

DANISH PERCEPTIONS ON INTERWAR ROMANIA

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Abstract:

In the interwar period, Romania and Denmark were two distant countries, which were separated by great cultural, social, political and economic differences and which had just begun to discover each other. Their diplomatic relations were established in 1917, when a Romanian envoy was appointed to Copenhagen whereas the first Danish minister was appointed to Bucharest in 1924. The establishment of the diplomatic offices in the two capitals led to a strengthening of bilateral Danish-Romanian relations. The two people started to know each other's cultural, social and political patterns. In this article I look at the representations generated by Romanians in the Danish conscience, which I assume is interesting for the study of Romania's bilateral relations with the peoples from this part of Europe. The Danish image of the Romanian space during the first half of the 20th century is characterized by a series of prejudices and stereotypes formed along time because of a scanty knowledge about the realities in this space.

Resumé:

I mellemkrigstid, Rumænien og Danmark var to fjerne lande, som var adskilt af store kulturelle, sociale, politiske og økonomiske forskelle og som lige var begyndt at opdage hinanden. Deres diplomatiske forbindelser var blevet etableret i 1917, når en rumænske minister blev udnævnt i København henviser til den første danske minister blev udnævnt i Bukarest i 1924. Oprettelsen af det diplomatiske kontorer i de to hovedstæder ført til en styrkelse af de bilaterale dansk-rumænske forbindelser. De to folk begyndte at kende hinanden's kultur, deres sociale og politiske mønstre. I denne artikel vi kigge på repræsentationer genereret af rumænere langs gang i samvittighed en nordisk og fjernt folk som danskerne, som vi mener er interessante for undersøgelsen af den rumænske bilaterale forbindelser med mennesker fra denne del af Europa. Den danske billede af den rumænske plads i løbet af første halvdel af det

20. århundrede er kendetegnet ved en række fordomme og klichéer dannet langs tid, på grund af en sparsom viden om realiteter inden for dette rum. I de følgende linjer er det viste, hvor var rumænerne opfattede af den danske befolkning, hvilke fælles interesser de havde, som førte til deres tilnærmelse.

Rezumat:

În perioada interbelică România și Danemarca erau două state îndepărtate care erau separate de diferențe mari din punct de vedere cultural, social și politic, care abia începuseră să se cunoască una pe cealaltă. Relațiile lor diplomatice au fost stabilite în 1917 atunci când un trimis extraordinar român a fost numit la Copenhaga, în vreme ce primul trimis extraordinar danez la București a fost desemnat în 1924. Stabilirea oficiilor diplomatice în cele două capitale a contribuit la strângerea relațiilor bilaterale româno-daneze, iar cele două state. Acestea au început să ia seamă la cultura, societatea și sistemul politic al celeilalte națiuni. În acest articol analizez reprezentările asupra românilor în conștiința danezilor. Pentru prima jumătate a sec. al XX-lea, imaginea danezilor asupra românilor este caracterizată de o serie de prejudecăți și stereotipuri formate în timp datorită cunoașterii fragmentare a realităților din acest spațiu.

Keywords: Danes, Romanians, prejudice, stereotypes, images, backwardness

In the interwar period Romania and Denmark were two distant lands, separated by great cultural, social, political and economic differences, which had just started to discover each other. Their diplomatic relations had been established in 1917 when a Romanian minister was appointed to Copenhagen whereas the first Danish minister was appointed to Bucharest in 1924. The establishment of diplomatic offices in the two capitals led to a strengthening of the bilateral Danish-Romanian relations. The two people started to know each other's culture, their social and political patterns.

In this article I look at the representations of Romanians in the conscience of a Nordic and distant people like the Danes, which are interesting for the study of the Romanian bilateral relations with the peoples of this part of Europe. The image of the Other has a significant impact on the bilateral relations between states. The representations that nations have acquired of each other are a result of their contacts and relations. The accuracy of the others' image depends on factors such as the importance and interest they show to each other, geographic distance and so forth. From this point of view, it should be noted from start that the Romanians and the Danes were separated by geography and culture. The

little importance the Danes granted to the Romanians explains why their image of Romania is not that substantial and expressive.

The Danish image of the Romanian space during the first half of the 20th century is characterized by a series of stereotypes and clichés formed along the time, due to a scarce knowledge of realities within this space. Often this kind of false representations have a negative impact on the bonds between countries. For example, Romania was regarded in Denmark as a piece of the larger group of Balkan countries which for the Danes were some kind of “brigand countries where people were walking on streets with their pockets full of guns”¹. Romania from the end of the 19th century was considered a half barbarian country, devastated by uprisings and clashes between political parties².

In these conditions, one question comes naturally: what were the reasons for the Danes entering in contact with the Romanians during the first half of the 20th century? One will find the answer thinking at the changes produced on the European political scene as a consequence of the First World War and their impact on countries from South-East Europe. Romania's changed statute acquired at the end of the war through its national unification boosted her international prestige, bringing her in the attention of both the great and small powers, which saw in her a viable partner in the effort of keeping a peaceful climate on the continent. Its efforts of securing the peace and stability in south-east Europe generated favorable echoes to the Scandinavian countries governed by the same pacifist principles³. Its evolution within the Little Entente and its alliances with Poland, Italy and France were followed with interest by Denmark for which Romania had become a European state on which one could count⁴.

Very little known in the Nordic countries, merely in the economic circles, the new Romania established during the interwar period was „destined to occupy a significant place in the Scandinavian conscience” as C. E. Hansen affirmed in his book entitled *Rumænien arbejder!* (København, 1935)⁵. The ample transformations produced on the political, economical and social fields, the rich natural resources that Romania

¹ Arthur Christensen, '*Rumænien og Rumænerne*', *Gads Danske Magasin* (København, 1916): 2.

² Ibid.

³ Note no. 1056/16.07.1935, from the Romanian legation in Copenhagen to Nicolae Titulescu, Arhivele Diplomatice ale Ministerului de Externe al României (hereafter A.D.M.A.E.), file Copenhagen, vol.13,

⁴ Hans Frederik Ulrichsen, *De nye Lande- Polen, Rumænien, Tjekkoslovakiet og Jugoslavien*, (København:1929), 16

⁵ C.E. Hansen, *Rumænien arbejder!* (København, 1935) 7

possessed, pointed her as an excellent trading partner. After the war, states such as the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden and Czechoslovakia turned their attention to Romania, a series of companies from these countries sent their representatives here and trade intensified.

Romania was for a long time for the Danes and Northerners in general, a *terra incognita*, about which nothing was known except that it was “a small agrarian country that fought in the Balkan wars”, although after the war it reached 18 million inhabitants, becoming a medium power among the European states. Romania has gained Danish attention not only through its new political statute in Europe, its size or population, but especially through its economic potential and the ascendant evolution of its political and economic organization⁶. For a state with very old trade tradition like Denmark, the new Romania on its way to modernization represented a valuable ground for new businesses.

Romania's image-makers were Danish travelers, politicians, diplomats, or businessmen who regarded the Romanians according to their own interests in Romania. Several of these people wrote down their impressions gathered as a result of their interaction with the Romanian space. Most times these writings were addressed to the large Danish public who, in this way, could make themselves an idea about Romanians.

Due to the large distance, news about Romania reached Denmark indirectly, mostly through the foreign press. This explains why the Danish public often acquired a false image of Romania, especially because the mass-media depicted a declining Romania, “a country invaded by bolshevists, where daily a revolution takes place and the royal family is divided because of misunderstandings between its members”⁷. Responsible for this negative image was mainly the weak propaganda which the Romanian state was conducting in Denmark, as well as in the other European states, a fact pointed out by some of the Romanian envoys to Copenhagen at that time. The lack of information about Romania was so obvious that a series of individuals less well intended took advantage of that and tried to create an unfavorable image of Romania by spreading often false and alarmist news about it⁸. Sometimes, the ignorance could be hilarious: a provincial Danish newspaper published a greeting article for

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 'Interview with a Romanian diplomat', *National Tidende and Dagens Nyheder* (19.01.1928), A.D.M.A.E., file Danemarca, vol.15, 85-88

⁸ Note no. 492/19.03.1930 from the Romanian legation in Stockholm to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (from now on R.M.F.A.), A.D.M.A.E., file România, vol. 477, 162

the Romanian king Ferdinand's birthday, when in fact he had died 3 years earlier⁹.

This state of affairs was noticed by different Danes, often on a tone of regret. The Danish deputy, Hans Frederik Ulrichsen, in his booklet entitled *De nye Lande- Polen, Rumænien, Tjekkoslaviet og Jugoslavien*, showed that foreigners often associated Romania and the Romanians with "the easy and superficial life of Bucharest, with traces of corruption from the Ottoman era, or with the wastage of the dominant class, a remnant of times when the boyars exploited the peasants"¹⁰. The author of the booklet highlights the fact that Romania of 1929 was completely different; it was a country in a full development process. On this occasion, he addresses to his compatriots who might wish to get to know Romania by encouraging them to go there in order to inform themselves and not to let themselves influenced by the false rumors that were going around¹¹.

Romania was little known in the North as a tourist's country, but it is exactly this aura of exotic land making of it an attractive destination. Habitually, the country was called the "country of the sun"¹². It was considered a very beautiful country, due to its enchanting landscapes, with high mountains, covered by forests, large plains, rivers and lakes which represented an attraction to the Nordic travelers. The folk culture passed from one generation to another, from ancient times, and the national costumes worn by peasants during the national holidays were interesting attractions for the Danish travelers, who were great fans of trips, a trait inherited from their Viking ancestors, well known for their incursions on the continent¹³. In 1924, the director of a Nordic travel agency, Georg Neeborg, asked the Romanian minister of Industry and Commerce, for some travel propaganda materials about Romania. Neeborg undertook for himself to make travel propaganda for Romania in the Nordic countries by publishing a series of articles about Romania in the leading Scandinavian daily newspapers and by organizing trips of the Scandinavian travelers on the Romanian land¹⁴.

⁹ *Nationaltidende* (25 august 1930)

¹⁰ Ulrichsen, 1929, 16

¹¹ H.F.Ulrichsen refers to the anti-Romanian propaganda deployed by the Magyars after the First World War through false news on Romania.

¹² *Politiken* (3 august 1931)

¹³ Hansen, 1935, 99

¹⁴ Letter from Georg Neeborg to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Romanian National Central Archives, (from now on A.N.I.C.), file Ministerul Propagandei Naționale (from now on M.P.N.), file no. 95/1927, 1-2

Romania: “the richest and the poorest country in Europe”

Most of the Danish references to Romania from the first half of the 19th century highlights the abundance of the natural resources of this country and the deep poverty in which most part of the Romanian people lived. A Danish journalist, Axel Breidahl, who visited Romania during the German occupation from the First World War, noticed: „There is almost no other country in the world that has so excellent conditions in order to make happy a people, like Romania has. The country has in the underground such great resources that she could feed easily the double of its population”¹⁵. Romania was indeed a large country, rich in natural resources but compared to the Western Europe, it was way behind. This paradox characterized Romania for centuries and it is available in some cases even today.

For the Danes of that time, descendants of the peasants who in the 19th century had managed to transform by their own work the poorest land into the most fertile land, thus making Denmark one of the largest granaries in Europe, the state of things from Romania was unconceivable. Significant in this sense, are the observations of the Danish journalist, Ejnar Black made in one issue of *Berlingske Aftenavis* from Copenhagen, in December 1939: “In Romania, where one can find the best farming land, where the oil is springing from the earth, where gold and silver are abundant and the forests are the third richness of the country, where the natural resources are phenomenal, here are living those who should be the elite of this country, the peasants, who anyway, are the majority, in conditions similar with those from the Middle Ages and in a poverty that a Dane who has not seen it, could not even imagine it”¹⁶. The improvement of the living conditions of the Romanian peasants was, in his opinion, an essential condition for the economic development of Romania, mainly an agrarian country.

Romania was a country of contrasts. The Romanian society was split into social categories with great differences in terms of welfare and culture. For the Danes who were used to live in an egalitarian society, existed “nether great richness nor great poverty”, all these seemed aspects detached from a novel. The observations of the same Danish journalist,

¹⁵ Axel Breidahl, *Fra det erobrede Rumænien, Sklidringer fra en etapperejse* (København,: Nordiske Forfatteres Forlag, 1918) 14

¹⁶ Excerpt from *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 18.12.1939, A.D.M.A.E. file *Danemarca/1920-1944*, vol.7, Presa

who captures the features of each social category from Romania, are illustrating in these sense. In a single day spent in Romania, he meets people belonging to all social classes. Among them, a member of the royal family, perhaps Queen Helena, who was in a bad state of health but living in a distinguished apartment. Then he passes to the meeting with a general secretary of a ministry, which takes place in a "precious office", situated in a new building, with marble frames. The secretary, having on his desk "more phones than one can imagine that a simple human can use, spoke to him in an incomprehensible language for five minutes in the audience which was not easy to obtain"¹⁷. Then follows the visit into a modest home where a young woman was embroidering sitting on a couch, while the man, with grey hair and intelligent eyes behind the glasses, speaks politics, "which was strictly forbidden"¹⁸.

The Dane is astonished by the similarity between Romanian peasants' life and that of the Danish peasants 500 years earlier, so great was the difference between the Romanian and the Danish peasants in 1939. While the Danish farmers were living in a nice houses situated in the middle of the cultivated land, the Romanian peasants were living in houses made of dried clay, without proper windows and lacking comfort, as they had to shelter up to eight members of one family¹⁹. Poverty was doubled by a lack of education, the majority of the Romanian peasants being illiterate.

The author of the article completes the suite of characters with his own image, willing perhaps to illustrate by this juxtaposing the contrast between the exponent of the society he belongs to and those belonging to the Romanian society: "a room in a hotel, where an able Dane, dressed with a navy blue costume, speaks with a Fyn accent. The Dane is still strong, he has seen thirty countries in four continents, and now, lastly, Romania, for whom he sacrificed fifteen months and he knows it perhaps better than an ordinary Romanian. Anyway, when you sit in your own hotel room and let the rumors of the day enter into your ears, you have the impression that this country is the richest and poorest in Europe"²⁰.

If most of the Danish references to Romania are reduced to the description of a certain state of the affairs, in an article from *Politiken* of August 3, 1931, entitled "Romania looked into the face", one finds a description of the social, political and economic situation of Romania at

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

that time, followed by an analysis of the factors that have determined this state of things. Although sixty years had passed since Romania had detached herself from the Balkans and entered into "the European family", it had kept numerous of its Balkan features. The corruption that had seized as an octopus all the state institutions seemed inescapable and the lead of the country was in the hands of incompetent politicians, although Romania was not lacking valuable people. The deplorable state of the Romanian economy was a result of the lack of coordination between state institutions, the chaotic adoption of laws according to the fantasy of a certain minister, laws that were often contradicting each other, the waste of money which most times reached the wrong people. Romania needed a steel hand of a courageous man who could start the work for the organization of the Romanian society on principles adapted to the realities of the time²¹. In the Danish journalist's opinion, Romania was confirming the conviction that "only in rich countries, with old traditions and a high culture, one can find capable politicians that not only have ideas but they also have the courage to put them into practice. Denmark could make "honest business" with the Romanians only when Romania's leaders "will learn to value the notion of honesty and the trust granted by the people"²².

The political organization and the system of governance in Romania were far from being ideal. For the Danes, the parliamentary regime in Romania as well as in the other Balkan states was just a "useless illusion". The organization of the elections in order to obtain the results desired by the authorities was just one of the arguments used by the author in support of his theory²³.

Behind all these aspects noticed by Danes when they were coming to Romania, one can detect their understanding for the fact that this country had to face after the war a series of national, social, political and economic problems which were not at all easy to solve. In spite of the difficulties it had encountered, Romania was making visible progresses²⁴.

Andreas Sørensen in his article entitled "An interesting excursion in Transylvania", published in several Danish newspapers in January 1930, describes this evolution which he could notice on the spot. Traveling with the Orient Express from Bucharest to Oradea, he was surprised by its comfort and the modernity compared to other Romanian railways. For the

²¹ *Politiken* (3 august 1930)

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Christensen 1918 2

²⁴ *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 27.02.1940,

Danish used to living on a plain, the long way through Transylvania's Alps was "a race to a fabulous world"²⁵. The traveler notices that Transylvania was above all the industrial province of Romania, a literally gold mine due to its underground rich in oil and natural gas. The agricultural land, one of the most fertile in Europe, equally allowed the development of agriculture. Sørensen also affirmed that the history of Transylvania was "the best example of the vital force of a national minority". For thousands of years, the province was under foreign rule but in spite of all persecutions the Romanians remained as a minority in the region. The Magyars' critics against the Romanian government are considered baseless. Since the unification, Romania had reformed its entire educational system but the Magyars did not have to suffer because of it. A great number of schools financed by the state for the minority's education had been established, while before the Union there was no Romanian school financed by the Hungarian state.

Bucharest, a place where the Orient meets the Occident

As it was natural, the capital was one of the most often visited places of Romania and, consequently, it created the first impression to the Danish visitor. Bucharest was the subject of many articles in the Danish press during the first half of the 20th century. Bucharest was perceived as a city of contrasts, where the buildings of banks with architecture in American style were next to boyar houses. The daily activities were concentrated on Calea Victoriei, (The Victory Avenue) which resembled to the main street of a provincial town on a great national holiday²⁶. The people were walking between the Royal Palace which resembled a French town hall and the Post Palace. Beyond the centre filled with restaurants, hotels, new boulevards and beautiful parks with lakes started the dirty and poor neighborhoods traversed by River Dambovită. Here poor people were living, wearing ragged cloths, earning their money by selling corn and vegetables. The streets were small and dark, filled with houses where lamps with oil were twinkling. One Danish visitor argued that the name "Paris of the Balkans" was inappropriate. Bucharest had become an East European Paris more "because of its luxury and vices than by its culture and fineness". Thus, the foreigners traveling by carriage on Calea Victoriei might think being on a

²⁵ Soro Amstidende, Silkeborg Avis, Vestkysten and Aalborg Amstidende (January 1930) A.D.M.A.E., file Copenhaga, vol.7, file România, vol. 477, 133

²⁶ Dispatch nr. 716/G, Copenhaga (25 May 1944), A.D.M.A.E., file Copenhaga, vol.7

boulevard in Paris although their coachman had an “air of eastern barbarianism”²⁷.

The general impression was of an unfinished city. Bucharest was in a continuous development. The spectacular transformation of the Romanian capital in the first decades after the war pleasantly surprised the Danish MP, Hans Frederik Ulrichsen, arrived here for the third time in 1936, on the occasion of the Bucharest Interparliamentary Congress. Back into his country, he wrote an article in *Nationaltidende* in which he described the city’s transformation compared to his last visit: “Never a capital has changed so fast. Bucharest could easily be called the city of the future, of traffic and constructions instead of Paris of the Orient”²⁸.

Bucharest had evolved from a “Balkan borough” as it was at the beginning of the 19th century into a modern city, with a railway station in Italian style, “with new large boulevards, although a bit too monotone”. The city centre looked completely American, reminding the Danish traveler of the second Brazilian city, Sao Paulo. Here were the headquarters of banks, assurance societies, phone companies, newspapers and hotels with nine up to twelve levels. The main road, Calea Victoriei, had also changed becoming larger. New buildings and squares were under construction everywhere. Visiting the new headquarter of the Law Faculty, Ulrichsen points out that “law is a specialty of the country; people like to discuss, the Romanian is a native jurist. It is almost natural here that most of the deputies are lawyers or teachers”²⁹. One can observe a light irony in his tone, but that is not malicious. After all, he declares himself charmed by the general outlook of “this city full of life where in the evening, Calea Victoriei is full of people, as in Bucharest dinner is served at 8 or 9 like in Budapest, Athena or Belgrade. Brilliant officer uniforms, beautiful and well dressed women, multiple special editions of the newspapers, the cafes full of people, the luxury shops, all these are reminding of the Paris boulevards, but with more uniforms, with a more suggestive traffic, with a stronger current”³⁰.

It seems that the Danish observer was not so much impressed by the new buildings, large parks or war monuments which were anyway “too many and too pompous”, as by the elements that were giving the city and

²⁷ Christensen, 1918, 3

²⁸ Appendix to report nr. 2607/28.10.1936, Copenhagen, G. Assan for R.M.F.A., A.D.M.A.E., file Danemarca, vol. 15, 151-155

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152

³⁰ Appendix to report nr. 2607/28.10.1936, Copenhagen, G. Assan for R.M.F.A. , A.D.M.A.E., file Danemarca, vol. 15, 151-155

the people's life an oriental character and by the originality of the peasants' costumes. He expressed his wish that the modernization process will keep something from the picturesqueness of the Romanian traditions.

In one article carried by the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Aftenavis* of February 1940, a change of statute of the Romanian capital is pointed out. Bucharest, which a few years before seemed to the Danes a faraway city with romance stories and several yearly murder attempts, had acquired a new significance. In Bucharest all important decisions are taken, "now that Warsaw and Prague lost their influence"³¹. The author of the article explains this fact through the order and quietness established by King Charles II in his authoritarian rule starting with 1938. Although the Danes, a traditional democratic people, did not sympathize with this form of government, they recognized its contribution to the assurance of a certain internal stability of the country. Stability was absolutely necessary in a country where poverty was widespread, in spite of the precious natural resources it possessed. In Denmark, the situation was exactly the reverse. The soil riches were lacking, but the economy of the state was one of the most competitive in Europe and the level of living was high.

The Romanian peasantry

The Romanian peasant occupies an important place in the Danish representations of Romania. This is very natural since Denmark had a predominant agrarian population like Romania. The Romanian peasant is constantly depicted in contrast with the Danish farmers.

The situation of the Danish peasants during the first half of the 20th century was the result of an ample process of social transformations which began at the second part of the 18th century. In 1788 the Danish peasants became free, being the firsts in Europe to be freed from the feudal vow³².

The peasants became owners and set the basis of small and medium farms which later became models for the entire Europe. These transformations took place under the strict control of the Danish state that put at the peasants' disposal a system of credits in order to support their work. The performing level of the Danish agriculture was largely due to masses education and the cooperatist movement which gained momentum in the second half of the 19th century.

³¹ *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 27.02.1940, A.D.M.A.E., file Copenhagen, vol.7

³² Adrian Sfintescu, *Cooperația agricultorilor danezi - metode de lucru* (București: Tiparul Românesc, 1940), 24

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Danish farmers had the fight for the transformation of their economic and juridical liberty achieved through the agrarian reforms of the previous century into a real political influence gained when the Liberal Party (Venstre) formed its first government³³. Taking into consideration all these, one can understand the consternation the Danes regarded the condition of the Romanian peasantry. An article from the Danish press of 1939 presented the peasant's life and working conditions, which seemed detached from the Middle Ages. The Romanian peasants were cultivating only two types of vegetables, grain and corn, and this only for their own consume, as they served them as a basic alimentation. In a Dane's eyes this was a "grotesque tradition"³⁴. The cloths were indicative for the poverty in which they lived. It seemed a turn back in time "to get the poorest crop from the richest land³⁵". The reduced efficiency of the Romanian peasant's work is attributed to his indolence and inclination to drink plum brandy, a strong aromatic drink. He had though some excuses: the large number of holidays established by the orthodox religion, around 200 every year, that he doesn't even remember all of them. The peasants lacked the impulse to work, as they were living surrounded by priests and monks who encouraged them to think at Saints Peter and Pavel and to light candles in church while they were "either disgusting rascals or excellent people"³⁶.

Axel Breidahl, another Danish journalist, dedicated the Romanian peasant an entire chapter in one of his books about Romania, published in 1918. Lacking the aspiration to economic wealth, the Romanian peasant was content with cultivating so much land as he could pay the lease to the boyars and to support his family³⁷. The fertility of soil which needed no additional fertilization was encouraging the peasant's idleness who "was not too hardworking anyway". Some of the Romanian villages resembled the poor regions from North Africa. Houses built of clay mixed with straw sheltered the peasant's family and cattle. Agriculture was done by the use of plough carried by oxes. The cattle did not have any shelter and were badly nourished³⁸.

³³ Kund J. V. Jespersen, *A history of Denmark* (Palgrave Macmillan 2004), 69

³⁴ Excerpt from *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 18.12.1939,

³⁵ *Politiken*, 8.04.1939, A.D.M.A.E. file *Danemarca/1920-1944*, vol.7, Presa, 276

³⁶ Excerpt from *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 18.12.1939, A.D.M.A.E. file *Danemarca/1920-1944*, vol.7, Presa

³⁷ Axel Breidahl, *1918*, 17

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The Romanian peasants were not lacking qualities though. Although they were not educated in schools, they were intelligent enough and were learning fast. In spite of their hard living conditions, they were not lacking life's happiness. Bredahl notices the beauty of the peasants, especially that of women, their proud attitude and straight going³⁹. Their costumes which they were very proud of, drew the attention in a pleasant way: "One does not see the most humble peasant or youngster without a beautiful embroidered waistcoat, usually beautifully colored and with splendid drawings. The women's blouses beautifully embroidered are famous"⁴⁰.

The ignorance of the rural population from Romania was attributed by Bredahl to the maintaining of feudal relations between the boyars and the peasants. The land distribution was unfavorable and unequal unlike any other country. The boyars were leasing land to the peasants who had to cede the largest part of their crop from which they kept only what was necessary to feed their family. As a consequence, the Romanian peasant could not be blamed for being "lazy and indifferent and worked only for filling its belly with polenta and tzuica made of plums"⁴¹. For a Dane coming from a land with "talented, independent, educated and wealthy peasants", it was hard to understand how in a European civilized state could exist such relations, "more than primitive"⁴².

To draw a conclusion, I can say that the Romanians and Danes were little known to each other during the interwar period. The few contacts between the two nations revealed significant differences in social, cultural and economic between them. Although the general impression of the Danes about Romania was an unfavorable one, their interest should not be overlooked. Beyond all criticism, one can notice the Danish understanding of international circumstances less favorable under which the Romanian state has evolved along the time, surrounded by big powers that have disputed its dominance and set serious obstacles in its development. The observations made by the Danes who got to now Romania as it truly was, are of great significance and help us understand better what place Romania occupied in Europe during the interwar time.

³⁹ Ibid., 19

⁴⁰ Ibid., 18

⁴¹ Ibid., 24

⁴² Ibid., 21