



Alterity and identity: Romanian-Swedish mutual perceptions during The Second World War

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Abstract

The geographic distance between Romania and Sweden influenced the creation of mutual imaginary. However, it wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that inhabitants of the two nations were interested in discovering each other. Therefore, Romanian-Swedish mutual impressions were mostly based on the accounts of tourists who had visited both nations. During the interwar era, direct contact between Romanians and Swedes was infrequent. The news about Romania was disseminated by the Swedish press, which played a significant part in the formation of hostile sentiments. On the other side, the Romanian diplomats who ran the Stockholm-based Legation had nothing but admiration for Swedish society. During the Second World War, the situation improved as more Romanian and Swedish intellectuals traveled to Scandinavia and the Balkans. However, these interactions did not alter how Romanians and Swedes viewed one another.

Rezumat

Distanța geografică dintre România și Suedia a influențat formarea imaginii reciproce. Locuitorii celor două țări au devenit interesați să se descopere relativ târziu, la începutul secolului XX. În consecință, percepțiile reciproce româno-suedeze s-au bazat în mare măsură pe mărturiile călătorilor care au vizitate aceste țări. Contactul direct dintre români și suedezi a fost unul sporadic și în perioada interbelică. Știrile despre România au fost diseminate cu ajutorul presei suedeze, care a jucat un rol esențial în formarea opiniilor negative. De cealaltă parte, diplomații români care au condus Legația din Stockholm au avut cuvinte de laudă la adresa societății suedeze. Situația s-a mai îmbunătățit în perioada celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, când intelectuali români și suedezi au avut oportunitatea să viziteze Scandinavia și regiunea balcanică. Cu toate acestea, contactele stabilite nu au reușit să schimbe în mod esențial felul în care românii și suedezii s-au perceput reciproc.

Keywords: mutual perception, alterity, Second World War, society, culture, Romania, Sweden
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Introduction

The geographic constraints had significance in creating the Romanian-Swedish mutual imaginary. The distance of approximately 2 000 km between Romania and Sweden decisively influenced the evolution of their bilateral relations. Because the two countries were located in distant

geographical regions (North and South) and belonged to different cultural spaces, the image of 'the other' was created mainly based on indirect perceptions and sporadic contacts. Accordingly, with the principles of imagology, the more a group creates an in-depth image of a distant nation, the more ambiguous and fantasy-influenced the conception will be. On the other hand, when two distant nations do not share a common border and a controversial history, the inhabitants of these territories create mutual perceptions free of conflicting elements¹. However, the citizens of Romania and Sweden became interested and curious to discover each other relatively late, as they were mainly concerned with strengthening their relations with the countries in the region in which they were located. As a result, for an extended period, the Romanian-Swedish mutual perceptions were based on the testimonies written by the travelers who visited Scandinavia, respectively, the Balkans. The image of Romanian society circulating abroad at the beginning of the 20th century was that of indolent, apathetic and resigned people. There was also a more favorable image, the one of "good savages", thanks to the peasant's ability to combine irony with enthusiasm²

In contrast to such images, the Swedish society was perceived as organized, solidary, peace-loving and trusting of its own rulers³. These images of "the other" contributed to the creation of mutual perceptions and stereotypes that influenced the development of different domains, such as trade, between Romania and Sweden. The situation started to change once the two countries opened legations in Stockholm and Bucharest. Then a permanent team of diplomats and experts was actively involved in popularizing the Romanian and Swedish culture, society and economy in their regions.

The purpose of this research is to examine how Romanians and Swedes regarded one another during World War II. As is well known,

¹Ion Chiciudean, Bogdan-Alexandru Halic, *Imagologie. Imagologie istorică*, (București, 2009), 7.

²Dennis Deletant, "Romanians", in Manfred Beller, Joep Leerssen *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2007), 224.

³Jenny Andersson, Mary Hilson, "Images of Sweden and The Nordic Countries" in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2009, 220.

Romania abandoned its neutrality and joined the Axis during World War II, whereas Sweden stayed neutral. Has this aspect influenced the alterity and identity between the two nations? Which were the core elements of the Romanian-Swedish mutual perceptions? Has mutual perception evolved or stayed mostly unchanged since the turn of the 20th century? To answer these questions, we focused our research on primary sources identified at the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania and the Swedish National Archive, on the articles published in Swedish mass media and on the accounts of Romanian and Swedish travelers who visited the regions during the war.

Romanian-Swedish mutual perception during the interwar period

During the interwar era, direct contact between Swedes and Romanians was infrequent. The news and information concerning Romania were disseminated across the whole Scandinavian Kingdom through the press. The Swedish press was also an instrument for German, Soviet, Hungarian and Romanian propaganda to spread their convictions and form beliefs. It was common practice for Swedish tabloids such as *Aftonbladet* and periodicals such as *Norrskensflamman* to write critical pieces on Romanian politics marred by corruption, the dictatorial reign of King Carol II, anti-Semitism, and rural poverty. As a result of these revelations, the Swedes had a poor impression of Romania, which they deemed "instable and inconsistent as a state." They considered Romanians to be "unserious and rude"⁴. In contrast, Nicolae Iorga, a historian, described the Swedish society he encountered throughout his travels. He used the following phrases: "The Swedes did not build a governing class as we did (...) the bourgeoisie in Sweden maintains its position, thus there is no need to borrow (money) from other individuals. And the peasant, the stalwart and proud peasant (...) is a pillar of the nation and the monarch."⁵

⁴Arhivele Diplomatice ale Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României [The matic Archives of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, hereafter AMAE], Fund 71/Sweden, vol. 25, 26-27.

⁵Nicolae Iorga, *Sfaturi pe întuneric. Conferințe la radio, vol. II, 1936-1938* (Bucharest: Fundația Pentru Literatură și Artă "Regele Carol II", 1940), 278-279.

Swedish and Romanian ministers who led legations in Stockholm and Bucharest respectively recorded their observations on the countries where they were appointed by the government. In his memoirs, Einar Wirsén, the Swedish Minister Plenipotentiary who oversaw the Swedish diplomatic mission in Romania between 1924 and 1925, portrayed Romanian society. The Swedish diplomat examined each social category's features with careful dedication. According to his perspective, one of Europe's wealthiest nations, Romania, had a population predominantly composed of peasants who lived in difficult circumstances and often went hungry. Wirsén emphasized that the majority of the country's population was illiterate. In addition, he emphasized the vast difference between these folks and the aristocracy, who stood out with their fine attire and magnificent homes. In addition, the majority of Romanian nobility studied overseas. Wirsén also noted that Romania lacked a robust middle class, which may have contributed to the development of commerce, manufacturing, and artisanal companies⁶.

Even though Wirsén did not identify with the Romanian politicians with whom he had poor connections⁷, the Minister's description of the situation was not far from the reality. The First World War had a massive effect on Romania. The lack of workers hampered agricultural productivity. This phenomena had a significant impact on the national economy, since Romania was mostly agricultural and 80% of the active population was engaged in agriculture.⁸ Industrial growth did not begin until 1923, after the recovery process, and the effects did not become apparent until investors provided funds for industrial businesses.⁹ Despite advances in society and the economy, the level of life in Romania in 1938 remained modest, according to official statistics. Meat intake per capita was much lower than the Western norm. The average amount of meat consumed by Romanians

⁶Einar Wirsén, *Från Balkan till Berlin*, (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1943), 9–21.

⁷ See Andreea Dahlquist, "The Activity of the Swedish Legation in Romania from Its Founding in 1921 to World War II", in *Balkanistica*, vol. 35, 2022, 28-31.

⁸Ioan Scurtu (coord.), *Istoria Românilor. România întregită (1918-1940)*, vol. III, (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2003), 102.

⁹*Ibidem*, 89.

was 18 kilograms per year, which is significantly less than the average amount of meat consumed by Britons, who consumed roughly 60 kilograms per year.¹⁰ The social indicators were also very modest and placed Romania not only behind the states of Western Europe but also behind Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. This situation is reflected in the high illiteracy rate, which reached 54.3% in 1938¹¹.

Another essential testimony about interwar Romania came from Jonas Alströmer, the Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest between 1925-1933. He had a generally favorable view of Romania, which he considered as one of the richest nations. Alströmer admired the country's natural riches, such as salt, oil, and gold, but he lamented the impoverished and uneducated peasants. The Swedish envoy was startled that the farmer still lived with his animals in a modest dwelling. In his autobiography, Alströmer reflected: "In villages, neither radio nor electricity nor a cinema existed. A little inn where the men spent their nights and a football field were all that existed".¹² Alströmer's remarks also had a correspondent in reality. According to statistics, the electricity consumption per capita was only 58 Kwh/year in 1938, while the radio subscribers reached 13.9/ 1 000 inhabitants the same year¹³. Alströmer's remark was natural since, in Sweden, 90% of households had access to electricity by the mid-1930s¹⁴.

Dimitrie Pennescu, the Romanian minister plenipotentiary in Stockholm, offered the Swedish perspective on Romania. He reported to Bucharest that the Swedes' attitude towards us was "less sympathetic," but Romania was not one of the nations on which they often exhibited animosity. The majority of Swedes viewed this faraway nation with indifference since they knew little about it, while the majority of journalistic coverage was negative. Pennescu called attention to a crucial point, namely that the

¹⁰Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500- 2010)*, (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 218.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Jonas Alströmer, *Diplomat minnen (1908–1933)*, (Stockholm: Tryckeriaktiebolaget Epege, 1951), 214–253.

¹³*Anuarul statistic al României 1939-1940*, (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1940), 569.

¹⁴Håkan Heden, *Energimarknadsinspektionen. En sekellång historia*, (Borås: Elanders Sverige AB, 2012), 19.

Swedes' "less sympathetic" approach did not stem from problems in bilateral relations, as is often the case with neighboring nations that share a common past, but rather from a lack of in-depth understanding about Romania. Pennescu emphasized the need of expanding cultural contacts between these two remote nations.¹⁵

Barbu Constantinescu, the Romanian Minister in Stockholm from 1933 to 1940, stated in an interview with *Aftonbladet* that he traveled to and visited other nations, but "none of them were so harmoniously structured."¹⁶ In the early 20th century, Sweden intended to become a "nation of the future." The conditions were favorable to attain this objective. Sweden had already achieved a high level of industrialisation, electricity, and economic growth, according to Romanian diplomat¹⁷. All the investments and social policies created the harmonized society Constantinescu described.

Romanian society described by Swedish citizens during the Second World War

On November 10, 1940, a catastrophic earthquake struck Romania, causing major material damage and killing around 1,000 people. In this context, the Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet* conducted an interview with Bruno Alm, the Swedish director of STAB¹⁸ in Bucharest. The journalists sought information about the situation of the members of the Swedish community from Romania. After assuring the reporter that no one was wounded by the earthquake, Alm discussed the experiences of the Swedes from Bucharest.¹⁹ According to the director, his compatriots successfully assimilated into

¹⁵AMAE, Fund 71/Sweden, vol. 25, 61-62.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁷Francis Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy. Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 47.

¹⁸Svenska Tändsticks Aktibolaget (STAB) is a Swedish company founded in 1917 by Ivar Kreuger. Ten years later, STAB became the world's most significant match producer after Kreuger monopolized the match market by lending money to governments worldwide, including the Romanian one, in 1929. During the Second World War, STAB owned two match factories in Romania, one in Filaret and the other in Timișoara. (See Andreea Dahlquist, "Economic Relations between Sweden and Romania during the Second World War", in *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, vol. 12, Issue 1, 2020, 81-112).

¹⁹*Aftonbladet*, November 12, 1940, 8

Romanian culture and regarded this Danubian nation as their second home. They spent time with the Romanians and picked up their language quite fast, since they saw Romanian as a relatively simple tongue. There was not a single Swedish school in Bucharest, which was Alm's sole complaint. Therefore, members of the Swedish community were required to enroll their children in French and German schools. Alm also emphasized that Queen Victoria of Sweden often provided financial assistance to the German school and church in Bucharest. The Queen's gesture may be explained by the fact that she had German ancestry, having been the Princess of Baden before becoming the monarch of Sweden. Queen Victoria's policies and popularity during the First World War were impacted by her heritage. She opted to demonstrate a pro-German stance despite Sweden's professed neutrality. According to the registry found in the Swedish National Archives, roughly forty Swedish people were resident on Romanian soil at the time of the earthquake. There were those who resided in Ploiesti, Codlea, Sibiu, and Timisoara in addition to Bucharest and Brasov.²⁰ Bruno Alm and his family immigrated to Romania in 1930 and settled in Bucharest, where he began working as an engineer for STAB.²¹

During the Second World War, a number of Swedish citizens traversed Europe to reach Romania. This was the case of *Aftonbladet* columnist Carl Kreuger, who was notorious for his support of Hungarian propaganda in Sweden. He recorded his observations of Oradea, a city he visited in June 1940 following the Hungarian army's conquest. According to his information, an identical picture could be seen in Oradea as in the whole of northwestern Transylvania. People might see pictures of Horthy and Stephan I and Hungarian flags everywhere on buildings and squares, for instance. Kreuger remarked that the residents of this area lived simple lives. Kreuger remarked that Oradea seemed to be a little town while having twice the population of Uppsala and Gävle. The buildings were in poor condition, and there was no tram, but buses sometimes drove through. Kreuger was

²⁰Riksarkivet, Utrikesdepartementet [The National Archive of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereafter Riksarkivet, UD], Beskickningsarkiv Bukarest, Nationalitetsmatrikel, 1936–1946, unpagued.

²¹Ibid.

used to a much higher degree of cleanliness in hotels and restaurants. The journalist from Sweden noticed that the level of living was much lower than in his own nation. Many of the folks he encountered were unshod and wore torn clothing. This sight struck the journalist, who wrote in *Aftonbladet* that throughout the economic crisis, Swedes did not live in comparable circumstances. Kreuger was astounded by the savage existence of the Romanian peasants. Villagers still lived in homes with two rooms, one for the family and one for their livestock.²²

The Swedish writer and pedagogue Allen Degerman²³ expressed a similar perception of Romanian society. In an article dedicated to Greater Romania published in *Jönköpings Posten*, he specified that "the Romanian agriculture was primitive, and the progress was stopped for a long period by poverty and serfdom"²⁴. In addition to the consequences of World War I and the post-Greater Unification reform process, Degerman cited the effects of World War I and the beginning of the reform process as factors that had influenced economic advancement. The Romanian government has granted agricultural land to 69.47% of the rural population as a result of the agrarian reform. Despite the division of property, some peasants lacked the appropriate equipment to cultivate their farms. In addition, land fractured throughout time owing to the large number of children a peasant family used to have and for whom dowries were required. Population growth lowered grain production per capita. The decline in wheat prices in Europe and the persistence of antiquated latifundia methods contributed to the stagnation of agricultural productivity.²⁵

Karl August Modén, a Baptist missionary pastor, journeyed to Romania during the Second World War to assess and address the Baptist community's condition with Romanian authorities. Later, he published an

²²*Aftonbladet*, November 2, 1940, 6.

²³Allen Degerman (1901-1980) led several folk universities and taught about global issues. He also wrote books about general history. Degerman was involved in the pacifist movement and introduced UNESCO's activity in Sweden. In 1975, University of Linköping distinguished him with "Doctor Honoris Causa". (*Vem är det? Svensk biografisk handbok*, (Stockholm: P A Norstedt & Söners, 1977), 210).

²⁴Riksarkivet, UD, Tidningsklipp, Serie 4, Rumänien, 1940, unpagued.

²⁵ Murgescu, 226–227.

article in Svenska Morgonbladet in which he condemned the ruling elite's treatment of all minorities existing in Greater Romania. He stated that "the intolerance and persecution of political and religious minorities by Romanians marks a tragic chapter in this country's history."²⁶ Moreover, a topic frequently debated in Swedish newspapers, which significantly helped to shape public opinion regarding Romanian politics and society during the Second World War, was the situation of the Jews during Ion Antonescu's regime.

Gustav Bolinder was another Swedish citizen who traveled into Romania during the Second World War. Professor Bolinder did not see the sedentary lifestyle of Romanian peasants as a negative, but rather as an effective means of preserving their language and culture in spite of the influx of migrants and foreign domination.²⁷ Together with the linguist and scholar Alf Lombard, Bolinder labored ceaselessly to build a distinct picture of Romania in the collective Swedish psyche. Lombard was a friend of Romania, and he began to advocate openly for Romanians after learning about the Second Vienna Award in the summer of 1940, when Northern Transylvania was granted to Hungary. His Romanian friend Sextil Pușcariu wrote Lombard a letter informing him that the Museum of Romanian Language had to be relocated from Cluj to Sibiu after the Award. This news compelled Lombard to take a stance, despite his lack of interest in politics. He authored the piece *Några ord om den transsylvanska frågan* (*A Few Remarks on the Transylvanian Issue*), in which he discussed why Transylvania should be a part of the territory of Romania without addressing any political matters. Instead, he utilized geographical and demographic factors to bolster his argument. Transylvania, according to Lombard, formed a genuine territorial unit of the Romanian state. Lombard challenged Hungarian language philologist Arvid Fredborg, who argued that the Carpathian chain constituted the natural boundary between Romanians and Hungarians. The Swedish linguist illustrated the multitude of mountain crossings that

²⁶Riksarkivet, UD, Tidningsklipp, Serie 4, Rumänien, 1944, unpagged.

²⁷See Andreea Dahlquist, "Romanian Propaganda in Sweden under the Second World War", in *Analele Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași*, no. LXVII, 2021, 459-474.

connected Moldova and Wallachia with Transylvania. According to Lombard, the Tisa River created a more impenetrable barrier. Thus, only two bridges were constructed over this body of water: one in Seghedin and the other in Solnica. According to the demographic data, Romanians comprised the majority of the population of Transylvania. He noted that just three of the eight counties taken by Horty's troops were mostly populated by Hungarians. Fredborg himself agreed with this position.²⁸ Even while the Swedish professor did not specify the source of his information, census statistics from 1930 showed that 3.2 million Romanians resided in Transylvania, accounting for 57.9% of the entire population, while 1.35 million Hungarians stood for 25% of the overall population. Transylvania was split into 23 counties, of which only three possessed an absolute majority of Hungarians, forming the Szekerland. Four additional counties had a proportionate distribution of the two nationalities, but the other 16 counties were dominated by Romanians.²⁹

Brita Wrede, a Finnish-Swedish journalist and author, conducted a radiography of Romanian society. Upon the outbreak of war between Finland and the Soviet Union, she traveled to Romania on assignment to discuss the military situation in Karelia. In addition, Wrede was given the charitable purpose of negotiating the passage of meat from Romania to Finland. Wrede decided to keep a diary during her time in Bucharest since Romania was little-known in Northern Europe. The majority of the material reached the Scandinavian Kingdom via political reports or newspapers and bemoaned the unfortunate circumstances of the Romanians.³⁰ Her 1944 book was released with a propagandistic intent. She provided a concise overview of Romanian history, beginning with the merger of Moldova and Wallachia in 1859. Wrede respected both Queens Elizabeth and Maria for their vigor and commitment to humanitarian causes. After meeting Nicolae Caranfil, the architect who renovated Bucharest and other districts of Romania, Wrede

²⁸AMAE, Fund 71/Romania, Propaganda, vol. 490/1940-1944, 169-171.

²⁹Andreas, Hillgruber, *Hitler, regele Carol și mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române (1938–1944)*, (București: Humanitas, 1994), 144.

³⁰ Brita Wrede, *Rumänien i ofredens år*, (Stockholm: Lindfors Bokförlag AB, 1944), 9.

came to the conclusion that "a leader in Romania should be like dynamite"³¹. This affirmation could suggest that Romania needed an active leader willing to do more for the country's well being .

Brita Wrede, echoing the sentiments of many tourists, characterized Bucharest as a city of contrasts, where peaceful areas with an oriental flavor blended with raucous ones. Tiny lanes such as Calea Victoriei crossed broad boulevards where people of various types, from sophisticated ladies to bear-footed youngsters, officers to peasants in national costumes, could be seen. Similar to other Swedish individuals who backed Romanian propaganda, Wrede attempted to blur the distinction between "we and them" by highlighting commonalities between Sweden and Romania. During the Winter War, the Swedish society became recognized for its sympathy with Finland. Under the motto "Finland's cause is yours," Swedish citizens participated in campaigns to collect finances, medications, food, and military equipment. Sweden intervened and rescued Finnish youngsters transported by boat across the Bothnia Bay. On the other side, the Romanians Wrede encountered were hospitable and prepared to offer all they had to assist, despite their little means and war-ravaged lives.³² According to Wrede, the Romanians' friendliness assisted Swedish people in adjusting to the nation in which they had chosen to reside. Even though the majority of Swedes had decent employment and lived in opulent homes constructed near Snagov Lake, the manner in which they were greeted by Romanians caused them to see Romania as their second home. Among them were the children of Stig Hägglöf, the administrator of STAB industries, who "adored Romania and returned to Bucharest with joy."³³ Brita Wrede ended her journal by sending a message that impacted the reader: "Romania's destiny to endure, suffer and be reborn is boundless"³⁴. Thereby, the Swedish journalist manifested her trust that at the war's end, Romania would be reborn despite all the destruction caused by the bombings.

³¹Ibid., 30.

³²Ibid., 72.

³³Ibid., 80.

³⁴Ibid., 149.

After the publication of her book in 1944, Brita Wrede received both positive and negative reactions. She received positive critics for her picturesque and original way of describing places and tourist attractions entirely unknown to the Scandinavian Kingdom's inhabitants³⁵. The differences between Romanian and Swedish societies had widened throughout time for a variety of reasons. Some of these were discussed earlier, but also because of the idealization of the inventive Swedish country, which was more receptive to modernity than other countries, particularly "peripheral" nations in the far distance. Thus, Swedes often viewed foreigners, including Romanians, with superiority. Through the material provided in her book, Wrede challenged her audience to reconsider the common mental picture of Romania. Swedes could now have a better understanding of Romanian history and peasant life in order to see Romania as an honorable nation that did not merit arrogance and disdain.³⁶ In an *Aftonbladet* article, Wrede was criticized for her prejudiced portrayal of Romanian people, notably King Charles II. The journalist who authored the piece deemed Wrede's tone to be disagreeable and naïve, since her political opinions were woven throughout her observations.³⁷

Another Swedish journalist who traveled to Romania during the war used the alias of "J v L". He was employed by *Aftonbladet* and arrived in Bucharest after Allied bombardment. He later detailed the attitude he experienced in the Romanian capital and other rural regions he visited in an essay. He saw Romania as the "El Dorado" of the Balkans, despite all of the war-related problems. According to his evidence, "people still live a good life in so-called Paris of the Balkans" since nutrition was not yet rationalized and there was sufficient food. Moreover, owing to German investments, Romania did not experience a severe shortage since manufacturing increased and was more efficient. He recalled that on certain days the restaurants did not provide bread, but instead served polenta cakes. On the other hand, fashion galleries in central Bucharest still carried catalogs of

³⁵AMAE, Fund 71/Romania, Propaganda, vol. 490/1940–1944, 300.

³⁶Ibid., 297–298.

³⁷Ibid., 302.

Parisian attire. "J v L" explains how the Romanian peasant differs from his Swedish counterpart. In other articles, the peasant was described as primitive, impoverished, uneducated, and of low social standing; yet, "J v L" believed the rural populace to be speculators. The peasants could ask for eggs and dairy foods as much as they wanted because the Romanian state had no fixed prices for these products by law. Consequently, the peasant was held accountable for the growth of the illegal market.³⁸

The article published by "J v L" in a periodical devoted to Nazi propaganda altered the perception of Romania. This nation fought with the Axis for almost three years. Prior to the tremendous bombardment of Bucharest by the Allies, it was true that life in the city was rather peaceful. Through interviews with Romanian figures and conferences conducted in the Scandinavian Kingdom during the war, the Swedes were also aware of this aspect. Nonetheless, the reality did not appear the same over the whole nation's area. The delivery of crops and animal goods to the Reich left the Romanians with few dietary alternatives. One of the reasons why peasants became speculators was a scarcity of food. They attempted to sell their goods at a high price in order to secure their survival. The Swedish journalist praised the improvement of the Romanian economy as a result of German investments. We should be wary of such an assertion. It is true that enhancing oil production efficiency helped to the modernisation of this sector, but the Romanian economy maintained a respectable level not simply due to Romanian-German cooperation. The Romanian government did not fully comply with Berlin's demands because it was unwilling to place the whole national economy under a German monopoly. The Romanian leaders devised a strategy to rescue the economy so that the state could survive after the war. Several times, the Romanian opposition to Germany's entire control of national industry made Romanian-German economic discussions contentious.³⁹

³⁸*Aftonbladet*, May 07, 1944, 12.

³⁹ Hillgruber, 247-248.

Swedish society reflected in Romanian collective mentality during the Second World War

Romanian intellectuals have traditionally admired and studied Scandinavian nations and cultures with great interest. Some of them, such as the historian Nicolae Iorga and the ethnologist Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas, believed that the Romanian government should adopt the so-called "Swedish model." This sociopolitical framework was built on national principles, which identified Swedes as pragmatic, reformist, inventive, and more prone to modernity than other people.⁴⁰ Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas was inspired by Arthur Hazelius' idea of Skansen⁴¹ and inaugurated in 1906 the National Museum, which would become the Romanian Peasant Museum. He attempted to include in his museum actual dwellings from all places inhabited by Romanians, even those located beyond the country's boundaries. In his turn, Nicolae Iorga was impressed by the Scandinavian way of educating its people in "folkskolor"⁴² and organized starting with 1908 a popular summer school in the city Vălenii de Munte.

⁴⁰Jenny Andersson, Mary Hilson, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁴¹Skansen is the first open-air museum created by the Swedish professor and folklorist Arthur Hazelius. He considered that people would never get to know themselves if they did not know their history. The history Hazelius was referencing to was on its way to disappearing. The industrialization and mechanization of agriculture had affected the old rural society. To keep this consistent part of Sweden's history alive, Hazelius started moving to Skansen old houses from all Swedish regions. He decorated these buildings as the peasants used to live. Next, he moved into the so-called 'alive museum' of plants and animals from Sweden. After Hazelius's death, the Skansen concept spread and inspired other mimeographs from Europe and USA. (*Om Skansen*, on-line: <https://www.skansen.se/sv/skansens-historia>).

⁴²Folkskola was the basic compulsory public school introduced in Sweden in 1842. However, long before the Swedish authorities opened this school, there was statutory folk education in this country organized by the church. According to the 1842 public school law, at least one school with one qualified teacher was established in each parish and each city assembly. The concept of class was not used, so the teacher had to educate all the pupils at once. This is why there was a single category of educators: public school teachers. Even if the church, the peasants and some politicians criticized *Folkskolan*, the number of pupils learning in these schools increased. According to the official records, in 1850, there were enrolled 270 000 students, which increased significantly to 702 000 students in 1900. The folk school's development was marked by the decline of the old agrarian society and the rise of the industrialized world. (*Folkskola*, on-line: <https://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/folkskola>).

Another factor that intrigued Romanian educators was the use of film in teaching foreign languages in Swedish schools. The instructors used a novel technique. First, they provided their students with the movie scripts so that they could concentrate on the dialogue. After seeing the film, the students were required to reread the same material in order to examine its pronunciation and intonation.⁴³ It seemed that the method gave positive results as Fredric Nanu, the Romanian minister plenipotentiary named to head the Legation in Stockholm in 1943, characterized the Swedes as "quiet, polite and good speakers of English language"⁴⁴.

During his tenure in Stockholm, Nanu wrote on his impressions of Swedish culture and society. The Romanian ambassador emphasized in his dispatches the significance of Sweden's neutrality during the First World War for environment and heritage protection. In addition, Sweden might have been able to construct the most dense rail network in Europe. Nanu also noted that the residents were very protective with their nature, their most valuable asset. They carefully used the woods and maintained the rivers since they were the major source of energy production.⁴⁵ This method was crucial for the country's economic and technical modernisation. The topography of Sweden presented certain obstacles for hydropower plant construction and energy transmission. However, respecting the idea of environmental preservation, the Swedes refused to meddle and alter the natural flow of rivers in order to meet their energy generation demands.⁴⁶

According to Nanu, the Swedes surmounted perilous historical circumstances by learning to maintain their composure. The Romanian envoy remarked, "In truth, the Swedes take pleasure in their ability to balance opposites or what seem to be opposites, a talent shown by the cordial relationship between the monarch and the republican government."⁴⁷ Nanu was referring to the social-democratic government, which succeeded for

⁴³*Revista Generală a Învățăământului*, XXVIII, 1-2, January-February 1941, 76.

⁴⁴Frederic Nanu, *The land and people of Sweden*, (Philadelphia & New York: J P Lippincott Company, 1949), 4.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁶Francis Sejersted, *op. cit.*, 31.

⁴⁷Frederic Nanu, *op. cit.*, 113.

many years in leading the society without getting into conflict with the Royal house's politics. Petre Constantinescu-Iași, a co-founder of the Romanian Communist Party, was opposed to this tactic. He believed that Hjalmar Branting's strategy to reforming Swedish society quietly was inappropriate. Constantinescu-Iași said, "Instead of directing workers' frustrations towards the revolutionary road, to which they are called, social-democratic leaders sought reforms to lull the audience to sleep and collaborated with monarchist capitalists' representatives."⁴⁸

There were no notable distinctions between socioeconomic classes in Sweden, but the middle class, comprised of merchants, manufacturers, and industrialists, was well defined. According to Minister Nanu, developing such a peaceful society was only feasible due to the government's years-long commitment to achieving progress. Therefore, it was difficult for other nations to replicate and apply the "Swedish model." Nanu stressed that the hard labor of the Swedes was evident in everything, including canals, roads, bridges, forts, and all the ancient and imposing churches, palaces, and castles constructed by a tiny people occupying a huge country.⁴⁹

Victor Brabețianu, the Romanian Envoy and Plenipotentiary Minister in Stockholm between 1941-1943, produced a different vision of the Swedish political landscape. The Romanian envoy argued that the military victories of the Allies over Nazi Germany produced a wave of congeniality among the Swedes and helped the communist cause to expand and acquire more followers. In one of his reports delivered to Bucharest, Brabețianu argued that in the Scandinavian Kingdom, "a type of collective political blindness" hindered Swedes from seeing the imminent communist threat to their nation. He emphasized that the Swedish socialist policy was substantially different from Soviet communism. Still, the number of individuals interested in communist ideology rose, while resentment against Germany and her supporters emerged among the populace.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Petre Constantinescu-Iași, *Unde duce colaborarea? Pagini de istorie contemporană*, (București: Ed. Cercul de Cultură Socialistă, 1921), 98.

⁴⁹ Nanu, 88.

⁵⁰ AMAE, Fund 71/Sweden, vol. 5.

Brabețianu was expressing the collective mentalities and interests of the Romanian authoritarian administration he served, which was in alliance with Nazi Germany. The communist menace was not as severe as Brabețianu had anticipated. Despite the fact that the first Swedish communist party, Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Vänsterparti, was founded in 1917, before the Third International (Comintern), the communist movement did not gain traction in Sweden. In addition, there were misunderstandings and disagreements inside the Swedish communist organization in the time that followed. As a consequence, Karl Kilbom and Nils Flyg created the Swedish Communist Party (SKP) in 1929 and extended its activities into Norrbotten, a remote and sparsely inhabited area. Neither of these organizations shown their cohesion, and in 1937, Kilbom expelled Flyg from SKP. SKP's highest performance in parliamentary elections occurred in 1932 and 1936. The party subsequently gained six of the 230 seats in the Swedish Parliament. During the 1940 and 1944 elections, SKP received less than 4% of the total vote. The party was thus expelled from Parliament.⁵¹

In his turn, Camil Demetrescu⁵² traveled to Sweden in the spring of 1943. Demetrescu was astonished that the traditional, impoverished proletariat did not exist in Sweden, despite the SKP's efforts to gain more supporters. During his time in Uppsala, Demetrescu witnessed a communist demonstration. He saw that all of the participants, like the other individuals he encountered in the capital city, wore good attire. Moreover, Demetrescu

⁵¹See Per Meurling, *Kommunismen I Sverige*, (Copenhaga: Saga Egmont), 2018.

⁵²Camil Demetrescu was born in Braila on July 5, 1913. He attended the courses of the Faculty of Law at the University of Bucharest. In 1937 he made his debut in diplomacy occupying the post of legation attaché in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 1942/1945, Demetrescu worked for the Directorate of the Ministry and Cipher. During the negotiations between Romania and the Allies (1943-1944), he was tasked to transmit the instruction verbally from Bucharest to the Romanian legations in Lisbon, Madrid, and Stockholm (capitals where the Romanian Ministers tried to get in contact with the Allies' representatives and negotiate the armistice). After the end of the war, Demetrescu chose to stay in Romania and ended up being convicted by the communist regime that took over power and served 15 years of hard prison. He was released in 1962 but was found guilty in another process and imprisoned again. Demetrescu was pardoned in 1976 and acquitted of all charges only in 1998, too late since he died on August 7, 1922, in Bucharest. (See Camil Demetrescu, *Note – Relatări*, (București: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2001)).

was amazed with the cleanliness of the streets and the honesty of the Swedes. He noted that in this "ultra-civilized" nation, there was no specific lost-and-found service since individuals recovered their belongings from the same location where they had forgotten them.⁵³ These elements were stunning to foreigners who visited Sweden during the war, but they were commonplace for Swedes as a result of the government's successful social reforms in the 1930s. The measures taken aided in enhancing the lives of employees and ordinary citizens, propelling Sweden to the forefront of global wellbeing. The social-democratic administration backed laws that offered people with adequate pensions, guaranteed acceptable allowances for families with children, and provided employees with equitable compensations and health insurance. All of these choices, together with the effort to establish universal equality, became the defining features of Swedish social policy.⁵⁴ Such a policy was reflected in the excellent level of life of the residents of the Scandinavian Kingdom, which Demetrescu appreciated greatly. The Romanian diplomatic also reflected on the Swedes' enmity against the Germans, whom they dreaded. Despite the fact that many of them studied German, they refused to speak it publicly. Demetrescu and other Romanians who traveled to Sweden during the Second World War emphasized that: "the immediate impacts of the war were absent (...), destructions, calamities of all types, and piled worries which were burdensome in all war-torn nations, whether triumphant or defeated, free or occupied".⁵⁵

The visit of a group of journalists to Stockholm in the autumn of 1942 was a pivotal milestone in the development of Romanian-Swedish cultural interactions. This team featured the bureau head of the Ministry of the Press, Oskar Walter Cisek, as well as the journalists Ioachim Botez of the daily *Curentul*, Valeriu Măgureanu of *Timpul*, Valeriu Mardare of *Universul*, and George Sbârcea of the newspaper *Viața*⁵⁶. On their way back from Finland, the delegation stopped in Stockholm to tour various printing firms and get

⁵³Ibid., 175.

⁵⁴Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity. Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875-1975*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 134-135.

⁵⁵Camil Demetrescu, *op. cit.*, 175.

⁵⁶*Dagens Nyheter*, September 7, 1942, 28.

inspiration. Even though the Romanian Legation in Stockholm had planned a large banquet with 1,000 guests, Minister Brabețianu was forced to abandon this plan and instead hold a small ceremony. The Finnish authorities were dissatisfied with the objectives of the Romanian Legation since the struggle with the Soviet Union had a significant influence on Finland, and the Finnish government could not afford to treat Romanian visitors equally well. Thus, the reception scheduled for Romanian media was far more modest than the one planned by Romanian officials in Stockholm.⁵⁷

The delegation came to Stockholm on September 6, 1942, and spent four days in this Scandinavian country⁵⁸. The next day, the journalists visited the editorial office of *Dagens Nyheter*, one of the most read newspapers in Sweden. They were struck by the Swedish journal's enormous page count.⁵⁹ That year, for example, *Dagens Nyheter's* issues had between 24-26 pages. During that period, Romania faced a lack of paper, and the newspapers had no more than 12-14 pages. Another innovation from Swedish media that surprised Romanian journalists was the possibility of receiving phone announcements for publicity. A day later, the delegation visited the power plant owned by ASEA (Allmänna Svenska Elektriska AB), the company that also had businesses in Romania⁶⁰. Afterwards, the guests visited and admired the little houses from Åkeshov, built by the Swedish authorities to solve the lack of housing. They got deeply impressed by the peaceful and decent life enjoyed by the inhabitants of Sweden, despite the world war⁶¹.

Ioachim Botez, a journalist who represented the right-leaning and often far-right daily *Curentul*, granted an interview to the liberal weekly *Stockholms Tidningen*. He expressed admiration for the Swedish society, which was characterized by cohesion, punctuality, and hard work. A salesperson startled the Romanian journalist by leaving him alone in the shop for a few minutes without concern of a potential robbery.⁶²

⁵⁷AMAE, Fund 71/Sweden, vol. 26, 40-41.

⁵⁸Ibid., 69-70.

⁵⁹*Dagens Nyheter*, September 8, 1942, 11.

⁶⁰See Dahlquist, *Economic Relations between Sweden and Romania*.

⁶¹*Svenska Dagbladet*, September 8, 1942, 9.

⁶²AMAE, Fund 71/Sweden, vol. 26, 88.

On September 9, 1942, Valeriu Mărgineanu, a colleague of Botez and editor for *Timpul*, gave an interview to the social-democratic daily *Svenska Dagbladet*. Mărgineanu had visited Stockholm seven years before and was astonished by the great living standards Swedish employees had attained meanwhile. The publication for which Mărgineanu worked was founded by the Romanian diplomat Grigore Gafencu. Even though the newspaper attempted to maintain its independence, journalists with center-right views, like Mărgineanu, served in the editorial office. Due to the Scandinavian Kingdom's advanced degree of social development, Mărgineanu said that Romania had much to learn from this nation. However, his conservative and national-liberal views did not align with Sweden's social-democratic government. Therefore, Nicolae Iorga's concept of transferring the "Swedish model" to Romania was evoked once again, despite the fact that the Romanian society had to wait for development since all the human and material resources were engaged in the war economy. Mărgineanu concluded his interview by stating that even if the government had rationalized the food, Romanians were not experiencing food shortages.⁶³ The situation was not as serene as Mărgineanu described because he referred only to the citizens of Bucharest. The rural population struggled to obtain food, as the majority of grain output was shipped to Germany. In addition, the crop was negatively influenced by lengthy winters, flooding in the spring, and dry summers.⁶⁴

Conclusions

During the time period under study, the Swedish and Romanian perceptions may be characterized as practically polar opposites. While citizens of Scandinavian countries viewed Romania with suspicion or indifference, Romanians held a favorable view of Sweden. Individuals of high culture and diplomats who visited and settled in Sweden discovered intriguing and beneficial features that they want to introduce into Romania. It was believed that these loans would help alleviate a few of the issues facing

⁶³*Svenska Dagbladet*, September 10, 1942, 9.

⁶⁴Riksarkivet, UD, 1920 års doss., HP 2804, vol. X, September-November 1942, unpagged.

Romanian society. In contrast, Romania's reputation in the Scandinavian Kingdom was not set in stone. However, it was mostly based on claims made by Swedish diplomats staying in Bucharest and media reporting. During the Second World War, the prevalent image established during the interwar period did not change much. Cultural exchange was the sole area of progress. During the war, contact between the Romanians and Swedes intensified, resulting in a deeper knowledge of each culture's past. Despite this, a large proportion of Swedes often condemned the corrupt politicians that controlled Romania and sympathized with the difficult living conditions of the ordinary people. In the collective consciousness of Sweden, the image of the Romanian peasant was that of an uncultured but diligent individual who was used to enduring daily challenges. Swedes found it difficult to grasp how Romanians could continue to live on the edge of subsistence in a country with plentiful and varied natural resources. For these Scandinavians, who laid the groundwork for an innovative social system, Romania was a country governed by antiquated conventions. Lombard and Wrede were among the Swedish scholars who contributed significantly to the formation of the Swedish outlook. They praised Romania's cultural and economic accomplishments and spread propaganda in Sweden. On the other hand, Swedish society was considered an outstanding model for Romanians to emulate.

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