia during the interwar era, instead of on the in-depth analysis of administrative structures at the county level. Consequently, the institutional and territorial characteristics of Ismail County regarding the 1938 administrative reform are still largely unexamined in scholarly studies.

The period between 1938 and 1940 represents a crucial moment in the political and administrative history of interwar Romania. The coup d'état of February 10, 1938, marked the end of interwar Romanian democracy. As M. Ilie (2018) notes, the establishment of the authoritarian monarchical regime was a response both to internal political fragmentation and to the growing threat of extremist movements. The 1938 Constitution effectively concentrated power in the hands of the monarch, reduced the role of Parliament to a decorative one, and suppressed traditional political parties. This political change provided the necessary environment for a broad administrative reform, aimed at consolidating central authority under the guise of political and administrative modernization.

The legal basis for the reorganization of the administrative system during this period was the Administrative Law of 14 August 1938. As I. Scurtu (2010) explains, this law was the second major attempt at regionalization in interwar Romania, after the failed reform of 1929. Researchers who studied the effects of the 1938 administrative reform have found that the Carlist regime officially promoted the 1938 law as a "decentralizing" measure intended to bring the administration closer to the citizens, but the effect was mostly the opposite. Fl. Grecu argues that the reform led to an "excessive centralization and militarization" of state institutions. The creation of lands allowed the central government to exercise more direct control over local authorities through the Royal Residents, effectively bypassing traditional local autonomy. This tension between the rhetoric of administrative efficiency and the authoritarian reality remains a central theme in the study of Carlist Romania (Grecu, 2014, p. 30-31).

According to O.M. Mitu, the integration efforts of Ismail County were hampered by the lack of modern infrastructure. For example, Ismail County did not have a railway connection with the regional center Chisinau or Galati (Mitu, 2018, p. 228).

The figure of the Royal Resident was central to the new administrative reality. In the Lower Danube Land, the first resident was Victor Cădere, followed by the renowned historian Constantin C. Giurescu, who took office in February 1939 (Giurescu, 2000, p. 273-277). As L. Negru (2005, p. 101-102) details, the Royal Resident held vast powers, including the supervision of all decentralized services and the right to coordinate county prefects. Giurescu's tenure is often highlighted in the literature for his efforts to balance administrative control with cultural and economic investments. However, the Resident remained a political appointee of the Crown, ensuring that the region's governance aligned strictly with the King's directives.

A defining feature of the 1938–1940 period was the militarization of civil administration. To ensure loyalty and order, King Carol II replaced many civilian prefects with senior military officers. The police and gendarmerie in Ismail County were also restructured. A. Pohrib (2008,

p. 170-176) notes that during the Royal Residency, the police in the Lower Danube region were tasked with solving social problems while maintaining strict control over extremist situations and potential revolts. In Ismail, the police were not only concerned with common crime but also with monitoring political dissent and ensuring the security of the border with the USSR.

Ismail County was characterized by a complex ethnic mosaic, which included Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarian Gagauzians, and Jews. The administrative reform took place against the backdrop of growing security concerns. In these circumstances the local population often felt neglected by the central authorities, and some minority groups maintained sympathies for the former Russian imperial regime (Mitu, 2018, p. 226-227).

Administrative organization of Ismail County within the Lower Danube Region (1938–1940) in an original experiment in regional governance in Romania. The 1938 reform, although presented by officials as a modernization effort to ensure administrative efficiency through decentralization, functioned in practice as an instrument of centralization and militarization. Led by royal figures like Constantin C. Giurescu and overseen by military prefects, Ismail was incorporated into a regional framework that emphasized the creation of order, allegiance to the Crown, and national safety. The specialized literature indicates that, while it established a framework for a wide regional structure, the reform served as a tool of an authoritarian regime aiming to stabilize a turbulent border area amid a global crisis. Examining the administrative structure of Ismail County during the authoritarian Carlist regime provides important understanding of the dynamics of authoritarian rule and the difficulties of governing a politically diverse and strategically important region.

Results.

1. Establishment of the Lower Danube Land.

After the establishment of the monarchic regime, the idea that only a new and authentic administrative reform could solve the pressing problems of the Romanian administrative system was intensely promoted. The pressing problems being the elimination of the political factor from the administration, the promotion of social values and legality and the prompt and correct resolution of citizens' demands. After an intense media preparation, King Carol II and his supporters, led by the Minister of the Interior A. Călinescu, proceeded to carry out the reform (Scurtu, 2011). Minister A. Călinescu explained the failure of the previous administrative reforms by the following two vices: instability in the functioning of local public administration due to the way local councils were constituted and the politicization of local administration. The guiding ideas of the new reform were: 1) good administration and the accountability of local public authorities for their work, 2) creation of a new territorial-administrative unit - the Land, 3) deconcentration of state services (Călinescu, 1938, p. 11-15).

The new administrative law was published in the Official Gazette of Romania no. 187 of 14 August 1938. Romania's counties, according to the new administrative law, were grouped into 10 Lands. The counties were regional territorial districts with legal personality and economic, cultural and social duties.

Article 55 of the Administrative Law stipulated that "The Land shall take care of its own needs and carry out measures of general interest ordered by the central bodies" (Carol al II-lea, 1938, p. 3779).

The county was an administrative territorial district with a double meaning:

a) one intended "to satisfy the general interests of the state, unification of all the external services of the central authorities, thus establishing between these services principles of collaboration and coordination of activities",

b) the other, to represent the local interests of the territorial constituency, "with the task of meeting needs which, although they may be felt in several localities, simultaneously but not identically, varying in existence and in intensity or quality".

These local interests were organized in the form of politico-territorial legal entities. To carry out the tasks entrusted to it, the State ceded to the Land, within the limits established by law, a part of the public power, which the Land had to exercise under the control of the State (Guvernul României, 1938, p. 3822).

The Lands were administered by royal residents, who were given broad powers in the administrative, economic, social and cultural fields. Each ministry had an external service that functioned alongside the royal resident, except for justice, the army, the foreign service, autonomous public corporations, higher education institutions and commercial administrations (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 1/1938, p. 2-61).

The ten lands were: Olt, having its residence in Craiova, comprising 6 counties; Bucegi, with residence in Bucharest, comprising 10 counties; Marii, having Constanta as residence, comprising 4 counties; Dunarea de Jos, with the seat in Galati, comprising 10 counties; Nistru with the seat in Chisinau, comprising 4 counties; Prut, with the seat in Iasi, comprising 9 counties; Suceava, with the seat in Cernauti, comprising 7 counties; Mures, with the seat in Alba Iulia, comprising 9 counties; Someș, with the residence in Cluj, comprising 7 counties; Timiș, with the residence in Timisoara, comprising 5 counties (Carol al II-lea, 1938, p. 3778-3779). Some of the counties created overlapped the historical provinces: Timiș - Banat, Olt - Oltenia, Suceava - Bucovina (Cocșan, 2010, p. 6).

At the time of the creation of the Lands, Bessarabia was administratively delimited into 9 counties and had an area of 44 422 km², which was 15% of entire country's area of 295 049 km² (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 3).

As I mentioned, the Lower Danube Land comprised ten counties of Romania from different historical provinces. See Table 1.

Tab. 1
The historical provinces of which the counties included in the Lower Danube Land were part

Province	Counties
Bessarabia	Cahul, Ismail
Dobrogea	Tulcea
Moldova	Covurlui, Fălciu, Putna, Tecuci, Tutova
Muntenia	Brăila, Râmnicu Sărat

Source: Institutul Central de Statistică. (1940). *Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940*. București: *Imprimeria Națională*, p. 3.

City of Galati was the administrative centre of the land, the seat of the royal resident of the land was also located there. The ten counties included 45 "plase" (rom. sing. plasa), 2 municipalities, 8 urban residence (rom. reședința) communes (rom. comuna), 14 urban non-residence communes, 10 suburban communes and 699 rural communes (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 88/1940, p. 14). The counties and urban municipalities included in the Danube County are presented in Table 2:

Tab. 2.
Counties and urban communes included in the Lower Danube Land

County	Urban communes
Brăila	Brăila
Cahul	Cahul, Leova
Covurlui	Galați
Fălciu	Huși, Fălciu
Ismail	Ismail, Bolgrad, Chilia Nouă, Reni, Vâlcov
Putna	Focșani, Adjud, Mărășești, Odobești, Panciu
Râmnicu Sărat	Râmnicu Sărat,
Tecuci	Tecuci
Tulcea	Tulcea, Babadag, Isaccea, Măcin, Sulina
Tutova	Bârlad

Note: Town names printed in italics are county residences.

Source: Institutul Central de Statistică. (1940). *Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940*. București: *Imprimeria Națională*, p. 14.

The Lower Danube Land was the second largest Land in Romania, with a total area of 37 958 km², which constituted 12.86% of the country's surface (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940: 3) and the fourth largest according to the number of populations according to the 1930 census (Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, 1931, p. 38-41).

While the administrative laws of 14 June 1925, 3 August 1929 and 27 March 1936 expressly established and

regulated the legal personality of the county, according to the new administrative law of 14 August 1938, the county became a mere control and deconcentration district for the general administration, losing the legal personality it had had since 1864. In this context, in September 1940, the county regained its legal personality under Law No 577/1940. This was, in the case of modern Romania, the only attempt to establish Lands as political-administrative units and it survived only two years (Cocean, 2010, p. 6; Cornea, 2013, p. 98).

2. Territorial delimitation of the communes of Ismail County

According to the provisions of Article 194 of the new Administrative Law, within 2 months of its promulgation, prefects, together with praetors, had to examine the revenue situation of rural communes and, after consulting the village council, to make a new delimitation of the communes. To fulfil the provisions of Article 194 of the Administrative Law on the new rural communes' boundaries, the Ministry of the Interior drew up a set of rules, which were sent to the Royal Residents of the Lands for implementation.

Thus, to comply in a timely manner with the legal provisions on the territorial delimitation of communes, it was recommended the observation of the following rules:

a) The determination of the number of households that would compose the future villages had to be done strictly with the freely expressed consent of the majority of the consulted community. Any grouping of households had to be incorporated into a nearby village.

b) After the delimitation, villages had to be grouped into communes, because only the commune, according to article 1 of the law, had the quality of an administrative territorial district. The rural commune could be composed of one or more villages, among which, one was designated as the residence of the commune, i.e., the seat of the communal administration. The commune residence was established in the village closest to the geographical center of the commune and the most important in terms of population or of economic value.

According to the provisions of Article 194 of the Administrative Law (Carol al II-lea, 1938, p. 3801) the villages which have the right to have a delegate had to be determined. To this end, the Ministry recommended that any village which is situated more than 3 kilometers away from the village of residence should have its own delegate.

c) The following points had to be taken into consideration when establishing the territorial limits of rural communes:

- the most suitable means of communication to the commune's residence,
- the local topographical situation,
- the convergence of the interests of the inhabitants,
- other factors that contribute to the smoothest possible community life.

d) In order to avoid the creation of rural communes

with insufficient financial means to sustain a normal administrative life, the Ministry recommended the establishment of a minimum ordinary income for each rural commune, set at 100,000 lei annually for communes in the flatland and hill areas and 60,000 lei for those in the mountain region.

It was recommended that as many villages as necessary to be grouped together in a rural commune in order to achieve a number of contributors, whose contributions would amount to the minimum income set. The tendency, according to the Ministerial recommendations, should be and remain the following: "rural communes, with as much financial power as possible, limiting, of course, the fulfilment of this condition, where it would become a hindrance, in the communal administrative life, by a too large territorial extension of the commune, which

would also hinder the building work and the means of communication with the village of residence" (Iasi CSNA, Fund 1753, F. 45/85 (1938), p. 19-20).

The operation's execution deadline, regarding the delimitation of the communes according to the new administrative law, expired on 14 October 1938 (Iasi CSNA, Fund 1753, F. 45/85 (1938), p. 206). In fact, the delimitation of the rural communes in Romania's counties was completed by the decision of the Minister of Interior no. 2908 of 24 February 1939 (Tașcă, 2011, p. 480).

The territorial-administrative delimitation of Ismail County in the composition of Lower Danube Land, implemented following the provisions of Article 194 of the new Administrative Law and the resolution of the Ministry of Interior No. 32914 of 1st of September 1938 is presented in Table 3:

Tab 3

Territorial-administrative boundary of Ismail County in the composition of Lower Danube Land

Name of the "plasa"	Name of the Commune	
1. Plasa ISMAIL with seat in urban commune Ismail	1. Ismail	Urban commune, seat
	2. Broasca	Rural Commune
	3. Câșlița-Dunăre	" "
	4. Ceamașir	" "
	5. Doluchioi	" "
	6. Fântâna Zânelor	" "
	7. Hagi-Curda	" "
	8. Hasan Aspaga	" "
	9. Muravleanca	" "
	10. Necrasovca-Nouă	" "
	11. Necrasovca-Veche	" "
	12. Regele Carol II	" "
	13. Pocrovca-Nouă	" "
	14. Sofian	" "
	15. Traian-Vechi	" "
2. Plasa BOLGRAD with seat in urban commune Bolgrad	16. Bolgrad	Urban commune,
	not-residence	
	17. Băneasa	Rural Commune
	18. Bulgărica	" "
	19. Căiraclia	" "
	20. Caracurt	" "
	21. Cișmeaua-Văruită	" "
	22. Curciu	" "
	23. Dermendere	" "
	24. General Al. Averescu	" "
	25. I. Gh. Duca	" "
	26. Tabacu	" "
	27. Tașbunar	" "
	28. Vaisal	" "
	29. Vlădiceni	" "

Name of the “plasa”	Name of the Commune	
3. Plasa CHILIA NOUA with the seat in Urban commune Chilia-Nouă	30. Chilia-Nouă	Urban commune, not-residence
	31. Aprodul Purece	Rural Commune
	32. Baccealia	” ”
	33. Borisauca	” ”
	34. Cariscica	” ”
	35. Caramahmet	” ”
	36. Chitai	” ”
	37. Cișmele	” ”
	38. Draculea	” ”
	39. Dumitrești	” ”
	40. Enichioi	” ”
	41. Eschipolos	” ”
	42. Furmanca	” ”
	43. Galilești	” ”
	44. Jibrieni	” ”
	45. Nerușai	” ”
	46. Regele Ferdinand	” ”
	47. Spasca	” ”
4. Plasa RENI with the seat in Urban commune Reni	48. Vâlcov	Urban commune, not-residence
	49. Reni	Urban commune, not-residence
	50. Anadol	Rural Commune
	51. Barta	” ”
	52. Bolboaca	” ”
	53. Caragacii Vechi	” ”
	54. Cartal	” ”
	55. Cășlița Prut	” ”
	56. Cișmichioi	” ”
	57. Cuza-Vodă	” ”
	58. Etulia	” ”
	59. Frecăței	” ”
	60. Giurgiuilești	” ”
	61. Satu-Nou	” ”
	62. Slobozia Mare	” ”

Source: Galati County Service of the National Archives, Fund 47: The royal residence of Lower Danube County, File no. 88/1940, p. 5-6.

Thus, Ismail County included: an urban commune (Ismail), 4 urban communes (Bolgrad, Reni, Valcov, Chilia Noua), 57 rural communes including 73 villages, divided into 4 “plase”. The table of the delimitation of

Ismail County in “plase” and communes, in relation to the total number of plains and communes in the Lower Danube County is presented in Table 4:

Tab 4

Administrative units of Ismail County compared to the total units of Lower Danube Land (1939)

County / Land	No. of plase	Urban Communes				Rural Communes				
		Total	Residences		Not-residences	Total	Rural	Suburban	Composed of	
			Municipalities	Towns					Total	villages
Ismail				1		7	7		3	3
Ținutul Dunărea de Jos	9	4		8	4	8	95	3	941	941

Source: Institutul Central de Statistică. (1940). *Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940*. București: Imprimeria Națională, p. 18.

For comparison and a better understanding of the evolution of territorial size and the number of local

communities, Table 5 shows the territorial-administrative delimitation of Ismail County in 1921.

Tab 5

Territorial-administrative boundaries of Ismail County in 1921

I. Plasa Bolboaca	II. Plasa Cișmea	III. Plasa Șichirlichitai	IV. Plasa Tuzla
1. Anadol 2. Barta 3. Bolboaca 4. Caragaci 5. Cartal 6. Curci 7. Etulia 8. Frecățeți 9. Hadji Abdul 10. Împuțita 11. Reni (urban commune) 12. Satul Nou 13. Tabac	1. Baccialia 2. Borisovca 3. Cișmele 4. Cariacica 5. Cara Mahmet 6. Chilia Nouă (urban commune) 7. Chitai 8. Dmitrovca 9. Drăculea 10. Enichioi 11. Eschipolos 12. Furmanca 13. Gălilești 14. Jebrieni 15. Nerușai 16. Potcovca 17. Vâlcov (urban commune)	1. Babele 2. Banovca 3. Bolgrad (urban commune) 4. Broasca 5. Cișmeaua văruiță 6. Cemașir 7. Caracurt 8. Cairaclia 9. Cășlița 10. Duluchioi 11. Dermendere 12. Erdec Burno 13. Fântâna Zânelor 14. Hasan Aspaga 15. Hadji Curda 16. Moravlievca 17. Necrasovca Veche 18. Pocrovca Nouă 19. Șichirlichitai 20. Tașbunar 21. Traianu Vechi 22. Vaisal	1. Noul Caragaci 2. Sărieri 3. Săgani 4. Tropoclo 5. Tuzla (urban commune) 6. Zolocari

Source: Ismail MA, Fund 153, Inv. I, F. 39: 132.

Of the 250,501 inhabitants of Ismail County 250,094 were Romanian citizens and 407 foreign citizens (Galati CSNA, Fund 81, F. 1/1938, p. 26). The ethnic composition of the population of Ismail County in 1938 was rather mixed. Romanians, numbering

83,072, constituted 33.2%, Bulgarians - 19.9%, Russians (including Lipovenes) - 26%, Gagauz - 9.1%, Ukrainians - 7%, other ethnic groups were less numerous. Data on population numbers by ethnic groups are presented in Table 6.

Tab. 6

The population of Ismail County in 1938

Romanians	83.072
Bulgarians	49.810
Russians	42.097
Lipovenes	23.015
Gagauz	22.919
Ukrainians	17.529
Jews	8.333
Albanians	1.655
Greeks	817
Germans	559
Poles	257
Gypsies	189
Czechoslovaks	88
Turks	87
Armenians	74
Total	250.501

Source: *The Galati County Service of the National Archives, Fund 81: Galati General Police Inspectorate, File no. 4/1938, p. 26.*

The population and density of inhabitants in Ismail County according to the 1930 census was as follows: area in km² - 4 212, inhabitants - 225 509, inhabitants per km² - 54 (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 42).

The distribution of Ismail County's population by place of living, according to the census of 29 December 1930, was as follows: of the total 222 509 inhabitants of the county, 75 860 (33,6 %) lived in urban communes and 149 649 (66,4 %) in rural communes (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 44-45).

Regarding the judicial organization of the county, in the town of Ismail there was a County Court with 8 magistrates and 5 lesser courts with 10 magistrates (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 21).

In Ismail there was also a Chamber of Commerce and Industry covering the territorial district of Ismail County (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 24).

3. Status of Ismail County in the composition of the Lower Danube Land.

In order to understand the state of affairs in Ismail County after its incorporation into the Lower Danube Land, the data contained in the Report of the Prefect of Ismail County, Colonel St. Gheorghide, on the activities carried out in the county from the time of his appointment (20 March 1939) until the date of writing the report - 16 November 1939, submitted to the Royal Resident of the Land of the Lower Danube, are useful.

The account of the activities carried out begins with the work in the field of forestry. Compared to the other counties of Danube County, Ismail County, as can be

seen from the data presented in Table 7, ranked last in terms of the number and area of forests.

Tab. 7

Breakdown of State forests by county in 1938/39

County	Number of forests	Surface in ha
Brăila	34	12 127
Cahul	61	9 921
Covurlui	17	5 308
Fălciu	27	13 563
Ismail	1	60
Putna	28	26 123
Râmnicu Sărat	2	14 135
Tecuci	21	9 761
Tulcea	48	72 562
Tutova	16	10 409

Source: *Institutul Central de Statistică. (1940). Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940. București: Imprimeria Națională, p. 439.*

Given the existing situation, the problem of forestation of Ismail County was a issue of importance for the county administration. Prefect St. Gheorghide reports that 64 communal seed nurseries were established during the period in question, in which acacia and various other tree seeds were sown. These nurseries managed to grow good seedlings for planting - a total of 2 124 581 specimens. As a result of forestation, 2 332 636 saplings were planted on roads, parks, various alleys and communal forests with a total area of 292,14 ha. The prefect also reports that in the county the digging of ditches and the carrying out of plantations for completions and for communal forests has begun, with a total of 1 176 ha having 5 249 000 saplings, of which 2 124 581 to be taken from local nurseries, 1 000 000 saplings from the Chisinau Forestry Inspectorate, and the rest to be procured through the Agricultural Chamber.

Steps have also been taken to increase the area of orchards. The land has been delimited, enclosed with a trench and prepared for cultivation in an area of 83,54 ha encompassing 46 communes, of which in 6 communes trees were planted last spring in an area of 8,3 ha, for the remaining parts work has started and is being carried out this autumn with grafted fruit trees taken from the Agricultural Chamber which has 150,000 pieces, which is enough for all the above orchards. Next spring action will be taken to also find land in the other communes (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 8/1939, p. 41).

Regarding civil works, arrangements were made for brick-burning kilns to be built in each commune, these are subsequently to contribute to the construction and to the repair of premises. 15 communal baths and 3 health dispensaries were built for a total amount of 1,380,874

lei, the Praetor's office in the town of Reni, 2 schools (in Satu Nou and Jubrieni), 2 churches (Câșlița Prut and Eschipoș), communal wells were and are being built in 13 communes for a total amount of 405 000 lei.

The construction of county roads for a total amount of 1 423 713 lei, and communal roads and bridges for a total amount of 224 000 lei was in progress (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 8/1939, p. 43).

The sanitary state of the county was ensured by 6 mixed hospitals, 16 rural districts, 4 urban districts and 10 childcare dispensaries. All listed medical institutions provided consultations and treated the sick free of charge. At the dispensaries, for poor young children, rice, grey, sugar and clothes were distributed free of charge (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 8/1939, p. 44).

The economic state of the county was determined by the fact that the harvest "was not one of the best as a cold rain that fell during the heat dried out the grain, considerably reducing production per ha and consequently worsening the economic welfare of the inhabitants" (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 8/1939, p. 45).

Regarding the spirit of the population of the county, the prefect reports that in general it was peaceful, and that "the minorities did not engage in any kind of action or propaganda of a minority nature, except that they followed on the radio with great interest the unfolding of external events and the results of the Anglo-Franco-German war" (Galati CSNA, Fund 47, F. 8/1939, p. 46).

Since radio was the most important source of documentation at the time, the data on the number of radio subscribers is interesting. In 1938 there were 1 290 radio subscribers in Ismail County (5,2 subscribers per 1 000 inhabitants). According to the number of radio subscribers, Ismail County was outnumbered by Covurlui County with 5 017 subscribers (21,4 subscribers per 1 000 inhabitants), Brăila with 2 745 subscribers (11,0 subscribers per 1 000 inhabitants) and Putna with 2 300 subscribers (10,6 subscribers per 1 000 inhabitants) (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 569).

Between 1938 and 26 January 1940, 144 architectural objectives were built in the town of Ismail. In the interwar period Ismail became an important administrative and cultural center of Romania, 815 architectural objectives were built here between 1924 and 26 January 1940 (Dumitrașcu, 2016, p. 83). According to the 1930 Census data, there were 4 452 inhabited buildings in Ismail (Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, 1931, p. 40).

In 1938, there were 159 motor vehicles in Ismail County, including 116 cars, 12 buses, 9 motorcycles, and 22 trucks (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940, p. 516).

Discussions.

The administrative organization of Ismail County within the Lower Danube Land (1938–1940) highlights the characteristics of a territorial reorganization model dominated by administrative centralization. The reform of 1938 aimed to overcome administrative fragmentation at the subnational level and to create larger territorial-administrative structures capable of ensuring more efficient coordination of public policies and strengthening

the control exercised by central authorities over local administration. Thus, the integration of Ismail County into the Lower Danube Land should be examined as part of a broader process of administrative reorganization, through which subnational administration was reconfigured by the establishment of regional units governed by royal residents.

From an institutional perspective, the administrative reorganization did not substantially alter the territorial-administrative structure of the county; however, it changed the mechanisms of administrative coordination and subordination. The introduction of the regional level reduced the autonomy of county administration, as the main administrative and development decisions were coordinated at the level of the Land through the royal resident and the regional administrative apparatus.

At the same time, the experience of the administrative reorganization during the period 1938–1940 reveals the limitations of this model of regionalization. The short duration of the Lands' functioning and the tense geopolitical context in Eastern Europe prevented the consolidation of the new administrative structures and the long-term evaluation of their efficiency. In the case of Ismail County, administrative reorganization coincided with major political and territorial transformations that affected the institutional stability of the region. Therefore, studying this period in the history of Ismail County provides relevant insights into the evolution of territorial organization in interwar Romania and contributes to understanding the relationship between administrative centralization, regionalization, and the functioning of local administrative structures.

Conclusions.

The period during which Ismail County was part of Lower Danube Land is too short to assess the advantages or disadvantages of the regionalisation model in the form of lands.

In order to assess this period, the political context and the monarchic regime of power established in Romania, with unfavorable consequences for the democratic development of the country, must be taken into account.

The administrative system introduced by the Administrative Law of 14 June 1938 accentuated centralising tendencies, thus diminishing local initiative.

The criteria used to establish the territorial boundaries of rural communes are of interest, these have not lost their relevance and can still be taken into account today: the existence of means of communication to the commune's residence, the local topographical situation, the convergence of the interests of the inhabitants, the establishment of a minimum income for each rural commune, i.e. the grouping together in a rural commune of as many villages as necessary to achieve a number of contributors that would add up to the minimum total income (set at 100 000 annually for communes in the plain and hill region and 60 000 lei for those in the mountain region).

During the period under review, Ismail County generally maintained the territorial-administrative delimitation established in previous years.

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