

## **NICOLAE IORGA AND THE MAGIC OF GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD**

Ioan VOICU

### **A BOOK REVIEW: *NICOLAE IORGA AND POLAND*, *ROMÂNIA DE MÂINE* FOUNDATION PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 2021**

*Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), member of the Romanian Academy and president of the History Section (1924-1927), is an emblematic personality of the Romanian life. Unparalleled historian and theorist of this discipline, highly prestigious professor, translator, writer with representative works in all literary genres, journalist, publisher, editor, diplomat and politician, Iorga has contributed decisively to consolidating the cultural unity of Romanians everywhere.*

On the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the greatest Romanian historian –Nicolae Iorga –, it is worth remembering the words of the President of the Romanian Academy, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, who, in his funeral speech from 1940, at the passing of Nicolae Iorga, he defined him as “a legendary figure” who would gain in grandeur as time went on.

The current grandeur of Nicolae Iorga is convincingly illustrated by the recently published volume signed by Nicolae Mareş under the title *Nicolae Iorga and Poland*, Bucharest, Romania of Tomorrow Foundation Publishing House.

The result of a long research, this book covers in 226 pages an essential chapter of the activity of the great Romanian scientist in the service of cooperation and friendship between the Romanian and Polish peoples.

The very mention of the titles of some chapters and sections of this book, divided into four substantial parts, is a convincing testimony of the richness of ideas and analyses generated by an exceptional documentation

on the tireless work of Nicolae Iorga dedicated to Romanian-Polish relations, until the outbreak of World War II.

Here are some suggestive and illuminating examples of titles: The Polish flag – the one sacredly guarded in Romania – glorified by Iorga, when Poland was erased from the map; Iorga in the face of the terrible Polish fatality of 1939; A sincere Moldavian friendship towards the sympathetic, plagued by fate, Poles who arrived in the Romanian lands; Polish Foreign Minister Beck – in the role of conciliator or mediator – between Hungary and Romania; Horthy's visit to Poland – the first attempt to “dislocate the Little Understanding”; Romania was advised by Poles “to buy Hungary at the expense of Czechoslovakia” – agreeing to offer Ukraine Subcarpathia to Hungarians; Romania's perplexity about the joint Polish-Hungarian actions; Romania's firm response to the bastard solutions put into circulation by Warsaw; Bucharest asks Belgrade to show solidarity with Romanian efforts; Warsaw was aware that the whole Europe was against it; Beck's duplicity in relations with Romania will be maintained; The revisionist campaign of two million Hungarians in America, Italy, Great Britain; The Romanian-language lectureship in Krakow; Honorary member of the Krakow Academy of Sciences; Iorga wrote thousands of pages about Poland and Romanian-Polish relations; Unparalleled analysis in his journalism about Poland; Poland defends its being and its ancestral land; The brother's sufferings deserve relief; Iorga about Eminescu at the Jagiellonian University; The first Eminescu poems in Mickiewicz's language prefaced by Iorga; Moral obligations for Poland.

The volume ends with an impressive section on the political will of Nicolae Iorga, an extensive bibliography and a useful index of names.

The breadth and diversity of the material treated in this book do not allow a detailed presentation of its content, of some events brought for the first time to the attention of the Romanian reading public. Romanian and Polish historians are invited to continue to speak on about this topic. We will limit ourselves to highlighting Nicolae Iorga's conception of the place of good neighbourliness and solidarity in relations between Romania and Poland and the value of this humanist conception in the vast sphere of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

We will first treat the neighbourliness, benefiting from the fact that Nicolae Mareş makes it known to us through the very words of Nicolae

Iorga, to which are added the pertinent comments of the author of this book.

Historically, we are reminded that in 1917 the publicist Iorga would write in *Neamul Românesc* one of the most beautiful hymns to the Polish flag and Polish manhood in the fights that took place around the world: "In Galati, the Polish flag, Iorga wrote, of the white eagle that overcame the Teutonic prey cross so many times and guarded the entire East – both Russian and Romanian – from German conquest was raised. He fluttered proudly and freely, enthusiastically acclaimed by the noble soldiers in arms with eyes full of tears at the sight of their country coming out of the grave. And from the beginning it found a comrade in the flag of Romania, who also struggled and still struggles on so many fields of martyrdom of the people represented by it. Side by side, in brotherly closeness, they announced to us a guarantee of the future for our tormented and sacrificed people." The Polish people are defined by Nicolae Iorga in this article as "a neighbour to whom we are connected by so many older traditions, in addition to essential elements in the very soul of these two nations, a gentle feeling, a devotion to the ideal, a deep contempt for the overwhelming force of raw matter" (p. 23). An authentic hymn to good neighbourliness.

Critically continuing his idea in another context, Nicolae Iorga does not shy away from reminding that for the Romanians, "The idea of national unity – without a mixture of feudalism, for which the historical ties and the dispositions of spirit, the corresponding moods were missing –, could not be borrowed entirely from the neighbours, the Balkans being ruled by the Roman imperial dream of the Slavic countries, and those over the mountains having for their kings, former Slavic fashion voivodes, the Carolingian model of the West, with the blessing, indispensable, from the pope" (p. 207). Nicolae Mareş does not fail to inform the readers that these aspects are treated extensively by Nicolae Iorga in the work *România, vecinii săi și cheștiunea Orientului* (p. 154).

From all the volumes, studies and articles of Nicolae Iorga, the distinguished author of the book analyzed in these lines draws an essential conclusion: "The great Romanian historian and creator not only knew very well the Polish history and culture, but, since childhood, he showed special love and appreciation to our north-western neighbours. The historian, the great scholar, the statesman, the writer was the one who cultivated and militated like no other to establish the best possible relations of knowledge

and cooperation between the two countries and peoples, between their cultures” (p. 112).

Developing and arguing this conclusion, Nicolae Mareş invites the readers to navigate the entire activity of Nicolae Iorga put at the service of the good neighbourliness between Romania and Poland. He points out that “In the more than 1,000 books and tens of thousands of studies, articles and reviews, N. Iorga is the historian, writer, publicist, who wrote and published thousands of pages about Poland and the Romanian-Polish relations. He even researched and elaborated on Poland’s relations with other states, presenting them with rare meticulousness, in a universal context. The attempts of contemporaries and descendants, all together, failed to highlight the in-depth approach taken to Poland from within by the great propagator of Polish history, culture and spirituality, and especially the sensitive joints of his efforts. Iorga’s writings and appreciations of the Poles and their homeland wear a neo-romantic mantle, easily overcoming some of the known sins of Moldova’s northern neighbour. These feelings have been perpetuated for decades in his soul.

Nicolae Mareş brings this subject to the present day and informs: “It is with great regret that contemporary Polish historians do not know Iorga and have done nothing to propagate and understand him. They have not vouchsafed for 80 years since his passing into eternity to publish even a brief collection of the most important studies, of his analyses of bilateral issues of interest, collected by the tireless researcher through Polish archives, admittedly, today under Ukrainian rule” (p. 105).

The Romanian-Polish relations are not analyzed by Nicolae Mareş only in the light of the academic contributions we inherited from Nicolae Iorga. He brings us into a space of useful debate and Romania’s official position, expressed diplomatically by the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs. Thus, it is recalled that, on December 29, 1938, Grigore Gafencu presented an exposition on Bucharest radio in which he stroked a balance of the Romanian international policy of that period, addressing the issue of Romania’s relations with its neighbours. He stated: “Romania fulfils its peaceful duties towards its neighbours and with all the States that surround it on the basis of a complete independence and its full territorial integrity. They are goods earned with

blood and rightly so. They are a holy part of the world. No Romanian will allow them to be harassed. Keeping away from the ideological currents that trouble and sometimes bleed Europe, Romania will resolutely reject any outside interference in its state affairs, as well as any conspiracy that would tend to disturb its thinking and life, to weaken the settlements, the power of defence, the unity of the soul and its faith in the free fulfilment of its high mission” (p. 85).

In the matter of good neighbourliness, the Romanian diplomats followed with justified attention all the steps, initiatives and plans of the Polish state. Thus, the diplomat Richard Franasovici, former interior minister, writes a report that he sends directly to the king, but also to minister Petrescu-Comnen. In this report, Franasovici confirms that he was better informed than the new Romanian ambassador in Poland. Richard Franasovici states in his report, among other things, that “Compared to Czechoslovakia, Poland intends to inaugurate a good neighbourly policy, seeking to channel neighbouring republic through the port of Gdynia” (p. 64).

For a more nuanced characterization of Poland’s position towards its neighbours, Nicolae Mareş also appeals to foreign historians contemporary with the events evoked in the book. In this context, it is recalled that the English historian Normand Davies revealed – among Poland’s most dishonourable actions –, ultimatum given to Lithuania in March 1938 and the occupation of Zaolzia in October. Normand Davies points out that: “...the Polish authorities took advantage of the misfortunes of their neighbours to resolve old disputes and to congratulate themselves, but the government’s main concern was not to be surrounded by Germany on the southern and northern flanks.” These actions are far from understanding the concept of goodwill at that time and in contradiction with the interpretation of this concept today.

Good neighbourliness postulates the fulfilment of the solidarity duty between neighbours. It is an undeniable truth in the interwar period and fully valid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The historian Nicolae Iorga was fully aware of the validity of this truth, and Nicolae Mareş widely evoked the circumstances in which Nicolae Iorga gave expression to his feelings of solidarity with the Polish people. The section entitled Solidarity with Poland manifested by Nicolae Iorga in 1939 bears witness to the way in which the magic of good neighbourhood harmonizes with the imperative

of solidarity in Nicolae Iorga's thinking. "We do not find ourselves in the presence of a declarative solidarity, but of a call for a firm and large-scale solidarity action,' the author of the book explains this attitude. With the outbreak of the Second World War, in September 1939, until the last moments of his life, N. Iorga wrote, in *Neamul Românesc* and in other publications of the time, dozens of articles in which he proclaimed the outbreak of the world conflagration, depicting the drama of the people so close to us, forced to leave their ancestral hearth, in the face of the Nazi attack and bombing in the west and the Bolsheviks in the east... In the given situation, Iorga addressed, to all Romanians: 'from the bishop to the opinca', hot calls to support, with all the best, the afflicted Polish brothers. (p. 87). As a matter of fact, Nicolae Măreș considered this subject of crucial importance in the relations between Romania and Poland and he dedicated an entire monograph to it: Nicolae Măreș, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate*, Biblioteca Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010.

Nicolae Iorga analyses, in an international context, solidarity as a universal value, as it will be defined many years later by the United Nations, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000, in the Millennium Declaration which states *expressis verbis*: "Solidarity. Global challenges must be managed in a way that correctly distributes costs and burdens in accordance with the basic principles of equity and social justice. Those who suffer or benefit the least deserve help from those who benefit the most".

Referring to moral solidarity, Nicolae Iorga points out: "Moral solidarity (;) means first recognizing the need for goals that everyone must worship with their faith and work, ready to face any dangers and receive all suffering. [...] However, this solidarity needs to be managed, and the leaders should not be blindly sought at the moment of threats, such as, again, the changeable connection with them is not of a material calculation. They must always be at the place where the signal word is given, and this word must not be sought in the buds through all the corners of darkness. The hierarchy of functions should correspond as much as possible with the natural hierarchy of values and merits, so that the guide does not become more insecure than those who are required to be guided" (p. 216).

The reading of Nicolae Măreș' book highlights not only the passion and meticulousness demonstrated by the author in the in-depth

research of a topic of major interest for the history of relations between Romania and Poland, but also highlights the unilateral nature of the attention paid to Nicolae Iorga's contribution to promoting friendship between peoples. Polish historians have not found it appropriate to respond on the basis of reciprocity to the Romanian invitation to create academically useful bridges for better knowledge of the history of the two countries, especially in the periods of hardship that the Romanians and the Poles went through. Not even the alliance of the two countries in the organization of the Warsaw Pact, in the European Union and in NATO has stimulated joint research plans or individual projects of mutual interest in this specific field.

We hope that the English and Polish translation of Nicolae Măreș' book will make it easier for historians in Poland and Romania to take on the intellectual responsibility of clearing gaps in the history of their countries' bilateral relations.

This desideratum should, moreover, be examined from a broader perspective. Nicolae Iorga wrote the first history of Albania, which was used as documentary material at the Paris Peace Conference, where the independence of this country was recognized. Historically, the first fundamental works in Romanian historiography on the relations between Romania and many countries belong to him, among which a significant place is occupied by those dedicated to the relations with neighbouring states. These truths should be known by international public opinion. Nicolae Iorga should be converted, without delay, into electronic editions, easily disseminated worldwide.

The example offered by Nicolae Măreș through the volume of authentic pioneering presented in these brief lines should be followed by professional historians, who should fully capitalize on the huge documentary and interpretative legacy left by Nicolae Iorga. According to the latest data published or updated at June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in an encyclopaedic article published by Wikipedia, Nicolae Iorga is defined as a "wonder child, polymath and polyglot, with a prolific scientific activity." It is estimated that Iorga wrote 1,003 volumes, 12,755 articles and studies and 4,963 reviews, this unequalled activity culminating with *Istoria României*, in ten volumes. The widest possible knowledge of this immense work, through both individual and collective efforts, would

represent the most brilliant and well-deserved homage to Nicolae Iorga and his patrimony to the universal culture.

*IOAN VOICU: Doctor of Political Science from the University of Geneva (1968), doctor honoris causa in international law from the Assumption University of Thailand (1998), career diplomat; Romania's Deputy Representative to the United Nations Security Council (1990-1991); member of the Administrative Court of the United Nations (1987-1993), Romanian ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and permanent observer with international organizations based in Bangkok (1994-1999), associate professor at Assumption University in Thailand (2000-2019).*