

“UN SINGUR POPOR CU DOUĂ DRAPELE”: THE ROMANIAN-POLISH RELATIONS DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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Abstract:

This article, chiefly based on the archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tells the story of Romanian-Polish relations between the years 1919 and 1939. Driven by the fear of Soviet Russia, the two countries backed each other and tried to build up a cordon sanitaire which would protect Europe against 'contamination' from the East. During the 1920s things went more or less well – though Poland obstinately refused to participate in the Petite Entente system. In the 1930s, nonetheless, the change of the constellation of Powers in Europe, due to the rise of Germany and the inward-looking nature of Stalin's U.S.S.R., had as a result the two countries interpreting their interests differently and gradually choosing to ally themselves with opposite camps. The outcome of that change led to Poland being conquered by the Germans and Romania fighting alongside the Axis Powers.

Rezumat:

Acest articol, care se bazează în principal pe Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al Greciei, relatează povestea relațiilor româno-poloneze între anii 1919 și 1939. Mânate de teama de Rusia Sovietică, cele două state s-au susținut unul pe celălalt și au încercat să constituie un cordon sanitaire care ar fi protejat Europa împotriva „contaminării” dinspre Răsărit. În anii 1920 lucrurile au stat mai mult sau mai puțin bine, deși Polonia a refuzat cu încăpățănare să participe la sistemul Micii Înțelegeri. În anii 1930, însă, schimbarea survenită în constelația de putere din Europa prin ridicarea Germaniei și natura introspectivă a politicilor U.R.S.S.-ului lui Stalin a avut ca rezultat interpretarea diferită de către cele două state a intereselor lor și inițierea de demersuri treptate de alianță cu tabere opuse.

Rezultatul acestei schimbări a condus la situația în care Polonia a fost cucerită de germani și România a luptat de aceeași parte cu Puterile Axei.

Keywords: Take Ionescu; Józef Piłsudski; Piast and Jagiellonian Poland; Romania; Greece

There are three landmarks as far as Romanian-Polish relations are concerned in the interwar years: a) The statement by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in September 1922, at Sinaia: *alianța inimilor este reprezentată, de la Marea Baltică la Marea Neagră, de un singur popor cu două drapele*. b) The transfer of Victor Cădere, Romanian minister at Warsaw, to Rio de Janeiro¹, in the autumn of 1935, because of his disagreement with Nicolae Titulescu. c) The visit to Warsaw of Grigore Gafencu, Romanian Foreign Minister, in March, 1939, and his meeting with Józef Beck, his Polish counterpart – swan song of Romanian-Polish fraternity in the years before WW II. The relevant stages were the following.

I. The Common Fear

The prolegomenon was written in 1919, when the Romanian government, upon the “desperate call” of Polish Prime Minister, Ignacy Paderewski, dispatched large quantities of cereals to Poland – as humanitarian help². It may have been Nicolae Iorga who was the father of Romanian-Polish cordial friendship – a friendship which developed as early as during the last stages of WW I³. It was, nonetheless, Take Ionescu who took the credit for the rapprochement between the two countries⁴. In fact, upon conclusion of the convention of the defensive alliance between Romania and Poland at Bucharest, on the 3rd of March, 1921⁵, Ionescu, then Foreign Minister, clarified to Prince Eustachy Sapieha, his Polish equivalent, the following: “It is the common duty of our countries to defend side by side their right to live by means of the closest solidarity,

¹ Dispatch No.1318 of 21.09.1935 of Epameinondas D. Panas, Greek chargé d'affaires at Warsaw, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/7/4.

² Florin Anghel. *Construirea sistemului Cordon sanitair. Relații româno-polone, 1919-1926* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2008), 69-70.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴ Dispatch No.55 of 10.10.1925 of Petros Metaxas, Greek chargé d'affaires at Warsaw, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, AYE, 1925, A/5/VIII

⁵ Convention for a Defensive Alliance”. See Ion Calafeteanu (ed.). *Istoria politicii externe românești în date* (Bucharest: Fundația Europeană Titulescu/Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 240-241. The text in: *România-Polonia. Relații diplomatice, vol. I 1918-1939* (București, 2003), 18-22. Regarding the three secret protocols of the Convention, see Anghel, 125-126.

may! union with the neighbours by the side of whom we have fought ...". (*Les deux pays ont le devoir de défendre côte à côte leur droit à la vie par la solidarité la plus étroite, par l'union avec leurs voisins aux côtés desquels nous avons combattu...*)⁶ As a result, a secret «Military Convention» was signed that same day by the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the Romanian and Polish Army, generals Constantin Cristescu and Tadeusz Rozwadowski⁷.

Ionescu's statement today would be regarded as a commonplace; but was not in the early 1920s. According to a publicist of that time, the Polish People had suffered a "monstruous quartering" (*écartèlement monstrueux*), "Prussian vexation", and Russian tyranny (*le despotisme russe*); whilst the Romanians, on the other hand, had experienced "the age-old dispersal of their race" (*dispersion séculaire de la race*), the abduction (*rapt*) of Bukovina and Bessarabia, and oppression by the Magyars. As a result Romanian-Polish amity was given, by the 'parallel sufferings', a "stamp of permanence" more effective than the one relying on treaties⁸.

This assessment is irrefutable. Thanks to Piłsudski's genius volte-face in 1917, his 'providential' captivity by the Germans and, of course, Ionescu's obstinacy⁹, both Poland and Romania were found in the victors' camp at the end of the Great War. But happy coincidences were not enough for the hearts' rapprochement heralded by the Marshal at Sinaia.

It is a truism, too, that the Soviet régime jeopardized mainly the two brother-countries, Romania and Poland. Though Romania was not able to assist Poland in the critical days of the year 1920¹⁰, both countries had a common foe in the 1920s and 1930s, namely Communist Russia. On the 16th of September, 1922, the last day of Marshal Piłsudski's official visit to Romania, a new Military Convention was signed in Sinaia by C. Cristescu and T. Rozwadowski. Article 1 of the 1922 Convention stipulated that, if one of the two Parties were a victim of aggression and, as a result, the *casus foederis* was constituted, the other Party, i.e. the one that had not suffered aggression, must enter at once the war alongside its ally¹¹. In June, 1923, it was the turn of King Ferdinand and Queen Consort Maria to pay a

⁶ Georges Deroussi, « Pologne-Roumanie », *L'indépendance roumaine* (Bucharest), 25.10.1929.

⁷ MAE/DAD, *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 15, 22-24; Anghel, 134.

⁸ Georges Deroussi, « Pologne-Roumanie », *L'indépendance roumaine*, 25.10.1929.

⁹ Dimitris Michalopoulos, *Attitudes parallèles. Éleuthérios Vénisélou et Take Ionescu dans la Grande Guerre* (Athens : Institut de recherches sur Éleuthérios Vénisélou et son époque, 2008³³), 23-28.

¹⁰ Dispatch No. 8945 of 7/20.07.1920 of Ioánnēs Pappas, Greek chargé d'affaires at Bucharest, to the Foreign Ministry AYE, 1920, 20.3; Anghel, 86.

¹¹ Anghel, 142-144; Calafeteanu, 245.

visit to Poland¹²; and on the 27th of June, the Sovereign and Piłsudski were in Mokotów at an impressive military review: Polish and Romanian armies were a shield against Bolshevism, modern political product of Asia¹³. “Poland and Romania are to be found on the Eastern borders of European civilization”, was trumpeted in the well-known liberal¹⁴ paper *L'indépendance roumaine* in October 1929, i.e. in the happy days of August Zaleski's visit at Bucharest¹⁵. The “Bolshevist threat”, nonetheless, was not the only reason of that rapprochement and relevant alliance. Poland almost desperately needed an outlet on the Mediterranean. For Danzig being a city under a peculiar international régime, the seaport of Gdynia¹⁶ was not enough. It is certain, moreover, that Romania and Romanians were very much to Piłsudski's taste; and this personal factor should not be underestimated. In September 1928, for instance, the Marshal, having suffered from ill-health, was treated at Lucjan Skupiewski's nursing home¹⁷ near Târgoviște¹⁸. He was recovering and was delighted to do so in the friendly atmosphere of the home and homeland of Dr. Skupiewski. After having recovered from illness, he paid a visit at Bucharest, on the 30th of September, 1928¹⁹. But it was clear his visit had no political flavour. Constantin Argetoianu, then Foreign Minister of Romania, notwithstanding seized the opportunity to proclaim once more the very basis of the Polish-Romanian cordial alliance. “The two countries are nowadays the champions and guarantors of Peace and Civilization in Eastern Europe”, he declared at the official lunch Marshal Piłsudski was offered²⁰.

It is noteworthy that the above statement was only the core of the Romanian multi-directional foreign policy. For the Bucharest Government was aiming at that time at concluding a “Central Europe Locarno Treaty” –

¹² Anghel, 193-196.

¹³ *România-Polonia*, vol. I, 29-30 (note 1).

¹⁴ Dispatch No. 2309 of 15.12.1933 Kōnstantinos Kollas, Greek minister at Bucharest, to Dēmētrios Maximos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE, 1933, A/7.

¹⁵ *Pologne et Roumanie se trouvent aux confins orientaux de la civilisation européenne* (« La visite de M. Zaleski », *L'indépendance roumaine*, 26.10.1929.)

¹⁶ “The new Polish port of Gdynia... From a fishing village of a thousand souls in 1921, Gdynia expanded to a city of 120,000 people in 1939”. (Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki. *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 239.

¹⁷ *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 54: dispatch No. 2007 of 26.06.1928 of Carol Davila, Romanian minister at Warsaw, to Vintilă Brătianu, Romanian Prime Minister, 108-109.

¹⁸ Kollas' dispatch No. 1283 of 04.09.1928 to Alexandros Karapanos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1928, 50.2

¹⁹ He left on the 4th of October. (*L'indépendance roumaine*, 04.10.1928.)

²⁰ Kollas' dispatch No.1438 of 03.10.1928 to Karapanos, AYE 1928, 50.2.

that is with Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary²¹. Poland, on the other hand, did not approve such a policy; she was prone to bilateral treaties²². For the Polish, either populace or rulers, their military strength was a point of vital importance – literally a question of their nation’s life or death²³. It is why they agreed to have (within the context of *Sanacja*) that famous “colonels’ régime” consolidated even before Marshal Piłsudski passed away²⁴. Since, therefore, they were situated among two potentially terrible enemies, namely Germany and Soviet Russia, considered Romania to be their only trustworthy ally²⁵.

* * *

They were right. First of all, because the Romanian Army’s prestige was enormous in Central Europe. For if the Polish beat the Red Army in 1920 (thanks not only to the strategic astuteness of Piłsudski but to the French assistance, as well²⁶), Romanians’ numerically weak army succeeded in routing the Hungarians and entering Budapest in 1919²⁷. As a result, Romanian soldiers were so proud as to fire at British boats on the Danube²⁸. For Great Britain had a spite against Romania, since the time of Hungary’s military administration by the Allies (August-November, 1918)²⁹.

It is noteworthy that Poland and Romania were seeking in the late 1910s and early 1920 their national integration³⁰. For Romanians wished to

²¹ *L’indépendance roumaine*, September 12th, 1928. (Interview of C. Argetoianu, published first in the Vienna paper *Neue Freie Presse*.)

²² *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 81: Dispatch No. 1432 of 15.05.1936 of Constantin Vișoianu, Romanian minister at Warsaw, to Nicolae Titulescu, Foreign Minister of Romania, 165.

²³ Dispatch No. 841 of 21.09.1933 of Iōannēs Politēs, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Maximos, AYE 1933, A/13/II.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Kollas’ dispatch No. 2016 of 10.10.1934 to Maximos, AYE 1934, A/3/18.

²⁶ In July, 1920, Polish Army was in “desperate situation”. (Telegram of 14.07.1920 of Pericles Noulēs, secretary of the Greek legation in Berlin, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, AYE 1920.3. Also: Metaaxas’ dispatch No. 745 of 30.11.1925 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925/A/5 [viii].)

²⁷ Dispatch No. 169 of 30.01.1919 of), Pantelēs Psychas, Greek minister at Bucharest, to Alexandros Diomēdēs, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1919, A/5/V(11); dispatch No. 3921 of 22.04.1919 of the same to the same.

²⁸ Psychas’ dispatch No. 1077 of 22.10.1919 to Diomēdēs, AYE 1919, A/5/V (11).

²⁹ Anghel, 85.

³⁰ The 1918 proclamation of Polish independence by Józef Piłsudski was stirring: *En qualité de généralissime de l’armée polonaise je m’empresse de notifier aux gouvernements et aux peuples belligérants et neutres l’existence d’un État Polonais indépendant comprenant tous les territoires de la Pologne unifiée. L’État polonais renaît par la volonté de la nation entière...* (AYE 1919, A/ 5/VI [23].)

have Hungarian rule removed from Transylvania and Russian from Bessarabia, whilst the Polish, beyond the ideological differences with “Red Moscow”, encouraged an authoritarian régime to be established in Ukraine as well as the separatist currents in that country³¹. What is more, “Jagiellonian Idea”, i.e. Piłsudski’s federalist dream, fuelled the feud between Poland and Lithuania³². Whatever the facts of the matter, Romania and Poland were, so to speak, natural allies. On the 26th of March, 1926, the Romanian-Polish Treaty of Guarantee was signed in Bucharest³³, in fact a second alliance treaty after the one of 1921 had expired³⁴; and in November, 1927, lieutenant-general Kazimierz Sosnkowski paid a visit to Bucharest and considered with his Romanian colleagues a plan of military co-action. The crux was a presumed aggression against Yugoslavia by Italy. Romania should assist her neighbour and Poland would then assist Romania. The latter’s military leadership, nonetheless, regarded Sosnkowski’s minutely detailed plan too complicated, and, therefore, not very serious. For they dreaded that, in such a case, Soviet Russia would attack Bessarabia³⁵. So the limits of Romanian-Polish military co-operation were unveiled.

In point of fact, the Romanian-Soviet feud over the eastern part of Moldavia was continuous during the 1920s and the 1930s. Romania wished Bessarabia’s annexation by her to be recognized not only *de facto* but *de jure*, too, by the Soviet Government. Still Moscow regarded a plebiscite to be

³¹ Metaxas’ dispatch No. 745 of 30.11.1925 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925/A/5(viii). Poland had recognized the independence of Ukraine and concluded an alliance with the Semion Petliura Government, which was fighting against the Red Army. (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 225.) With regard to the Polish aspirations concerning Ukraine, see mainly Anghel, 72-74.

³² Metaxas’ dispatch No. 745 of 30.11.1925 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5 (viii). The 1919 proposals of Lithuania to Poland, moreover, are very interesting: *Le gouvernement de Lituanie a proposé au gouvernement polonais d’organiser une défense commune contre les Bolchévistes aux conditions suivantes: La Pologne s’engage à reconnaître la Lituanie comme État libre et indépendant dans les frontières revendiquées par la Lituanie à la conférence de la Paix, c’est-à-dire les gouvernements de Kovno, Vilna, Grodno, Shwalki [Suwałki], une partie de Courlande et une partie de la Prusse orientale, avec Vilna comme capitale.* (Letter No. 863 of 06.05.1919 of the Lithuanian Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference to the Greek minister at Paris, AYE, 1919, 5/VI [23]u ministre de Grèce, No. 863, Paris, May 6th, 1919.) See also the statement of August Zaleski to the Polish Diet on the 15th of January 1929. (*Le Messager Polonais*, January 16th, 1929.)

³³ By Ion Gh. Duca, Foreign Minister of Romania, and Józef Wielowiejski, Polish minister at Bucharest. (*Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, No. 16, 28.02. 1927.)

³⁴ Its term was fixed at five years. (I. Calafeteanu [ed.]. *Istoria politicii externe românești în date*, 240-241.)

³⁵ Kollas’ dispatch No. 1944 of 08.12.1927 to Alexandros Zaimēs, interim Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1927, 17.1.

held previously in Bessarabia as a *conditio sine qua non* of any formal recognition by the Soviets of Bessarabia's international status³⁶. But Bessarabia presented a predicament not only in the matter of Romanian-Russian relations but of those between Bucharest and Warsaw as well. For the Romanian Government had expropriated their property from people on whom Polish citizenship was bestowed after the end of WW I. As a result, these people, not satisfied with the indemnity they were allotted, asked for equal treatment with French and British citizens – the only ones hitherto to have been well reimbursed by the Romanian Government. It is why Poland was seeking to be accorded the status of most favoured nation in that case; and she consented to conclude the 1926 Treaty only after having been asserted by the Romanian Government that this demand would be soon satisfied³⁷. The latter complied finally to pay Polish subjects 36,000 lei per hectare³⁸. The problem, nonetheless, was not resolved until Zaleski's visit to Bucharest in October 1929. After he returned to Poland, the Romanian-Polish agreement on the Polish citizens to-be-indemnified-for-their-property-in-Bessarabia was concluded in Warsaw³⁹. Obviously, it was due mainly to Zaleski's efforts; the Polish ex-landowners, nevertheless, had a grudge against him, because they considered him to have been "too easy to deal" with the Romanians⁴⁰. But they were not right; for if the Romanian Government would consent to having Polish citizens receiving more generous indemnities for their lost property, nationals of other countries, Hungarians for instance, would ask to be treated on equal footing as the Polish⁴¹. Similar problems mushroomed throughout Europe after WW I, and only British and French citizens had "preferential treatment", because their countries were then the strongest in Europe⁴².

In any case, the 1926 Treaty was somewhat different from that of 1921. The latter was aiming latently exclusively at Soviet Russia⁴³ and was

³⁶ Dispatch No. 2512 of 23.08.1933 of Spyridōn Polychroniadēs, Greek minister at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1933/A/3/20.

³⁷ Dispatch No.72 of 29.11.1926 of Andreas Delmouzos, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Pericles Argyropoulos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1927, 17.1.

³⁸ Ibid. Also: Kollas' dispatch No. 1548 of 13.11.1926 to Argyropoulos, AYE, 1927.1.

³⁹ Kollas' dispatch No. 79 of 11.01.1930 to Andreas Michalakopoulos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

⁴⁰ Kollas' dispatch No. 17 of 05.11.1930 to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

⁴¹ Kollas' dispatch No. 79 of 11.01.1930 to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

⁴² As far as Greece and Albania are concerned, see D. Michalopoulos. *Scheseis Helladas kai Alvanias, 1923-1928* (=Greek-Albanian Relations, 1923-1928) (Salonica: Paratērētēs, 1986), 69.

⁴³ Art. 1. (*România-Polonia*, I, doc. 18, 19; also doc. 37: I. Gh. Duca, Foreign Minister of Romania, to Constantin I. Diamandy, Romanian minister at Paris, No. 7229, February 4th, 1926, 72.)

conceived in the spirit of the League of Nations. In other words, it was a bilateral act within a concrete context. The former, nevertheless, was more or less formulated according to the "Locarno spirit". For it regarded the whole of the borderlines of either country⁴⁴: it was a *contra omnes* bilateral act.

Of course, the situation in Europe had changed by that time. As early as 1925, Stalin stated that "Capitalism had [doubtlessly] survived"⁴⁵; Trotsky, who was then given the post of the chairman of the Concessions Committee, announced that the core of his policy would be "to attract foreign capitals"⁴⁶; and last but not least Georgy Vasilyevich Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, had declared that the Soviets would not wage war on Poland and Romania. For Bessarabia and eastern parts of Poland would split respectively from the rule of Romania and Poland "by themselves", he explained⁴⁷.

The Soviet leaders were right; for the rampant famine in the USSR had a terrible impact even on the Red Army⁴⁸; as a result, Soviet Russia was not in a position to threaten anybody. In early 1928 the situation was more or less the same. The Soviets trumpeted now the cordial relations they had with Germany - in both political and economic fields⁴⁹. They were, nonetheless, "nervous about Poland", because they regarded her as a "very dangerous" enemy. Moscow would never tolerate Poland being a Great Power; and should Soviet Russia make war in Europe, she would battle against Poland first of all⁵⁰.

But the likelihood of such a war was still far away. In December, 1928, Maxim Maximovich Litvinov delivered a speech in the Central Executive Committee of URRS, and explained that Communist Russia had friendly relations with Germany (and relatively friendly with USA); Poland

⁴⁴ Art. 1. (Ibid., doc. 39, 74.)

⁴⁵ Dispatch No. 1932 of 27.03.1925 of Nicholas Mauroudès, Greek chargé d'affaires at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5/VII(3).

⁴⁶ Mauroudès' dispatch No.1864 of 10.06.1925 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5/VII(3).

⁴⁷ Mauroudès' dispatch of 05.05.1925 (no number given) to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5/VII (3),

⁴⁸ Dispatch No. 224 of 03.03.1925 of Raoul-Vivika Rosetès, Greek chargé d'affaires at Sofia, to Andreas Michalakopoulos, interim Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1925, A/5/VII (3).

⁴⁹ AYE, 1928, 65.3, "Report on the Foreign Policy of USSR" (in French); attached to Mauroudès dispatch No. 289 of 21.01.1928 to Michalakopoulos.

⁵⁰ *La Russie soviétique surveille avec un énoncement mal déguisé les progrès de sa voisine, la Pologne. Pologne pour Russie est un adversaire très dangereux... L'URSS ne peut admettre que la Pologne devienne une grande puissance... Si les Soviets font jamais la guerre, ils la feront à la Pologne qui est pour eux une barrière entre leur pays et l'Occident et un concurrent dans les pays baltiques.*(Ibid.)

and Romania, on the other hand, feigned they would be victims of Russian aggression, but simultaneously turned down Moscow's conciliatory overtures, Litvinov stated⁵¹.

Unlike Stalin, Trotsky and Chicherin, Litvinov proved not to be right; for the *beaux gestes* to which he alluded had good reception in the end. On the 9th of February, 1929, the multilateral protocol concerning "the renunciation of war as means of national policy", based on the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, was concluded in Moscow; and among the signatories were Soviet Union, Poland and Romania⁵². Peace was assured - for the moment; and Zaleski's visit to Budapest in 1929, before his visit to Bucharest, was in harmony with the spirit of the time. For he declared in the Hungarian capital that he had the intention of interceding between Romania and Hungary, his aim being to conciliate the two countries. Zaleski's initiative was received with cool indifference (actually with anger) in Bucharest, for it was regarded as "platonic", that is a naïve one⁵³. But it was a period of universal naïvety, due mainly to the famous Kellogg-Briand Pact.

II. Common interests

Development of bilateral relations in the field of trade was a constant concern in Bucharest and Warsaw. In early August 1929, Virgil Madgearu, Romanian Minister of Industry and Trade, paid a visit to Poland⁵⁴. The path to his stay in Warsaw was paved by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, the tireless Polish statesman⁵⁵. Romania had already taken great steps towards the unfolding of her commerce with Poland. For she had changed the customs rates, and created important facilities in the ports of Brăila, Galați, Constanța, and Giurgiu⁵⁶. Romanians' worry was that the bilateral trade balance showed a deficit to the detriment of their country. The importation of grapes from Bessarabia into Poland, for instance, was problematic. The Polish, on the other hand, asserted that this question would be settled soon⁵⁷.

⁵¹ *Izvestia*, No. 287 (3521), December 11th, 1928. (The Greek translation in *AYE*, 1928, 65.2.)

⁵² Calafeteanu, 258.

⁵³ Kollas' dispatch No.952 of 24.05.1929 to Michalakopoulos, *AYE* 1929, A/3/28.

⁵⁴ *La Nation Roumaine*, August 7th, 1929. (This newspaper was considered to be the semi-official organ of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

⁵⁵ Dispatch No. 638 of 14.08.1929 of George Lagoudakēs, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Michalakopoulos, *AYE* 1930, A/3/18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Of course, the problem was not only Bessarabian grapes. The main trouble was that both Poland and Romania were agricultural countries. 80% of the Romanian population were peasants with a plot of land of their own – and practically without debts⁵⁸. On the other hand, 70% of Poland's population were "farmers". But the fertility of Polish peasantry in connection with the fact that large scale land expropriation had not taken place yet in Poland, created serious problems in the economy of the country⁵⁹. However, a provisional Trade Convention was concluded between the two countries in late 1929; but problems did not finish⁶⁰. For both countries, being agricultural, produced nearly the same goods⁶¹.

As far as the Polish outlet to the Mediterranean was concerned, it is noteworthy that implied not only Romania but Bulgaria, Greece and other Balkan countries as well. On the 6th of February, 1930, Jovan Jovanović, Yugoslavia's former Foreign Minister, published in the newspaper *Trgovinski Glasnik* an article on the Polish plan of a railroad linking the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean seashore⁶². The intention was to build a rail line from Poland to either Salonica or Istanbul. The Bulgarians agreed in principle; but the point was whether the trains would cross the Danube by means of ferry-boats or a bridge. The Bucharest Government was in favour of the second option, namely a Giurgiu-Ruse bridge, whilst the Bulgarians preferred ferry-boats. The decision, nonetheless, was made up by Romanian and Polish experts during a conference in Warsaw already in August, 1929⁶³. The line would be a double-track one⁶⁴, and the terminus would be at Gdynia⁶⁵. The expenses of building such a line would be covered by the Polish Government, Zaleski stated during his visit to Bucharest in October 1929⁶⁶.

The problem was the Greek side. For it was dubious whether the Greek Government would accept Salonica to be linked to Gdynia via "Slavic countries" such as Bulgaria. It was only a couple of years before the

⁵⁸ Kollas' dispatch No. 947 of 24.04.1932 to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, AYE 1932, A/28/7.

⁵⁹ Dispatch No. 911 of 15.11.1934 of Alexēs Kyrou, Greek minister at Warsaw, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/13/II.

⁶⁰ Dispatch No. 11495 of 28.10.1929 of the Foreign Ministry of Greece to the Greek legation in Warsaw, AYE 1928, A/3/18.

⁶¹ Kyrou's dispatch No. 911 of 15.11.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/13/II.

⁶² The French translation in: AYE, 1930, A/3/18.

⁶³ Dispatch of 24.08.1929 (no number given) of G. Lagoudakēs, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lagoudakēs' dispatch No. 638 of 14.08.1929 to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

⁶⁶ Kollas' dispatch No. 2075 of 29.10.1929 to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.

Polish-Romanian agreement on the railroad from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean that a coup had overthrown General Theodoros Pankalos' régime, because he had agreed with the Yugoslav Government to establish a free zone in the port of Salonica⁶⁷. Of course, the LOT Polish Airlines was to establish in the early 1930s air communication between Warsaw and Salonica via Bucharest and Sofia⁶⁸; but rail linkage was different. The Yugoslavs on the other hand were hopeful that financial interests would prevail over the military ones in the mind of Greece's rulers: were Gdynia linked by train to Salonica, the latter would become an international trade centre once more⁶⁹. The Italians, moreover, were vigilant. For they had their own plans, such as to link Valona (Vlorë), Albania, to Istanbul via Salonica, or alternatively the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea via Yugoslavia⁷⁰. Romanian ports, on the other hand, namely Galați, Constanța, and Brăila were already linked to Gdynia and Danzig⁷¹; but the Black Sea was a rough and closed one. So the Mediterranean outlet was an absolute necessity and not only for trade reasons but for military ones, too. For Poland needed a "transit line" from Salonica to the North – a vital necessity in case of war⁷². But on the eve of WW II this ambitious plan, namely the Gdynia-Salonica railroad communication, had not materialized yet⁷³. Nor was another one, concerning a channel-to-be-built between the Pruth and Vistula rivers⁷⁴.

III. The Crisis

On the 9th of June, 1934, Nicolae Titulescu, Foreign Minister in the Gheorghe Tătărescu Government, and M. M. Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of USSR, each stated that "normal diplomatic relations" should be established between Romania and Soviet Union⁷⁵. As a result, Titulescu, a couple of weeks later, made a pathetic speech to the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs of his country: "Forget the

⁶⁷ Dēmētres Michalopoulos. *Ho Eleutherios Venizelos kai to Youngoslaviko Zētēma* (= Eleutherios Veniselos and the Yougoslav Issue) (Athens: Liberal Club, 1991), 12.

⁶⁸ The relevant documents in AYE, 1931-1935, A/15a.

⁶⁹ *Trgovinski Glasnik*, February 6th, 1930.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ « La visite de M. Zaleski », *L'indépendance roumaine*, October 26th, 1929.

⁷² *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 87: Dispatch No. 9507 of 17.02.1937 of Alexandru D. Zamfirescu, Romanian minister at Warsaw, to Victor Antonescu, Foreign Minister of Romania, 182.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, doc. 115: Grigore Gafencu, Foreign Minister of Romania, to the Romanian ambassadors in Paris, Warsaw, Belgrade, Ankara and Athens, and the Romanian ministers at London, Rome, Berlin, Budapest, Moscow and Washington, No. 15608, 09.03.1939, 228.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *L'Indépendance Roumaine*, June 12th, 1934; cf. Calafeteanu, 282.

past. The future knocks at the door [of us]...”, he explained⁷⁶. The next step was foreseeable: diplomatic relations between Romania and Soviet Russia were restored. On the 3rd of December, 1934, Mikhail Ostrovsky, Soviet minister at Bucharest, delivered his credentials. Titulescu, then abroad, came back to the Romanian capital in order only to assist with the ceremony⁷⁷.

It was the end of an epoch. Bilateral relations between Bucharest and Warsaw were disturbed⁷⁸. A couple of months before the Moscow-Bucharest relations were restored, Józef Beck, Polish Foreign Minister, explained in the League of Nations, Geneva, that his country would no longer accept the Minorities Treaties being applied, unless all nations matched their policies to the stipulations of those Treaties⁷⁹. It was a hint to Europe’s Great Powers, namely Britain and France, which used the Minorities Treaties as a tool for intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. This statement caused a sensation in Romania. The Gheorghe Tătărescu Government endorsed the essence but not the virulence of Beck’s statement. The Polish minister at Bucharest grasped the opportunity to defend “his” Foreign Minister and affirmed that “it was the duty of every true Romanian patriot to approve Beck’s declaration, unless his behaviour was brought into line with Foreign Powers’ orders”⁸⁰.

It was too much. *Adevărul* made a furious onslaught on the Polish diplomat⁸¹. An indirect consequence was that magyrophilia mounted up in Poland, and the palpable evidence was the official visit that Guyla Gömbös, Hungarian Prime Minister, paid to the Polish capital on the 20th of October, 1934⁸². A Romanian delegation, on the other hand, signed in Moscow a convention for the rail connexion of their country with USSR⁸³. The Romanian-Polish entente was nearly broken – and saved in extremis thanks to Poland’s peculiar position: she considered herself to be

⁷⁶ Kollas’ dispatch No. 1381 of 06.07.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, 1934. AYE 1934, A/3/20.

⁷⁷ Kollas’ dispatch No.2392 of 05.12.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/3/20.

⁷⁸ Kollas’ dispatch No. 2016 of 08.10.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/3/18.

⁷⁹ Kollas’ dispatch No.1900 of 21.09.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE, 1934, A/3/18. Literally: ... *une généralisation de la protection des minorités*. (Auswärtiges Amt/ Documents relatifs à l’histoire des origines de la Guerre [Berlin : Reichsdruckrei, 1939], No. 48 : The German Consul at Geneva to the Foreign Ministry of Germany, 41.)

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Issue of the 21st of September, 1934.

⁸² Politēs’ dispatch No. 806 of 20.10.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/13/II(i).

⁸³ Calafeteanu, 286; Polychroniadēs’ dispatch No. 249 of 20.02.1935 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/7/4.

simultaneously threatened by Germany and Russia. As a result, Romania was the only beacon in her despair⁸⁴.

Things, nevertheless, grew complicated once more, because of Piłsudski's death on the 12th of May, 1935; for it was now Romania's turn to be put in an awkward position. What would now be the policy of Poland?⁸⁵ But Titulescu was adamant: in summer, 1935, Friedrich Weber, *Völkischer Beobachter's* correspondent in Bucharest, was expelled from Romania. For (among others) he had bitterly criticized Titulescu's pro-Soviet policy⁸⁶. But, if Germany's National-Socialist Government finally swallowed the insult⁸⁷, the Polish side was infuriated when Titulescu jointly with Edvard Beneš, his Czechoslovakian counterpart, acted against Polish interests in the League of Nations⁸⁸. Titulescu proved once more that he was prompt to react: Victor Cădere, Romanian minister at Warsaw and one of the enthusiastic supporters of Romanian-Polish "cordial alliance", was moved from Poland to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; for he was not a fervent advocate of Titulescu's pro-Soviet policy⁸⁹. A virulent press campaign against the Romanian Foreign Minister ensued in Poland⁹⁰, and it was declared semi-officially in Warsaw that, unless N. Titulescu was removed from office, Polish-Romanian relations would be jeopardized⁹¹.

In truth, Titulescu's policy was not such an "insane" one. The Soviet Union was humiliated after the Japanese Empire had established the Manchukuo buffer state in northern-eastern China. As a result, the USSR tried to 'normalize' her relations with European countries: Romania and Poland were among them⁹². But whilst Romania, under Tătărescu, made overtures to Moscow, Poland hesitated. In early 1933, Adolf Hitler declared that Pomerania should be given back to Germany⁹³. Albeit that in January 1934, a Polish-German accord was concluded, Poland kept on being more afraid of Germany than she was of Soviet Russia⁹⁴.

⁸⁴ Kollas' dispatch No. 2016 of 08.10.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/3/18.

⁸⁵ *Adevărul*, May 15th, 1935.

⁸⁶ Dispatch No. 2745 of 29.08.1935 of Alexandros Rhizos-Rhankavēs, Greek minister at Berlin, to the Foreign Ministry. AYE 1934, A/7/4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Panas' dispatch No. 1318 of 21.09.1935 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/7/4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (See also *România-Polonia*, I, 145 [note 1].)

⁹⁰ Panas' dispatch No. 1426 of 10.10.1935 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/7/4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Politēs' dispatch No. 722 of 11.08.1933 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1933, A/13/II.

⁹³ Lagoudakēs' dispatch of 03.03.1933 (no number given) to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1933, A/13/II.

⁹⁴ Kyrour's dispatch No. 848 of 02.11.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE, 1933, A/13/II.

Strangely enough, the impact of the moral defeat Soviet Russia suffered thanks to Manchuria's affair was the involvement of Turkey in regard to Polish-Russian relations. Had Japan declared war on the USSR, the Soviet rulers dreaded being the victims of simultaneous Polish aggression. They asked, therefore, the Ankara Government to intervene in their favour⁹⁵. Economically speaking, Turkey was then in an awful situation⁹⁶; nonetheless, Ferid Bey, "the most intelligent Turkish diplomat", was transferred from London to Warsaw during the spring of 1932 in order that a Polish-Russian armed conflict be averted⁹⁷. But nothing happened.

IV. The outcome

In October, 1938, J. Beck paid a visit to Galați. He had talks there with King Carol II and Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, Foreign Minister of Romania. He tried to ensure a friendly attitude of Romania with regard to the Polish-Hungarian dispute over Sub-Carpathian Ukraine (Ruthenia)⁹⁸. On March 4-6, Grigore Gafencu was the guest of his Polish counterpart in Warsaw. He was regarded as a fervent adherent of the Romanian-Polish "cordial amity" - and actually he was. During his stay in the Polish capital he discussed with J. Beck the overall situation in Europe. Both countries had an "independent foreign policy", without "ideological restrictions" or interventions by the Great Powers⁹⁹. A key matter was the 1938 cession of Czechoslovakia's part of Sub-Carpathian Ukraine to Hungary - thanks to the First Vienna Award of the 2nd of November, 1938. Poland did not agree; for she had different views concerning Ruthenia. Should the issue be re-examined, Romania would conform to the line of Poland, Gafencu explained to his host¹⁰⁰. As far as Soviet Russia was concerned, both countries desired an ambiance of *bon voisinage*¹⁰¹. Matters of the Poland-Greece rail connection (via Romania) and Baltic-Black Sea shipping (by means of canals between Vistula, Dniester, Pruth, and Danube rivers) were

⁹⁵ Lagoudakēs' dispatch No. 450 of 15.06.1932 to the Foreign Ministry, 1933 A/13/II.

⁹⁶ The mortality rate was very high (27.5^o/∞) because of the hardships that the population bore. (Dispatch No. 597 of 15.05.1928 of Kōnstantinos Sakellaropoulos, Greek consul general at Istanbul, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE, 1928, 65.2.)

⁹⁷ Dispatch of 23.05.1932 (no number given) of Dēmētrios Kaklamānos, Greek minister at London, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1933, A/13/II.

⁹⁸ Calafeteanu, 307; Rhizos-Rhankavēs' dispatch No. 937/III of 13.05.1939 the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

⁹⁹ Kollas' dispatch No. 841 of 10.03.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3, 4).

¹⁰⁰ Dispatch No. 412/A of 07.03.1939 of Cimon Kollas, Greek minister at Warsaw, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

¹⁰¹ Rhizos-Rhankavēs' dispatch No. 937/III of 13.05.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

taken up once more. But money was needed. Would the British Government furnish the two countries with the necessary funds? It was a hope – but nothing more¹⁰². The point was however that the “Cold Years” of Romanian-Polish relations were over¹⁰³. *Rezultatul vizitei mele oficiale la Varşovia este foarte mulţumitor*, Gafencu stated on the 9th of March¹⁰⁴.

But the well of peaceful solutions was already running dry as well. During that fateful month of March, 1939, the President of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, delivered a radio speech on the occasion of Saint Joseph’s Day. He was quite clear: Poland was not in need of any protection from the Great Powers; for she had confidence in her own Army¹⁰⁵. A couple of weeks later, E. Kwiatkowski, then vice-president of the Polish Government, explained at Toruń that, without the Corridor, Poland could not survive¹⁰⁶. What is more, in the summer of that year the idea that Danzig could never be German was the leading one of Polish public opinion¹⁰⁷.

Despite her rulers’ statements, albeit self-confident, Poland was seeking discretely the assistance of the two major Western Powers. Ironically enough, it was J. Beck, once regarded as pro-German¹⁰⁸, who inaugurated such a policy¹⁰⁹; and, whatever the facts of the matter, he decided, after British pressure on him, to embark on a Polish-Russian rapprochement¹¹⁰. On the 10th of May, 1939, the Soviet legation in Warsaw was re-opened. (It had been practically non-existent during the last two years.)¹¹¹

What followed is well-known. The German-Polish conflict ended in Poland’s disaster since the Polish military leadership had, among other things, remained convinced of the usefulness of Cavalry and horses in the

¹⁰² C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 412/A of 07.03.1939 to the Foreign Ministry; K. Kollas’ dispatch No. 841 of 10.03.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

¹⁰³ C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 412/A of 07.03.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

¹⁰⁴ *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 115: G. Gafencu to the Romanian ambassadors in Paris, Warsaw, Belgrade, Ankara and Athens, and the Romanian ministers at London, Rome, Berlin, Budapest, Moscow and Washington, No. 15608, March 9th, 1939, 226.

¹⁰⁵ *L’echo de Varsovie*, 22.03. 1939.

¹⁰⁶ The French translation of his speech in AYE, 1939, A/13/II (3,4).

¹⁰⁷ C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 1129/B of 01.07.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (2).

¹⁰⁸ By contrast to A. Zaleski, a Francophile (Lagoudakēs’ dispatch No.410 of 01.05.1933 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1933, A/13/II.)

¹⁰⁹ C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 325/A of 22.02.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3-4).

¹¹⁰ Cf. F. P. Walters. *A History of the League of Nations* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 799.

¹¹¹ Dispatch No. 2050 of 11.05.1939 of Spyridōn Marketēs, Greek minister at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3-4).

age of armoured warfare¹¹². As a result, instead of the Jagiellonian Poland it was the Piast one that was restored in the mid-1940s. The Polish Army was strong – but not as strong as Edward Rydz-Śmigły used to believe¹¹³. The latter's persisting in not allowing the Soviet Army to enter Poland¹¹⁴, had a fatal impact on his country. What is more, the Marshal had offensive plans but did not defensive ones¹¹⁵; and since the German forces outnumbered the Polish Army, the game was over for Poland.

But Rydz-Śmigły's heroic death absolved his faults and failures.

* * *

It is a commonplace that during her martyrdom Poland was living in the hearts of her intelligentsia, political leaders, and military rulers. Piłsudski had been the main character in the drama of Poland's rebirth; and Rydz-Śmigły the one in her 1939 tragedy. Both of them have been worthy of their country. Piłsudski, nonetheless, was clear-sighted enough to grasp what was going on with Soviet Russia. "Britain tries to find mercenaries against the Soviets", he told A. Zaleski and Alexandru Iacovaky, Romanian minister at Warsaw, in February, 1927. Both Romania and Poland, consequently, should avoid war with Russia at any cost, unless Russia attacked either one of them¹¹⁶.

What is more, Piłsudski regarded as "unavoidable" a war of his country with Germany. Yet he feared Russia more than he did Germany. He tried, therefore, to gain time by means of the 1934 German-Polish pact¹¹⁷.

He was right. In 1927, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, explained *urbi et orbi* the importance that Russian oil had for Britain¹¹⁸. In fact, Piłsudski prophesied the main cause of WW II; for Hitler planned his own variety of *Drang nach Osten* only after the failure of the 1923 putsch in Munich. It was

¹¹² Because of the precedent of the 1919-1920 Polish-Russian war. Cf. Anghel, 148.

¹¹³ See mainly Hans-Adolf Jakobsen. *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik, 1933-1938* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin : Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1968), 729.

¹¹⁴ Marketēs' dispatch No. 2050 of 11.05.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3-4).

¹¹⁵ Dispatch No.664 of 16.09.1939 of K. Oikonomou, Greek military attaché at Belgrade, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE, 1939, A/13/II (2).

¹¹⁶ *România-Polonia*, I, doc. 46: Dispatch No. 655 of 11.02.1927 of Alexandru T. Iacovaky, Romanian minister at Warsaw, to Ioan M. Mitilineu, Foreign Minister of Romania, 89.

¹¹⁷ Ministère des Affaires étrangères, *Le livre jaune français. Documents diplomatiques, 1938-1939* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1939), doc. 115 : Léon Noël, French Ambassador in Warsaw, to Georges Bonnet, Foreign Minister of France, Warsaw, May 2nd, 1939, 146.

¹¹⁸ Joseph V. Stalin "Why England lost the oil monopoly" (translated into Greek), published (among others) in the Greek newspaper *Heleutheron Vēma* (= The Free Tribune [Athens]), 15.09.1927.

in Landsberg that Rudolph Hess put the National-Socialist leader in contact with Karl Haushofer¹¹⁹. As a result, the *Lebensraum* notion was produced and war preparations against Russia were fuelled as early as 1936¹²⁰.

Unfortunately, Poland was in the very center between Germany and Russia.

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¹¹⁹ Joachim Fest. *Hitler, I. Jeunesse et conquête du pouvoir*, translated into French by Guy Fritsch-Estrangin in co-operation with Marie-Louise Audiberti, Michel Demet and Lily Jumel (Paris : Gallimard, 1973), 259; cf. Stefan Zweig, *Le monde d'hier*, translated into French by Jean-Paul Zimmermann (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948), 222-224.

¹²⁰ James Douglas-Hamilton, *Motive for a Mission* (London: Corgi, 1980), 74.

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