

## QUEEN MARIE OF ROMANIA AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON

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*I wrote several years ago about the ignorance with which we pass over the contribution made by the military man and diplomat George Pomuț to the formation of the United States of America and, subsequently, to its development. That approach, which America appreciates to the highest level, should mobilize us, be a reason for inspiration for the American Romanian communities to copy Romania's former neighbors from before the war, present on the northern frontiers of the country.*

More recently, I note that the contribution made personally by Queen Marie of Romania, together with President Woodrow Wilson, in April 1919, to the opening of political relations between the USA and the Kingdom of Romania, is not known and especially revealed. I don't know that a line was written about the episode of the meeting of the American president and his wife with the Sovereign of Romania, that year. The meeting of the two is no longer noticed in Romania and especially in America. The contacts between Queen Marie and Woodrow Wilson, in a difficult historical period for the formation of Greater Romania, could prove blindly that Romanians know how to behave with dignity, as equals with any partner, not with the subservience noted in recent years, even compared to American soil in Bucharest, far too foreign to international customs and norms of behavior. Not long ago, the Romanian press was very concerned to find out what the American ambassadors from Chisinau and Bucharest had to say (excellences who have no idea what truly aureoleated leaders Romania once had! That is, those political people who proved capable of discussing on an equal footing with the Americans). That's why, below, I make available, to Romanians and Americans, the x-ray of the conversation between two independent and egal personalities, a meeting that resulted in beneficial consequences on the Romanian-American bilateral level. Everything was happening not in our years, but 100 years ago...

The meeting between President Wilson and Queen Marie is described in the memories of the sovereign published in the volumes of the Story of my Life, pages in which the weeks spent by the Queen of Romania in Paris, as the unofficial representative of Romania at the Peace Conference, are recounted. His writings saw the light of day in the interwar period, then, due to a stupid political will, they were forgotten, hoping that they will be erased from the collective memory. Only after 1989 did they manage to be better and widely known. A more extensive presentation, without any complex, of the unusual episode and especially of the dialogue held by two equal people, happened a century ago. Today, such a relationship could not even be dreamed of.

Queen Marie recalls that at the beginning of 1919 Wilson was "at the zenith of his career", having been chosen by the whole world as the Arbitrator of the Peace. "Wherever he went, he was received as a kind of Messiah; the case being made about him was enough to make a god's head spin. This extreme adulation, this elevation of an intruder to the first position in the boiling Europe of that day, belonged, from my point of view, to the war neurosis specific to those times."

We learn that at the end of the First World War, the world had an instinctive need for idols, being in search of a superman "capable of keeping in check the evil spirits released by the four terrible years of war". Then he turned his eyes to him (Wilson - n.a.), raising him to the highest pedestal, not wondering if he "happened to have a foot of clay".

So it was quite difficult for the American to resist the "praise and adulation".

The Queen looks with some pity on the President of America, knowing that the fall of the idol "is often as cruel as it is unjust. I disliked injustices of any kind; but since then I am no longer a lion hunter; nor was I ever inclined to howl like wolves. I like to hear of great men being recognized and doing their duty, but I am wary of excessive veneration of a hero, and I cannot understand why the man should be so extreme, both in adoration and hatred."

Much good sense in the judgment and in the thoughts of the Queen, who ardently desired a meeting with the Man of the Day. Even now, after a hundred years, one can still suspect female envy and regret that she cannot be in his place, although the City of Lights and London had received her with great brilliance, at the highest level, with a deference previously unknown to a woman, let alone a queen. So the meeting took place in early

February 1919, when the Queen arrived in Paris, and when Wilson's name "was on everyone's lips". The writer-queen also observed, about the atmosphere of the times: "there was something quite sick about the way he was glorified and put on a pedestal, which could only make him dizzy". No matter how much the crowned head tries to be as objective as possible, Marie does not hide her envy that her person is not in his place, especially since she fully felt that she was as adulated as the representative of America. He was probably thinking about the success of the difficult meeting with Clemenceau. Hence the thought that he would not mind "enduring" the torment that was in store for him.

The phrase in the following description is eloquent: "So much was he (Wilson) in a daze by the atmosphere created around him that he wondered if, as a great representative of democracy, it was not above his dignity to pay a visit to the Queen of Romania - only a Queen!". He writes in small letters - queen and continues: "But as it was sometimes done, he (Wilson - n.a.) thought how he could, cleverly, politely escape, informing me that he would be pleased to pay me a visit, but being a person very busy she has no time available (except) after nine o'clock in the morning".

And here, further, how in this game of cat and mouse the two finally found the solution to the realization of the dialogue: "I answered with perfect kindness, myself being on the rise, that I would be happy to receive him right at seven in the morning, if that suited him. Having nowhere else to go, he made a compromise and, accompanied by Mrs. Wilson, came to see me at half-past eight in the morning."

The description of the meeting is as simple, elegant and elevated as possible, including the presentation of the appearance of the American president, in the image that we know and find in the illustrated stores of the time: "tall, thin, with a very long face and a gentle smile, the whole his impeccable appearance was very much more like that of a Puritan minister"

### **Hate is an evil counselor**

The Queen, aware that the lines she wrote will remain recorded for history, reproduces the entire text contained in the Daily Journal, which she reproduced with the rigor of the historian in passages from the Late Chapters - recently rediscovered text, and to which we refer. Here are the "Journal" entries, this time:

April 10, 1919

*President Wilson came to see me early this morning with his wife, and he had the smile I knew from the photographs. I received him in my usual simple and direct style, so that the conversation did not stagnate for a moment, although I must say it was annoyingly limited (sic!). We talked about many things on the agenda, we also touched on the subject of Bolshevism, more than ever on my mind, and I was able to give him some tasty details about what the Bolsheviks were really like, which he didn't know.*

*I also explained the hopes of the small states, for which he had declared himself to be a defender, and this brought us to the discussion of the League of Nations, and he began to proclaim the importance of his favorite idea, and how especially the small states would benefit from the League . All for the admiration of the beauty of an idea. However, I could not help but draw his attention to the way in which brilliant ideas are often diminished by future partisans and followers who gradually corrupt the original concept, in the end something totally different from the great ideal. That's what happened to most religions, and today Christ would probably cry at the sight of what people have made of His teachings. How many horrors have been committed in the name of Religion?*

The conclusion suggested by the Queen remained interesting: "let's not treat defeated enemies too mercilessly. Hate is an evil counselor and leads to many problems!"

"The next day I lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson (author's emphasis) and I continued to study the great man with interest."

This time, the Queen states that she continued to be: "deeply interested in the ideas and ideals of the old gentleman", encouraging him "to expound his theories which he was quite willing to present", speaking "much and well".

**US President's Medallion:  
"Homme du monde" made by Queen Marie**

A first conclusion drawn by the Queen was that Wilson appeared to be: "a born preacher and could have been a very cultured minister. Very convinced that he is always right, he somehow has the air of a man who looks down on us, but at the same time he is a *homme du monde*, polite, kind, even in a ceremonious way. Ready to bring arguments, he has anyway, due to his superiority, a detached attitude, which distinguishes him from other mortals, he will certainly always have the last word to say. Although he was not without understanding, he still hung that feeling of antagonism, particularly to those who, due to their distance, are convinced of their indisputable superiority. This can make anyone wonder if they are absolutely genuine. I can only hope that Wilson is genuine, in such a way as to justify the extraordinary confidence that Europe has in his arbitration. Many of his countrymen look upon him as an impostor, and there is a large political group in the United States that looks forward to his downfall, for such is the world." We can ask ourselves today, with full justification: How many of the contemporary writer-analysts of those times issued such judgments?

Next, we learn that the Queen had only one clash with him: "He ostentatiously preached to me about how we should treat our minorities, showing how important it was, and he dwelt on the subject for a long time, becoming excessively moral and slippery; for a long time he exalted himself on the subject under discussion, treating me rather as an ignorant beginner who might have profited by his advice. No doubt I could have, but I was struck by the fact that he was too attached to the sound of his own voice, and when he finally paused, I suggested in a friendly way that he was probably used to these difficulties because of the Japanese question in the United States."

"At this - remarked the Queen - Wilson bared his long teeth in a polite smile, raised his eyebrows and declared that he was not aware of the existence of a Japanese problem in America! Not being a preacher, and as I was his guest, I just shrugged my shoulders and dropped the subject." This, is a true princely elegance!

"Before leaving, I advised him to promise to look for Brătianu to give him a chance to expose our situation to him. But I had the feeling that if there had been time I could have done much more in the discussion with

the president than our prime minister would have done, who did not speak English at all; moreover, I always enjoyed even a confrontation". ... As for Mrs. Wilson, this one, in the description of the Queen: "she was an attractive lady, and looked much better up close than from a distance. She was strong, had a beautiful complexion and gray-blue eyes, Irish. She was kind and kind. The first time I met her she had a formidable bouquet of orchids. I will always remember her like this, with those lilac orchids close to her smiling face." How femininely tender!

Not only the pen, but also the perfect elegance that characterized Queen Marie, former sister of charity, nicknamed the Mother of the Wounded, the one who was not afraid to enter, like George Enescu, the salons full of suffering patients, some of whom contracted exanthematic typhus in the trenches of Moldavia in the First World War, and who supported himself at the end of the first great world conflagration, on an equal footing with the most important leaders of the world, responding - this time - to the invitation made by the "Man of the Day" to a lunch in Paris seems unlikely. Could a Romanian head of state or today's First Ladies of Romania even dream of such an invitation?

Only the real First Lady of Romania, Queen Marie could do it. It all happened in times that we have forgotten and discarded far too easily, so that the reading of the above lines becomes comforting nowadays by the dignity it exudes. The chronicler would write: In great times, what Great Men Romania had.

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As a royal-blood princess, Queen Marie had high English and Russian origins: her parents were Alfred Ernest Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Duke of Edinburgh, and her mother, Maria Alexandrovna Romanova, Grand Duchess of Russia, the only daughter of Tsar Alexander of II of Russia. Moreover, being descended from the Romanovs, she was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria and Tsar Alexander II. He was part of the most illustrious families of his time, an opportunity to meet and befriend most of the crowned heads of Europe since then. In her writings, Queen Mary mentions, more than once, with pride the "wonderful little grandmother", Queen Victoria of Great Britain, who watched her "progress in life with a grandmother's love, but also with the concerned severity of to the queen who wanted every scion of her House to honor her wherever she was."

With special love, in the most different poses, his mother is described, the one who gave him the name Marie and not Victoria, although he respected the queen a lot, a name that has "something from eternity" in it, worn by of the Mother of God.

He tried all his life to find the proper explanation for the distant relations between them. He finds it perhaps in the fact that she "had been brought up in the most aristocratic Court".

It was the primary summer of the King of England, knowing directly the most distinguished statesmen, led by Clemenceau and the President of France, then with the American President Wilson and his wife, in the very period of his glory, in the spring of 1919, at Paris. She was constantly surrounded with great esteem by the entire German elite.

She grew up for two decades in the shadow of King Carol I of Romania and Queen Carmen Sylva, the latter a brilliant crowned head, known for refinement and good taste, poet and far-reaching patron, whose traits she inherited in the Royal Palace and at Peleş will present them in his writings left to posterity.

About her feelings for Romania, her adopted country, about her achievements as Queen, the writings she left us and a few sentimental phrases in the Testament at the end of our work, in which she blesses the Romanian people and the Romanian plains, speak: I bless you, beloved Romania, the land of my joys and pains, beautiful country, which you lived in my heart and whose paths I have known all. Beautiful country that I saw complete, whose destiny I was allowed to see fulfilled. May you be eternally abundant, may you be great and full of honor, may you be eternally towering among the nations, may you be honest, loved and skilled. I believe that I understood you: I did not judge, I loved (...) My people, think of one who loved life and beauty, who was too honest to be considerate, too merciful to be victorious, too loving to judge".

### **Few nations in the world can be proud of such Queens**

Among those who knew her for a long time and closely, was also I. G. Duca, in the capacity of minister, including foreign affairs, prime minister, man of culture. Let's not forget that he is among the government officials who managed with great skill the affairs of Romanian culture and spirituality; at the same time, the Duca participated in the main historical events during the war, but also in those immediately following the

conflagration, so that, from such a position, he would write that the Queen is brilliant, physically as well as morally, "as long as she can see, no one can surpass it. Beautiful, of enchanting beauty." And further: "I don't think there were many women in Europe who could have been like her. Intelligent, charming, full of talent for painting, for riding, for writing" The sober dignified had not yet known, because he had no way, the Queen's Journals, in the pages of which she puts writing after riding! And the "chronicler" Duca adds: "she had sparkling conversation, verve, humor, spontaneity in thought, originality of expression, courage - who did not see her in Iași in the midst of epidemics, going where the danger was greater? The love of truth, beauty, goodness - he lacked nothing. Add to this, pushed to the point of cynicism, an unflinching determination, a kindness springing from a real understanding of human nature, and an indulgence characteristic of all chosen souls." Here is what an unmistakable painting - we would call it an icon - that her contemporary made available to us to get to know Queen Marie better.

During the Great War, the French Ambassador in Romania left a sentence full of truth written: There is only one man in the Palace and that is the Queen. Having said that, nothing to take away, nothing to add.

In the days of national mourning in July 1938, the one who knew her so well, the great historian Nicolae Iorga, wrote sorrowfully. "...Romania lost everything that brought her prestige, pride, intelligence and will, as great and unforgettable memories, the woman of exceptional qualities, which are hardly found in history, Queen Marie. All her life was a mystery, in which the supernatural appeared incessantly, astonishingly, from the beauty of her young years to the imperial pride, yet united with so much grace, which she preserved to the end. And, through a mysterious movement of the soul that has always been in touch with the hidden powers of the world, She, who is now tormented by all the miseries connected with this painful body of ours, asked herself to perform in the air of the country that she so long loved her because he understood her so fully and deeply. Separation from HRH, who is so painful in flesh and spirit, is impossible for the Romanian people. The fool left, but she remains among us. She remains as a keeper of nameless sufferers, as were ours in the days comforted by Her, as the constant reminder of cruel battles and of felt joys, which her faith, stronger than any human heart, dominated".

Such a character we can only love forever and keep in our hearts generation after generation. Few peoples can be proud of such Queens!