

BESSARABIA AND THE PACT OF MUTUAL ASSISTANCE WITH THE USSR

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I am not a communist, and my intellectual training prevents me from becoming a communist, just as it prevents me from becoming a Hitlerite or a fascist. I am a liberal bourgeois democrat, for whom respect for private property and individual freedom is the very basis of existence. And I believe that such a doctrine can only be defended by Romania's non-intervention in the ideological struggle we are currently witnessing.

Nicolae Titulescu,
former Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Romania
(1928 – 1936, with interruptions)

USSR – a colossus in the vicinity of Romania

For the general Romanian audience, including for many historians who did not have access to the diplomatic archives in the country or across the border, the x-ray of Romania's external relations with foreign countries were carefully objectified, from the inside by the former Romanian foreign minister, Nicolae Titulescu, in his work "Foreign Policy of Romania"¹.

In this study we find the steps taken in this matter described in order, as well as the struggle he led in the diplomatic realm to defend Romania's interests in its relations with Soviet Russia, with whom he respected, and for which - in our opinion - he also had a certain fear. It was not at all easy for him to search and find the most favorable "identity of interests", - as he called it, and to which: "the Russian government should join only at the eleventh hour", through its representative, Litvinov: "only in principle and in a personal capacity".

With a disarming sincerity, Titulescu starts from the geopolitical realities of his time (the area of Russia four times larger than that of Europe and with a population of 162 million inhabitants, at the time), the Romanian

¹ Nicolae Titulescu, Romania's Foreign Policy /1937/ Titulescu European Foundation, Encyclopedic Publishing House Bucharest 1994.

diplomat of European stature was aware that " the colossal state" - the size of Russia - was on the coast of Romania and led a hostile policy that could lead to "crushing by the Great Neighbor". Starting from the above, the head of Romanian diplomacy designed the entire work scaffolding. At the same time, the unsurpassed diplomat was aware that our country could not "find an ally against Russia in the West only for the defense of Romanian interests".

The attempts at diplomatic settlement of the Romanian-Russian bilateral dispute, which took place in Warsaw - 1921, Vienna - 1924, Riga - 1931 or in Geneva - 1932 and 1933, kept the Romanians and Russians in the situation of being "like people living on two different planets". Not even today?

It is generally known that the Soviet Party insisted, since the discussions held in Riga, mentioned above, that the existence of a territorial dispute between the parties be stipulated in a future Romanian-Soviet pact, proposing the inclusion in the bilateral document of one of the formulations below: "territorial dispute", "Bessarabian dispute", or "existing dispute".



After signing a non-aggression treaty with Russia, the Polish ally became disinterested in Romania following it and countered such an action in every way

Nicolae Titulescu, who was structurally opposed to such an approach, began to act more decisively after October 20, 1932, when he determined the Romanian government to authorize him (September 21, 1932) to negotiate with the Russians. It should be noted that, shortly after Trianon, on October 28, 1920, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and Romania signed the Treaty on the Eastern Border of Romania, i.e. on the territory of Bessarabia, a document ratified in the following years by the first three countries, not by Japan. In other words, the union of Bessarabia with the Motherland was recognized by other states and internationally. The state of facts - in legislated form, also passed through the Bessarabian Parliament (Country Council), under the Soviet regime. In the fourth decade of the 20th century, Japan also declared its readiness to ratify the Treaty in question, but Bucharest did not hear the suggestion made by the former Japanese ambassador to Moscow, who later became minister of foreign affairs.

In the attempt to request in 1932 the support of Poland, as an ally, so that it might try to obtain from Moscow the removal of the words "existing dispute", Warsaw - which had already signed the non-aggression treaty with Russia that year (on July 15) - will give an at least shocking answer through Jozef Beck - that the Polish government is not interested in Russian-Romanian negotiations. The astonishment could not be small in Bucharest, where it was known that according to the Romanian-Polish bilateral military treaties of 1921, 1926 and 1931, the Polish side was obliged to "defend Bessarabia" by force of arms. Nicolae Titulescu will never understand this paradoxical attitude on the part of Poland, but especially Warsaw's reasons for not giving diplomatic support to its Romanian ally, in those moments. Only one incomprehensible reason was mentioned, that the Polish side would not be interested in the negotiations regarding Bessarabia, despite the fact that "the Treaty itself represents the object of the alliance".²

² Nicolae Iorga, participant in August 1933 at the Congress of Polish Historians in Warsaw, discussed at a reception given by the head of state, Ignacy Moscicki, with the head of foreign affairs, Jozef Beck. In his memoirs he recorded: "My impression is that this man /Beck/ does not love us or respect us. He needs the lie of peace, even if we have to tear our bodies apart to get it." /Nicolae Iorga, *Memoirs*, vol. 7, p. 124/

The Convention on the Definition of Aggression, signed on July 3, 1933

Starting from the premise that God helps those who help themselves, Nicolae Titulescu will strive to establish "cordial relations with the USSR, without resorting to Romania's allies: France and Poland".³

As a skilled politician, Nicolae Titulescu will first ensure his parliamentary support, help he brilliantly obtains from the people's elected officials, a fact he considers to be the greatest triumph of his parliamentary career, because "all the political parties in Romania, without exception, they approved the policy regarding the Non-Aggression Pact with the U.S.S.R."⁴

From now on, we will witness tenacious and feverish diplomatic activities on the part of Titulescu, in order to attract to his side the Soviet representatives in Geneva, diplomats with whom until then he had "only had duels" and to collaborate - in the end - brilliantly with these to the "definition of aggression".

Together with the Russian ambassadors from Switzerland, especially with Litvinov, Titulescu works with great care and particular precision on the texts for the elaboration of a document that satisfies both the Romanian interests and those of the partners, and last but not least the general European ones; this in the Convention on the Definition of Aggression, signed on July 3, 1933, in London, with the representatives of Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Turkey, the USSR and Afghanistan, by which the USSR undertakes not to use force against Romania or make war with it, removed being from the text of the bilateral treaty under negotiation the phrase regarding the recognition of the "existing dispute", i.e. the Bessarabian dispute.

Nicolae Titulescu mentions in the reference work the statement of Litvinov who said: "I know that, by signing this Convention, I am giving you Bessarabia", it being known in the diplomatic world that "Bessarabia ceased to form a point of friction between the two states".⁵

Certainly not out of grandiosity, as he was sometimes congratulated by his opponents, Titulescu will record: "Fruitful path accomplished!"

³ Ibidem, p. 108.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 107.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 187



Titulescu - Litvinov

What followed and could no longer appear in relations with the Soviets, after his landing on August 29, 1936, is another chapter of the history of Romanian diplomacy. Nicolae Titulescu refers to this in his notes from 1938, which abundantly prove his unparalleled clairvoyance regarding the unfolding of the events that will take place after that at a lightning pace: "If I had remained foreign minister, I would have concluded with Russia the treaty which he took into account all our interests. I was, am and remain in favor of a mutual assistance pact with the USSR, as long as this country pursues a policy of peace, as it has practiced in recent years. This Treaty is necessary for Romania even if Germany attacks Russia, or if it comes to terms with it. More: The treaty must be done on time. Otherwise, the Russian-German rapprochement will be done without us and to our detriment". What a clairvoyance!



Nicolae Iorga "Teacher of the Nation" and Nicolae Titulescu "Diplomat of the Nation" surrounded by collaborators

"So this eventuality - continues Titulescu - must find us allies with Russia. (it should be emphasized that these words were written a year before the signing of the Treaty of sad memory - Ribbentrop - Molotov of August 23, 1939). I consider Franco-Romanian friendship as an axiom: the Russian-Romanian one is an inevitable axiom. Then France and Czechoslovakia, being allied with the USSR, we cannot continue to remain isolated. It is said today that the difference in ideology would be an obstacle for German-Russian rapprochement. But how long can this obstacle exist? Nobody knows; in any case it will not be eternal. How important it is that Romania concluded the assistance pact with Russia before the German-Russian rapprochement took place; then Russia will consider it useless. I put in these statements all the weight of the political judgment that I have for almost 25 years of public life".⁶ This was the clairvoyant Nicolae Titulescu, the one about whom the historian of the nation, Nicolae Iorga, wrote about the "brilliant diplomat" that he is a sensitive and courageous man "for us and for the whole of Europe".⁷

⁶ Ibidem, pp.189-190

⁷ From "Neamul Românesc", December 14, 1937; idem George G. Potra, Nicolae Iorga – Nicolae Titulescu – Interferences, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 241-242.