

# **T**he regionalization process in Peoples Republic of Romania

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## **Abstract**

After the 1944 coup d'état, setting of the communist government on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1945 and the pseudo-elections organized in 1946, the year 1947 represents the terminus of communism instauration epos in Romania. Throughout this period, the communist leaders were assisted, coordinated, controlled and manipulated from Moscow. They were dictated orders and "suggestions" from Kremlin, all executed without hesitation. The end of 1947 brought to Romania a complete change of regime both political and constitutional. More precisely, unconstitutional. The Constitution of 1923 was suppressed, the king had no longer any role, than the former king of Romania; historical parties were already history, the Parliament was now consisting of a single room and was called the House of Representatives, where the communists controlled any decision and the executive management of the state was exercised by a five-member Presidium, totally subservient to the new regime. Romania was no longer a kingdom, but a popular republic. Concerning the administrative - territorial division, the new constitution stipulates a new delimitation of local authorities' competences and of the territories under their administration. The new constitution passed unanimously in the Grand National Assembly on September 24<sup>st</sup> 1952. This constitution brings substantial changes on administrative level as well. It was the turn of new realignment, after all the

legislative and constitutional changes, organizations and reorganizations of recent years, copies of the Soviet model, put into practice without any sense.

**Keywords:** Communist Regime in Romania, Soviet model, administrative-territorial evolution, constitutional changes, A.I. Vișinski, Petru Groza, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Nikita Brejnev, USSR.

The study of public administration history has a double importance today. Firstly, although somehow neglected so far, the administrative organization is essential for a better understanding of the political history of Romanians, the administrative organization being at the same time a determinant factor and a result of political evolutions. Secondly, during the debates regarding a possible administrative-territorial reorganization, knowing the administrative evolution of the Romanian state can only be useful for the elaboration of future projects.

If the administration during constitutional monarchy was the subject of some research— even if still insufficient—, the administration during communist regime represents a field hardly explored. Fact valid, moreover, for all those representing the institutional side of the regime. Certain aspects captured the attention of historiography, aspects of high impact, as repression, propaganda, struggle for power or international policy, other elements, no less important, being treated summarily or ignored.

After the 1944 coup d'état, the installation of the communist government on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1945 and the pseudo-elections organized in 1946, the year 1947 represents the terminus of communism instauration epos in Romania. Throughout this period, the communist leaders were assisted, coordinated, controlled and manipulated from Moscow. They were dictated orders and “suggestions” from Kremlin, all these executed without hesitation.

Andrei Ianaurevici Vișinski – Prime Deputy Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of the USSR who “convinced” the king to accept Petru

Groza government, best represents the working method of the Soviets in Romania.

The end of 1947 brought to Romania a complete change of regime, both political and constitutional, and more precisely, unconstitutional. The Constitution of 1923 was suppressed, the king had no longer any role, than the former king of Romania; historical parties were already history, the Parliament was now consisting of a single room and was called the House of Representatives, where the communists controlled any decision and the executive management of the state was exercised by a five-member Presidium, totally subservient to the new regime. Romania was no longer a kingdom, but a popular republic.

The control over Parliament was the factor that could speed up the communization of society, economy, and law and, not least, the constitutional order. A first step is done by amending the electoral law regarding legislative elections by lowering the age to 20 years for electors and 23 years for candidates.

A sole party, unitary and imposed by the Eastern partners, appears at the beginning of 1948: Romanian Communist Party (PCR) merges with Romanian Social Democratic Party (PDSR) and form Romanian Workers Party (PMR) during the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of PCR (thus becoming the I Congress of PMR), held between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of February in Bucharest<sup>1</sup>. The communist political satellites underwent reorganization processes: on January 30<sup>st</sup>, what was left of the National Peasant's Party (PNT) – the one led by Anton Alexandrescu – merging with the Ploughmen's Front.

From this point, things start to take place at breakneck speed for a normal socio-political life: on February 24<sup>th</sup> the House of Representatives dissolves itself summoning legislative elections a

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<sup>1</sup>At the meeting held on February 22, Teohari Georgescu launched a harsh attack against Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Minister of Justice, naming him „exponent of the bourgeoisie”. Thereafter, on 24th February he is abusively dismissed from the government.

month later, on March 28<sup>th</sup>, in order to elect a new legislature, with a Constituent Assembly role.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, the People's Democracy Front was founded (FDP), a new electoral organization, tailored to the Communists in order to simulate the exercise of democratic and peaceful assembly.

The communist machine, to which the force state institutions and governmental elements were "pulling" at, simulated the democratic election campaign without arousing political passions of yesteryear's voters, accustomed with the 1946 elections. The Election Day was extremely calm, without any major incidents. The results, published the following day, were overwhelmingly in favour of FDP: 93.2% - representing 405 seats. 7 seats were won by National Liberal Party by Petre Bejan (PNL) and 2 by the Peasant - Democrat Party Dr. N. Lupu). A new Presidium is elected<sup>2</sup>, its leadership having more or less the same structure as the preceding one: Constantin I. Parhon - as president and 3 vice-presidents: Mihail Sadoveanu, Ion Niculi and Petre Constantinescu-Iași. A new government also led by Petru Groza is voted.

Shortly after, on April 13<sup>th</sup> the House of Representatives votes the new constitution of the republic, after only 2 sessions of debates, in fact a copy of the Stalinist constitution of 1936: "Soviet Russia sealed the door of the prison that has become Romania with a new Bolshevik constitution"<sup>3</sup>. Nothing was accidental, "to legitimize the changes, especially those prepared (...) the primary objective of the constitution was to provide a legal framework for implementing the Soviet model"<sup>4</sup>.

The very first article of the new Constitution presents Romania as a "popular state", and the second one stipulates that the republic was formed as the result of the working class and the struggle of people against "fascism, reaction and imperialism". All the civil rights and

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<sup>2</sup>Consisting of 19 members.

<sup>3</sup>Reuben H. Markham, *România sub jugul sovietic* [Romania under Soviet yoke], Bucharest, Civic Academy Foundation, p.439.

<sup>4</sup>Gheorghe Sbârână (coord.), *Constituțiile României: studii* [Romania's Constitutions: studies], Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2012, p. 67.

freedoms were granted, the elective age was lowered once again to 18 years, and women were given full and equal rights to men. Although rights<sup>5</sup> „in all fields of state, economic, social, cultural, political and private law” were proclaimed in the constitutional text, these were not granted. A constitutional novelty was represented by the establishment of constitutional Presidium of the Grand National Assembly which had the role of a chief of state (a president, three vice presidents, a secretary and 14 members). The „supreme executive” body was the government.

As far as the administrative – territorial division is concerned, the new constitution stipulates a new delimitation of local authorities’ competences and of the territories under their administration. Thus, the new entities are: communes, *plăși* (sg. *plasă*)<sup>6</sup>, counties and regions. Locally, the people’s councils exercised the power. Territorial redistribution was not immediate, but became effective the following year.

Law no. 17 dated January 15, 1949<sup>7</sup>, established, transitorily, the new organs – the popular councils, coordinated by a „stat commission” functioning in addition to the Council of Ministers. The popular councils functioned in communes, *plăși* and counties (art. 1).

The communes were rural or urban (art. 5), the rural ones were represented by villages and hamlets (art. 6) and the urban ones were „population centres”, established by the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, residence or not of the county (art. 8).

The *plăși* were formed by villages (urban or rural) and were not the residence of the county (art.10). Several *plăși* formed a county. Territorial – administrative units with common interests formed the *plăși* and counties (art.10, 11).

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<sup>5</sup>„Freedom of conscience and religious freedom”, „individual freedom and of a citizen is guaranteed”, „the domicile is inviolable”, „freedom of the press, of speech, of assembly, of rallies, convoys and demonstrations are guaranteed”, „right to associate and organize”, „citizens have the right to education”

<sup>6</sup>A new and original administrative-territorial unit, a subdivision of a county.

<sup>7</sup>Published in Monitorul Oficial [The Official Monitor], Part I, No. 12/15 January 1949.

Communes, *plăși* and counties were led by the People's Councils consisting of municipal deputies, *plăși* representatives or county ones, and the leadership that is the Executive Committee, was provided by a president, vice presidents, secretary and members. The number of executive members depended on the represented entity: 11 in the capital of the republic, 5 for counties and urban communes county residences and 3 at the districts of the capital and rural communes (art.20-22).

A year later, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1950, the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of PCR) and the Council of Ministers uphold a series of directives, comprised in a mutual decision where as stipulated "the guiding principles for the conduct of territorial organization in order to meet local requirements and tasks that the local state power was called to fulfil"<sup>8</sup>.

In order to create strong administrative, economic and social units, "to ensure appropriate progress" in the fall of 1950 the Parliament votes the Law concerning the administrative-economic zoning the territory of Romanian People's Republic<sup>8</sup>; the law was voted on September 6, published on September 8<sup>9</sup> and entered into force the same day.

The new law completely changes the existing administrative order, dividing the territory into regions, cities, districts and communes in order "to ensure the development of industry and agriculture, with the purpose of constructing socialism and raising the living standards of working people and to facilitate as much as possible the closeness of the State and of the working people, to help ensure fullest political leader role of the working class and strengthen the alliance of the peasantry with the working class" (art.1).

The regions were economic-administrative units on which the central state organs directly supported (art.3). The regions were

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<sup>8</sup>Mihai T. Oroveanu, *Organizarea administrativă și sistematizarea teritoriului Republicii Socialiste România* [Administrative-territorial zoning of the territory of Socialist Republic of Romania], Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1986, p. 212.

consisting of districts and cities of regional subordination. The residence city of the regional People's Council region was the regional centre (art.4). 28 regions were mapped and their capitals established (art. 9):

1. Arad with the capital at Arad City.
2. Argeşwith the capital at Piteşti.
3. Bacău with the capital at Bacău City.
4. Baia-Mare with the capital at Baia-Mare City.
5. Bârlad with the capital at Bârlad City.
6. Bihor with the capital at Oradea.
7. Botoşani with the capital at Botoşani City.
8. Bucureşti with the capital at Bucureşti City.
9. Buzău with the capital at Buzău City.
10. Cluj with the capital at Cluj City.
11. Constanţa with the capital at Constanţa City.
12. Dolj with the capital at Craiova.
13. Galaţi with the capital at Galaţi City.
14. Gorj with the capital at Târgu-Jiu.
15. Hunedoara with the capital at Deva.
16. Ialomiţa with the capital at Călăraşi.
17. Iaşi with the capital at Iaşi City.
18. Mureşwith the capital at Târgu-Mureş.
19. Prahova with the capital at Ploieşti.
20. Putna with the capital at Focşani.
21. Rodna with the capital at Bistriţa.
22. Severin with the capital at Caransebeş.
23. Sibiu with the capital at Sibiu City.
24. Stalin with the capital at Stalin City (former Braşov, renamed after soviet leader).
25. Suceava with the capital at Câmpulung-Moldovenesc.
26. Teleorman with the capital at Roşiorii-de-Vede.
27. Timişoara with the capital at Timişoara City.
28. Vâlcea with the capital at Râmnicu-Vâlcea.

There were three types of cities: of republican subordination<sup>9</sup>, of regional subordination<sup>10</sup> and of district subordination<sup>11</sup>. The capital was divided into 8 city districts, corresponding to today sectors, among which we mention: 1 Mai, 23 August, Nicolae Bălcescu, Lenin, Grivița Roșie.

The raion was "an economic, political and administrative operational territorial unit, consisting of district subordination towns and villages (...) directly subordinated to region" (art. 7). The law organized 177 raions. From the administrative point of view, the raion was subordinated to the region.

The commune was "made up of one or more closed villages (...) directly subordinated to the district". Law no. 5/1950, changes the 58 counties, 424 *plăși* and over 6000 communes, with 28 de regions, 177 raions, 148 cities and 4052 communes.

The local bodies of state power, the people's councils were made up of deputies of "working people" elected for 4 years, which could take decisions and draw up provisions. Moreover, at the end of 1950, under the signature of Constantin I. Parhon, president of the Presidium of the National Assembly, and Teohari Georgescu, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers and the State Commission for implementing the Law of Popular Council, Law no. 17 of 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1949 radically changed, by Decree no. 259/1950, all the duties, responsibilities and obligations of the People's Councils being redefined. Their constituency and structure was also redefined.

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<sup>9</sup> A city which is "economically and politically of particular importance for Romanian People's Republic (...) directly subordinated to the central organs of the State" - Law no. 5/1950, art. 5. These 8 cities were: București, Brașov, Cluj, Iași, Constanța, Galați, Ploiești and Timișoara.

<sup>10</sup> A city which is "economically and politically of particular importance for the entire region" - Law no. 5/1950, art. 5. These 14 cities were: Brăila, Câmpina, Giurgiu, Lugoj, Mediaș, Piatra-Neamț, Predeal, Reșița, Roman, Satu Mare, Sfântu Gheorghe, Târgoviște, Turda, Turnu-Severin.

<sup>11</sup> A city which is "economically and politically of particular importance for the entire district" - Law no. 5/1950, art. 5. These were 103 cities (Mihai T. Oroveanu, op. cit, p. 218).



The law no. 5/1950 was modified, throughout time by the laws 5/1956, 3/1960 and decrees no. 331/1952, 289/1955, 12/1956, 548/1956, 652/1956, 413/1958, 431/1958, 164/1959, 423/1959, 431/1959, 297/1960, 299/1960 and 310/1960<sup>12</sup>.

A series of external political events, such as the disagreements between the USSR and Yugoslavia caused by Tito's "deviations", the blockade of Berlin and the worsening international situation, when a new world war seemed imminent, determined the Soviet leaders to focus their efforts on strengthening the influence in areas controlled by the communist parties and securing the already exercised control over the decision factors of the socialist camp in South East Europe. Everything to prevent dissidents and doctrinal heresies, for a rapid Bolshevization of the communist parties! This meant that any measure taken by Kremlin should have been implemented in all countries under Soviet control.

Alongside these measures, Romanian communism sees its way undisturbed, under the direction of Moscow. After the nationalization of industry in 1948, March 1949 represented the start of forced collectivization of agriculture as the result of a decision of Plenum of the PCR following the model already experienced in Soviet Russia.

Since the juridical and legislative framework rapidly changed, transgressing existing constitutional basis, the requirement of adopting a new Constitution became extremely necessary. Hungary and Poland had already achieved these goals in 1949, and, respectively, in 1952.

At the level of public discourse, Romanian communist leaders argued that change is necessary because that of 1948 was already exceeded „because of the revolutionary changes the country went through”<sup>13</sup>.

The new constitution passed unanimously in the Grand National Assembly on September 24<sup>st</sup> 1952, being in fact a project submitted by

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<sup>12</sup>Mihai T. Oroveanu, op. cit, note 276, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup>Gheorghe Sbârna, op. cit., p. 79.

PMR in the summer of the same year. This new constitution replaced that of 1948, focusing on ideology, history and especially on how the communist regime is legitimate in relation to historical realities and the USSR. It also contained an introductory chapter where all these components were clearly defined and presented. This constitution brings substantial changes on administrative level as well. It was the turn of new realignment, after all the legislative and constitutional changes, organizations and reorganizations of recent years, copies of the Soviet model, put into practice without any sense.

The articles 18-21 presented the new administrative-territorial organizing system. First of all, the regions number is reduced to 18, „creating economical stronger administrative units”<sup>14</sup>: Arad, Bacău, Baia Mare, Bârlad, București, Cluj, Constanța, Craiova, Galați, Hunedoara, Iași, Oradea, Pitești, Ploiești, Stalin, Suceava, Timișoara and Hungarian Autonomous Region (art. 18) .

In fact, the major change is related to the establishment of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, although there is no such legal entity in the constitutional or administrative Romanian tradition, created based on ethnic criteria. The Hungarian Autonomous Region assigned 3 (art. 19-21) of the 4 constitutional articles. It was located in territory inhabited by Hungarians in Transylvania and the Sekler region and was ruled by local elected bodies.

Regarding the local management bodies, Article 51 could only confirm what already existed and was put into practice. The only change is represented by the name of the entity: the Popular Council is turned into People`s Council, thus resembling, with The Soviet. The Constitution is strengthened with regard to the administration, by Decree 331/27 of September 1952<sup>15</sup>. This would be modified by Decree no. 12/1956<sup>16</sup> that stipulates the increase of the districts number from 183 up to 192, of communes` number from 4098 to 4313

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<sup>14</sup>Mihai T. Oroveanu, op. cit, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup>Among others, the number of raions raised from 177 to 183, the municipalities number raised from 4052 to 4096 and established 27 regional cities.

<sup>16</sup>Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale[Official Gazette of National Assembly], year V, no. 1/ 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1956.

and reduces the regions number to 16 „because they do not represent distinct economical units”<sup>17</sup>:

1. Bacău with capital at Bacău City.
2. Baia Mare with capital at Baia Mare City.
3. București with capital at București City.
4. Clujwith capital at Cluj City.
5. Constanța with capital at Constanța City.
6. Craiova with capital at Craiova City.
7. Galați with capital at Galați City.
8. Hunedoara with capital in Deva.
9. Iași with capital at Iași City.
10. Oradea with capital at Oradea City.
11. Pitești with capital at Pitești City.
12. Ploiești with capital at Ploiești City.
13. Stalin with capital at Stalin City.
14. Suceava with capital at Suceava City.
15. Timișoara with capital at Timișoara City.
16. Hungarian Autonomous Region with capital in Târgu Mureș.

Law no.5/1956 dissolved Arad Region and divided it between Banat and Crișana Regions and also stipulated that the territory of Bârlad Region would be divided between Galați, Iași and Bacău Regions.<sup>18</sup>

The Decree no.12/1956 is modified again in August 1960, when its annex is “renewed” by Decree no. 297/1960 (several communes and villages are dissolved, their number being reduced to 4259)<sup>19</sup>. A few months later, Law no. 2/27 of December 1960 would replace Law no. 5/1950; it establishes the rule that, in the future, administrative-territorial division be made by laws that would take into account „the economic, social-political, geographical, historical and local national conditions, in order to ensure multilateral development of socialist

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<sup>17</sup>Mihai T. Oroveanu, op. cit, p. 215.

<sup>18</sup>Gheorghe Sbârnă, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>19</sup>Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale[Official Gazette of National Assembly], year IX, no. 17/ 26 August 1960.

society and bring the state apparatus closer to the masses and ensure their wider participation of all state and public activity”<sup>20</sup>. Law no. 3/1960 decreased the districts number to 142. Another two decrees bring changes to the Romanian administration in September 1960, as follows: Decree no. 299/1960<sup>21</sup> dissolves several communes and Decree no. 300/1960<sup>22</sup> moves Fetești district from the Region of Constanța to the Region of București (art.1).

Perhaps the most important legislative change in the second half of 1960 in terms of administration is represented by Law no.1/1960<sup>23</sup> that modifies the constitutional stipulations from 1952. These are not substantive changes, but formal ones. In naming the regions, the historical origin of their names is reused (by amending art. 19 of the Constitution):

1. Argeș
2. Bacău
3. Banat
4. Brașov
5. București
6. Cluj
7. Crișana
8. Dobrogea
9. Galați
10. Hunedoara
11. Iași
12. Maramureș
13. Mureș – Hungarian Autonomous
14. Oltenia
15. Ploiești
16. Suceava

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<sup>20</sup>Mihai T. Oroveanu, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>21</sup>Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale [Official Gazette of National Assembly], year IX, no. 18/ 8 September 1960.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibidem.*

<sup>23</sup>*Idem*, no. 27/27 December 1960.

Decree no. 177/1964 brings several changes to the annex of Law no. 3/1960 by dissolving a part of the communes<sup>24</sup>.

The "premature" disappearance of Stalin and internal struggles to designate a successor (the winner being Nikita Sergheevici Hrușciov) caused, as a domino effect, reactions and disorders in all Eastern European countries under Moscow control. Hrușciov, in a war with Stalin's legacy, prefers to expose the regime's atrocities in order to portray himself in a positive light, a providential one, launching a furious attack against all the characters enforced by Stalin in various positions not only within the USSR but also in the communist parties led by loyal leaders. This fact became obvious along with the start of de-Stalinization process opened by the presentation of Hrușciov's secret report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Feeling concerned by the changes initiated in Moscow, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej turns towards the Western countries adopting several national strategies in order to strengthen his internal position. The Romanian leader manages to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in Romania enjoying "the prestige he had obtained in the eyes of Hrușciov" after the fail of the Hungarian Revolution in 1958<sup>25</sup>.

The Chinese-Soviet differences, the tensions between the USSR and China, and Romania's position as a mediator in this conflict have made possible the independence manifestations of our country within the Communist bloc without fear of repercussions coming from outside. The Declaration of April, as it is known in history, claimed that no other Communist Party could impose "its model and that relations between the communist countries should be based on respect for the independence and non-interference in internal affairs"<sup>26</sup>.

The estrangement of Moscow's policy and ideological changes led to the change the constitutional framework and its adapting to the

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<sup>24</sup>Idem, year XIII, Nr. 5/20 April 1964.

<sup>25</sup>Gheorghe Sbârnă, op. cit., pp. 90-93.

<sup>26</sup>Ibidem, p. 93.

new political realities. Grand National Assembly elected on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1965 ordered the establishment of a commission that would revise the Constitution of 1952.

The Party Plenum approved the Constitution revision project on June 28. The constitutional project is assumed and voted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of PMR, which becomes the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of PCR, the Party changing its name into Romanian Communist Party (PCR). Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had already died (19<sup>th</sup> of March), and the leader of the party was elected Nicolae Ceausescu, his protégé.

The New Constitution is voted on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1965 and promulgated the same day. The name of the state is changed again into the Socialist Republic of Romania (RSR). Concerning the local administration, the 5<sup>th</sup> Title reiterates the powers and duties of local administration, of people's councils, still composed of a president, vice presidents and members.

In the administrative area, the first change is made on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968 in Law no. 2/1968<sup>27</sup>. The Central Committee Plenary of PCR held between 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> of October 1967 proposed new principles for the administrative - territorial reorganization of the country, the changes being adopted at the National Conference of PCR held between 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> of December 1967.

Once adopted, the law brought along important changes; but the most important change of all is the dissolution of regions and districts, reorganized as traditional counties. The villages and cities would be led by mayors and municipalities are reinstated. The territory of Romania was divided into 2706 communes, 189 cities, 47 municipalities, 39 counties and Bucharest with 8 districts.

Amended several times during 1948-1965, Romanian territorial-administrative system was one of the most difficult issues that interested the leaders of People's Republic of Romania. Modelled on Soviet standards, the provisions of the laws in this field have introduced political and administrative realities for constitutional

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<sup>27</sup>Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale [Official Gazette of National Assembly], Part I, year IV, no. 17-18/17 February 1968.

tradition in our country. The implementation of the regions and districts as administrative units and the creation of the Hungarian Autonomous County Region (1952) represented foreign legislative innovations of the previous Romanian political and administrative before the installation communist regime. Amended and updated several times, the political and administrative structure of the country reflected the relationship that our state has with the USSR. When these relations were normal, Romanian legislators faithfully transposed Soviet organization, and when relations worsened, leading ultimately to a genuine distancing, certain provisions are abandoned. Thus, up to Law no. 2/1968 Romania remained faithful to the model outlined by the USSR. This law represents the foundation for the large-favourable trend, close to our spirit and tradition in terms of administrative-territorial organization.

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