"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, narează 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 sanitar 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 încăpățânare să participe la sistemul Micii Înțelegeri. În anii 1920, 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.
Un singur popor cu două drapele: The Romanian-Polish relations during the interwar period

Rezultatul acestei schimbări a condus la situaţia în care Polonia a fost cucerită de germani şi România a luptat de aceeaşi 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: *alianţa 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 Janeiro, 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 Panderewski, dispatched large quantities of cereals to Poland – as humanitarian help. 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 I. It was, nonetheless, Take Ionescu who took the credit for the rapprochement between the two countries. In fact, upon conclusion of the convention of the defensive alliance between Romania and Poland at Bucharest, on the 3rd of March, 1921, 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,

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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
nay! 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...). 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 Rozwadowski.

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” (écartelement
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 treaties.

This assessment is irrefutable. Thanks to Piłsudski’s genius volte-
face in 1917, his ‘providential’ captivity by the Germans and, of course,
Ionescu’s obstinacy, 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 fœderis was constituted, the other Party, i.e. the one that had not
suffered aggression, must enter at once the war alongside its ally. In June,
1923, it was the turn of King Ferdinand and Queen Consort Maria to pay a

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7 MAE/DAD, România-Polonia, I, doc. 15, 22-24; Anghel, 134.
9 Dimitris Michalopoulos, Attitudes parallèles. Éleuthérios Vénisélos et Take Ionescu dans la
Grande Guerre (Athens : Institut de recherches sur Éleuthérios Vénisélos et son époque, 2008
33), 23-28.
10 Dispatch No. 8945 of 7/20.07.1920 of Ioannês 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 Poland\textsuperscript{12}; and on the 27\textsuperscript{th} 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 Asia\textsuperscript{13}. “Poland and Romania are to be found on the Eastern borders of European civilization”, was trumpeted in the well-known liberal\textsuperscript{14} paper *L’indépendance roumaine* in October 1929, i.e. in the happy days of August Zaleski’s visit at Bucharest\textsuperscript{15}. 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 Gdynia\textsuperscript{16} 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 home\textsuperscript{17} near Târgoviște\textsuperscript{18}. 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 30\textsuperscript{th} of September, 1928\textsuperscript{19}. 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 offered\textsuperscript{20}.

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” –

\textsuperscript{12} Anghel, 193-196.
\textsuperscript{13} România-Polonia, vol. I, 29-30 (note 1).
\textsuperscript{14} Dispatch No. 2309 of 15.12.1933 Konstantinos Kollas, Greek minister at Bucharest, to Démétrios Maximos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE, 1933, A/7.
\textsuperscript{15} Pologne et Roumanie se trouvent aux confins orientaux de la civilisation européenne (« La visite de M. Zaleski », *L’indépendance roumaine*, 26.10.1929.)
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{18} Kollas’ dispatch No. 1283 of 04.09.1928 to Alexandros Karapanos, Foreign Minister of Greece, AYE 1928, 50.2
\textsuperscript{19} He left on the 4\textsuperscript{th} of October. (*L’indépendance roumaine*, 04.10.1928.)
\textsuperscript{20} Kollas’ dispatch No.1438 of 03.10.1928 to Karapanos, AYE 1928, 50.2.
that is with Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary\textsuperscript{21}. Poland, on the other hand, did not approve such a policy; she was prone to bilateral treaties\textsuperscript{22}. 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 death\textsuperscript{23}. It is why they agreed to have (within the context of \textit{Sanacja}) that famous “colonels’ régime” consolidated even before Marshal Piłsudski passed away\textsuperscript{24}. Since, therefore, they were situated among two potentially terrible enemies, namely Germany and Soviet Russia, considered Romania to be their only trustworthy ally\textsuperscript{25}.

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 well\textsuperscript{26}), Romanians’ numerically weak army succeeded in routing the Hungarians and entering Budapest in 1919\textsuperscript{27}. As a result, Romanian soldiers were so proud as to fire at British boats on the Danube\textsuperscript{28}. For Great Britain had a spite against Romania, since the time of Hungary’s military administration by the Allies (August-November, 1918)\textsuperscript{29}.

It is noteworthy that Poland and Romania were seeking in the late 1910s and early 1920 their national integration\textsuperscript{30}. For Romanians wished to

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\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{L’indépendance roumaine}, September 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1928. (Interview of C. Argetoianu, published first in the Vienna paper \textit{Neue Freie Presse}.)
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{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.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Dispatch No. 841 of 21.09.1933 of Iōannēs Politēs, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Maximos, AYE 1933, A/13/II.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Kollas’ dispatch No. 2016 of 10.10.1934 to Maximos, AYE 1934, A/3/18.
\item \textsuperscript{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].)
\item \textsuperscript{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.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Psychas’ dispatch No. 1077 of 22.10.1919 to Diomēdēs, AYE 1919, A/5/V (11).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Anghel, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{30} The 1918 proclamation of Polish independence by Józef Piłsudski was stirring: \textit{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].)
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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 country\(^31\). What is more, “Jagiellonian Idea”, i.e. Piłsudski’s federalist dream, fuelled the feud between Poland and Lithuania\(^32\). Whatever the facts of the matter, Romania and Poland were, so to speak, natural allies. On the 26\(^{th}\) of March, 1926, the Romanian-Polish Treaty of Guarantee was signed in Bucharest\(^33\), in fact a second alliance treaty after the one of 1921 had expired\(^34\); 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 Bessarabia\(^35\). 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 (vii.). 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 Koœno, Vilna, Grodno, Shvalki [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 6\(^{th}\), 1919.) See also the statement of August Zaleski to the Polish Diet on the 15\(^{th}\) of January 1929. (*Le Messager Polonais*, January 16\(^{th}\), 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 Zaímês, 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 status. 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 there 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 satisfied. The latter complied finally to pay Polish subjects 36,000 lei per hectare. 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 Warsaw. 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 Romanians. 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 Polish. 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 Europe.

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

36 Dispatch No. 2512 of 23.08.1933 of Spyridon 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 country: 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”; 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”; 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 explained.

The Soviet leaders were right; for the rampant famine in the USSR had a terrible impact even on the Red Army; 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 fields. 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 all.

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 Maurudès, Greek chargé d’affaires at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5/VII(3).
46 Maurudès’ dispatch No.1864 of 10.06.1925 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1925, A/5/VII(3).
47 Maurudès’ 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).
50 La Russie soviétique surveille avec un énervement 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 baltoiques. (Ibid.)
and Romania, on the other hand, feigned they would be victims of Russian aggression, but simultaneously turned down Moscow’s conciliatory overtures, Litvinov stated\(^{51}\).

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 9\(^{th}\) 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 Romania\(^{52}\). 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 one\(^{53}\). 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 Poland\(^{54}\). The path to his stay in Warsaw was paved by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, the tireless Polish statesman\(^{55}\). 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 Giurgiu\(^{56}\). 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 soon\(^{57}\).

\(^{51}\) Izvestia, No. 287 (3521), December 11\(^{th}\), 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 7\(^{th}\), 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.

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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 debts\textsuperscript{58}. 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 country\textsuperscript{59}. However, a provisional Trade Convention was concluded between the two countries in late 1929; but problems did not finish\textsuperscript{60}. For both countries, being agricultural, produced nearly the same goods\textsuperscript{61}.

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 6\textsuperscript{th} of February, 1930, Jovan Jovanović, Yugoslavia’s former Foreign Minister, published in the newspaper \textit{Trgovinski Glasnik} an article on the Polish plan of a railroad linking the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean seashore\textsuperscript{62}. 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, 1929\textsuperscript{63}. The line would be a double-track one\textsuperscript{64}, and the terminus would be at Gdynia\textsuperscript{65}. The expenses of building such a line would be covered by the Polish Government, Zaleski stated during his visit to Bucharest in October 1929\textsuperscript{66}.

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

\textsuperscript{58} Kollas’ dispatch No. 947 of 24.04.1932 to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, AYE 1932, A/28/7.
\textsuperscript{59} Dispatch No. 911 of 15.11.1934 of Alexēs Kyrou, Greek minister at Warsaw, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/13/II.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{61} Kyrou’s dispatch No. 911 of 15.11.1934 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1934, A/13/II.
\textsuperscript{63} Dispatch of 24.08.1929 (no number given) of G. Lagoudakēs, Greek minister at Warsaw, to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Lagoudakēs’ dispatch No. 638 of 14.08.1929 to Michalakopoulos, AYE 1930, A/3/18.
\textsuperscript{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 Theodōros Pankalos’ régime, because he had agreed with the Yugoslav Government to establish a free zone in the port of Salonica. Of course, the LOT Polish Airlines was to establish in the early 1930s air communication between Warsaw and Salonica via Bucharest and Sofia; 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 more. 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 Yugoslavia. Romanian ports, on the other hand, namely Galați, Constanța, and Brăila were already linked to Gdynia and Danzig; 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 war. But on the eve of WW II this ambitious plan, namely the Gdynia-Salonica railroad communication, had not materialized yet. Nor was another one, concerning a channel-to-be-built between the Pruth and Vistula rivers.

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 Union. 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

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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.


74 Ibid.

75 *L’Indépendance Roumaine*, June 12th, 1934; cf. Calafeteanu, 282.
past. The future knocks at the door [of us]…”, he explained. 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 ceremony.

It was the end of an epoch. Bilateral relations between Bucharest and Warsaw were disturbed. 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 Treaties. 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.”

It was too much. Adevărul made a furious onslaught on the Polish diplomat. An indirect consequence was that magyarophilia 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, 1934. A Romanian delegation, on the other hand, signed in Moscow a convention for the rail connexion of their country with USSR. The Romanian-Polish entente was nearly broken – and saved in extremis thanks to Poland’s peculiar position: she considered herself to be

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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 despair.  

Things, nevertheless, grew complicated once more, because of Piłsudski’s death on the 12th of May, 1935; for it was now Romanian’s turn to be put in an awkward position. What would now be the policy of Poland? 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 policy. But, if Germany’s National-Socialist Government finally swallowed the insult, the Polish side was infuriated when Titulescu jointly with Edvard Beneš, his Czechoslovakian counterpart, acted against Polish interests in the League of Nations. 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 policy. A virulent press campaign against the Romanian Foreign Minister ensued in Poland, and it was declared semi-officially in Warsaw that, unless N. Titulescu was removed from office, Polish-Romanian relations would be jeopardized.

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 them. But whilst Romania, under Tătărescu, made overtures to Moscow, Poland hesitated. In early 1933, Adolf Hitler declared that Pomerania should be given back to Germany. Albeit that in January 1934, a Polish-German accord was concluded, Poland kept on being more afraid of Germany than she was of Soviet Russia.

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.  
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 Kyrou’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 Galaţi. 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 host 100. As far as Soviet Russia was concerned, both countries desired an ambiance of bon voisinage101. 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% /oo) because of the hardships that the population bore. (Dispatch No. 597 of 15.05.1928 of Konstantinos 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 Kaklamanos, 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 more\textsuperscript{102}. The point was however that the “Cold Years” of Romanian-Polish relations were over\textsuperscript{103}. \textit{Rezultatul vizitei mele oficiale la Varșovia este foarte mulțumitor}, Gafencu stated on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of March\textsuperscript{104}.

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 Army\textsuperscript{105}. A couple of weeks later, E. Kwiatkowski, then vice-president of the Polish Government, explained at Toruń that, without the Corridor, Poland could not survive\textsuperscript{106}. What is more, in the summer of that year the idea that Danzig could never be German was the leading one of Polish public opinion\textsuperscript{107}.

Despite her rulers’ statements, albeit self-confident, Poland was seeking discreetly the assistance of the two major Western Powers. Ironically enough, it was J. Beck, once regarded as pro-German\textsuperscript{108}, who inaugurated such a policy\textsuperscript{109}; and, whatever the facts of the matter, he decided, after British pressure on him, to embark on a Polish-Russian rapprochement\textsuperscript{110}. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} of May, 1939, the Soviet legation in Warsaw was re-opened. (It had been practically non-existent during the last two years.)\textsuperscript{111}

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

\begin{footnotes}
\item[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).
\item[103] C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 412/A of 07.03.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3,4).
\item[105] \textit{L’écho de Varsovie}, 22.03. 1939.
\item[106] The French translation of his speech in AYE, 1939, A/13/II (3,4).
\item[107] C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 1129/B of 01.07.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (2).
\item[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.)
\item[109] C. Kollas’ dispatch No. 325/A of 22.02.1939 to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3-4).
\item[111] Dispatch No. 2050 of 11.05.1939 of Spyridon Marketēs, Greek minister at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry, AYE 1939, A/13/II (3-4).
\end{footnotes}
age of armoured warfare. 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-Śmigly used to believe. The latter’s persisting in not allowing the Soviet Army to enter Poland, had a fatal impact on his country. What is more, the Marshal had offensive plans but did not defensive ones; and since the German forces outnumbered the Polish Army, the game was over for Poland.

But Rydz-Śmigly’s heroic death absolved his faults and failures.

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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-Śmigly 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 them.

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 pact.

He was right. In 1927, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, explained urbi et orbi the importance that Russian oil had for Britain. 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

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114 Marketès’ 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. Miteelineu, Foreign Minister of Romania, 89.
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 Haushofer. As a result, the Lebensraum notion was produced and war preparations against Russia were fuelled as early as 1936.

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

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