

WAN LIGHT OF LITHUANIA IN BUCHAREST. THE SOURCES OF A NON-DECLARED DIVORCE (1918- 1926)

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Abstract:

Between the Acts of Union and, respectively, of Independence of 1918 and 1926 Romania and Lithuania shared no strategic interests or common regional politics. Although the Bucharest diplomacy insistently asked Warsaw to debate over its Baltic policy, at the end the Romanian-Polish anti-Soviet alliance became one of the most important pieces of so-called "cordon sanitaire" geopolitics, which included Baltic and Black Seas regions countries, but no Lithuania. Both states became locked in cold relations with no contacts and no recognition (until August 1924), which was due to regional politics, but contrary to common interests. The diplomatic relations, officially opened in August 1924, lacked any practical political consequences. The Kaunas coup d'état of December 1926 had little political and media impacts in Bucharest and, in the rarely definitions of Antanas Smetona new nationalist regime, most of Romanians condemned it (contrary with their attitude towards the coup d'état of Warsaw in May 1926). It was only in the last half of the '30s that between Bucharest and Kaunas new avenues in bilateral relations had opened, the impact of the fortunate decision of foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu in 1934 to create a Romanian Legation to cover Lithuania.

Rezumat:

În perioada dintre Declarația de Unire care constituia România Mare și Declarația de Independență care punea bazele statului independent al Lituaniei (1918) și anul 1926, atunci când în Lituania lua sfârșit regimul democratic, România și Lituania nu au împărtășit interese strategice sau politici regionale comune. În ciuda faptului că diplomația de la București a cerut insistent Varșoviei să discute împreună politica sa baltică, în cele din urmă alianța antisovietică româno-poloneză a devenit una dintre cele mai importante piese în geopoliticile așa-

numitei "cordon sanitaire", care includea țările din regiunile Mării Baltice și Mării Negre, dar nu și Lituania. Ambele state au rămas închistate în relații reci fără a avea contacte între ele și fără a-și acorda recunoaștere reciprocă (până în august 1924). Aceasta se datora politicilor regionale, dar era împotriva intereselor comune. Relațiile diplomatice, stabilite oficial în august 1924, au fost lipsite de orice consecințe practice. Lovitura de stat de la Kaunas din decembrie 1926 a avut un impact minor în mediul politic și în mass-media și, în rarele abordări ale noului regimul naționalist al lui Antanas Smetona, cei mai mulți dintre români l-au condamnat (în mod contrar atitudinii lor față de lovitura de stat de la Varșovia din mai 1926). Abia în a doua jumătate a anilor '30 s-au deschis noi contacte și legături între București și Kaunas, ca o consecință a deciziei ferice a ministrului de externe Nicolae Titulescu din 1934 de a constitui o legăție românească destinată să supervizeze evoluțiile din Lituania.

Keywords: Romania, Lithuania, regional politics, non-recognition, coup d'état

1. Nothing about the Baltic without Poland

The interwar Romanian diplomacy had missed almost all instruments of analysis and verification of information and expertise offered by the allied capitals in terms of major European geopolitical spaces. In the '30s and '40s of the 20th century, but even later on, the North - with the Scandinavian countries - and the North-East - with the three Baltic republics that became independent in 1918 - were not the major concern for the objectives and strategies of Bucharest. Usually, Paris and Warsaw offered not only their full reports on the internal policies of these spaces (which they of course interpreted in the light of their own interests) but especially they showed inflexible attitudes and directions, unequivocally, with respect to the regional policy solutions. And often France and Poland had insisted that Romania subordinates its Scandinavian and Baltic weak contacts to a regional complex, aiming to the relationships with / towards Germany and /or Soviet Russia / USSR.¹

¹ A unified and original approach on the development of the Romanian diplomacy in this context at Silviu Miloiu, *România și țările baltice în perioada interbelică* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2003). Miloiu, „Some Aspects of the Military Cooperation in the Border States Area in the First Half of the 1920s”, in *România și sistemele de securitate din Europa, 1919-1975*, ed. Ioan Ciupercă, Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor and Dan Constantin Măță (Iasi: Editura Universitatii Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2009), 65-79; Miloiu, „Exploring the Newborn in-between Europe: Romania, The Baltic States and the Concept of Collective Security During the 1920s,” *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies* 1 (2004): 62-73. From the Romanian perspective, in addition: Florin Anghel, *Construirea sistemului "cordon sanitaire". Relații româno- polone, 1919-1926*, second edition, (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2008); Anghel, „Polish Influences on the Baltic Demarches of Romanian Diplomacy, 1920-1930”, *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 4 (1999):

The Romanian Foreign Ministers, quite precarious in competences of North and North-Eastern Europe geopolitical spaces, subordinated themselves, with some limited reserves, to the majority of French and/or Polish projects or to those inspired by the so-called policy of "collective security". Often there was no logical in the Bucharest's actions relative to specific interests, most often the decisions were taken in conformity with the decisions of the other two allied capitals. One can remember here about the release with which Romania has renounced in the early 20s to the permanent diplomatic missions in some Scandinavian capitals (Oslo, Copenhagen, Helsinki), when, during World War I, in these states have been taken place important propagandistic and influence disputes for the international recognition of the 1918 Union' documents. In a similar fashion can be regarded the obstinacy - worthy for a better cause - not to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with the young independent Lithuanian republic, for reasons related exclusively to the specific interests of the Republic of Poland.²

It is worth pointing out that this situation - somewhat eccentric for a regional medium power, as Romania was, with strong central and southeast Europe alliances (the Little Entente, the strategic partnership with Poland, and eventually the Balkan Pact) and with defining claims regarding a specific relationship with the East (USSR), included in a geopolitical "cordon sanitaire" - can be easily revealed by factors and actions that bypass the strictly bilateral relations with the concerned countries. First, none of the strategic axes of military, political-diplomatic, economic or of cultural interest succeeded to start-up - up to the interwar decades, during that period and even later - from Bucharest to the North and North-Eastern Europe, the relations with these States being rather of conjuncture. The intellectual and political contribution of the Romanian elites (coming from Transylvania and Bukovina) who joined the Old Kingdom in 1918 was almost organically related to the interests and developments of the Central-European space (Germany, Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia). The tradition and the common spaces of the old

83-94; Anghel, „Apie svetimšalius ir nepažistamuosius. Rumunijos politiniu elitu požiūris i Lietuva pirmaisiais nepriklausomybes metais po 1918 m“, *Lietuvos Istorijos Metraštis*, 1 (2007): 33-43.

² Florin Anghel, „About Strangers and Unknowns. Romanian Political Elites Towards Lithuania in the First Years of Independence After 1918“, in *Europe As Viewed From The Margins. An East Central European Perspective From World War I To Present*, ed. Silviu Miloiu, Ion Stanciu and Iulian Oncescu (Târgoviște: Valahia University Press, 2008, 163-170. A complementary approach at Silviu Miloiu, „New Wine in Old Bottles. The League of Nations from Hopes to Disillusion: Lithuanian Perspectives“, in Silviu Miloiu, Ion Stanciu and Iulian Oncescu, 155-162.

political class in Bucharest took into account, almost without exception, France and its interests; moreover, from the late 19th century and early 20th century on, Romania claimed a strong position in the evolutions and relations from/with the South-Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the institutional fragility and the precariousness of numerical representation and influence of the elite from Bessarabia (that became part of Romania on March 27, 1918, after breaking away from Russia and following a brief independent existence) were major obstacles in the eastern direction of foreign policy, which aimed primarily the Soviet Communist State. It should be noted that this very Bessarabian elite, it alone in the Greater Romania, was educated in prestigious universities in czarist Russia: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tartu and Riga.³

Secondly, another equally important aspect is the fact that the Romanian diplomatic representatives in Northern and North-Eastern Europe were intellectual and professional capacities worthy to be taken into account, some of them becoming later Foreign Ministers. Their limited competence related to the peculiarities of the states where they were on duty, but especially the definitely limitation of the Romanian interests in Scandinavia and the Baltic region by Paris and Warsaw had limited, if not even cancelled, any independent assessment and strategy. Extremely well-meaning people at their posts (Raoul Bossy, in Helsinki⁴; Mihail Sturdza⁵ and Grigore Niculescu-Buzești⁶, in Riga) had informed and properly perceived the internal developments but, above all, the potential of the states where they were officials.

An irony of fate that defines the atypical relationship of Romania with the neighbouring area of the edge of Europe⁷ is revealed in June 1940, in the conditions of the precise application of the *Secret Additional Protocol* of the

³ Florin Anghel, „Între oglinzi paralele: provinciile de margine în conturarea politicilor externe interbelice ale României și Poloniei”, in Ioan Ciupercă, Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor and Dan Constantin Mătă, 118-130.

⁴ See Raoul Bossy, *Mărturii finlandeze despre România* (București, 1937) (reprinted as *Mărturii finlandeze și alte scrieri nordice despre români* (Târgoviște: Valahia University Press, 2008 by Silviu Miloiu); Bossy, “Urme românești la miazănoapte”, *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice* seria III, tom XIX, mem.3 (1937).

⁵ Mihail Sturdza, *România și sfârșitul Europei. Amintiri din țara pierdută* (Paris- Alba Iulia, 1994).

⁶ An overview of the activity of Grigore Niculescu-Buzești in Riga in 1939 - 1940, at Florin Anghel, “Instaurarea comunismului în teritoriile ocupate de Uniunea Sovietică în 1940. Cazul Letoniei”, *Arhivele totalitarismului* 17 (1997): 80- 87.

⁷ A good Romanian overview of the effects of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in the region, by comparison, at Silviu Miloiu, “Constructing Easternness and Settling New Frontiers in Europe: Again About the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact”, *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies* 5-6 (2006): 27-44.

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In Riga, the Romanian envoy, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, had transmitted, with emotions and in a moving manner, as many details as possible about the brutal annexation of the independent Republic of Latvia by the USSR, a military, political and ideological action supervised by A.I. Vyshinsky, special envoy of Joseph Stalin. Four years later, in Bucharest, in autumn 1944, the new foreign minister, the same Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, had witnessed powerless to the action of fast Sovietization of the country, led by the same A.I. Vyshinsky.

2. Geopolitical pictures of the edge of Europe: Romanian-Lithuanian relations until the end of 1926

The proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Lithuanian - read in Taryba on February 16, 1918 - passed almost unnoticed both in political, diplomatic and intellectual Romanian circles and in the press - censored - which was allowed to appear in Bucharest (under German occupation) and Iași (where the royal family, the Government and the Parliament had retreated). Even successive prime ministers, Alexandru Averescu⁸ (January 29 - March 18, 1918) and Alexandru Marghiloman⁹ (March 18 - November 6, 1918) did not mention anything about the historic decision in Vilnius in their detailed journals (it is also true that they did the same with respect to the events from Helsinki, Tallinn and Riga). However, a valuable Romanian diplomat like Vasile Stoica¹⁰, who left for the United States in 1917, in order to advocate for the Union cause, on behalf of the Romanian Government, had unconditionally supported the independence movement of the Baltic States in all discussions and negotiations that he held in America. In 1943, a quarter of century after the miraculous year 1918, Vasile Stoica recalled with emotion: *“Small and medium-sized nations from the Baltic to the Aegean, established in independent states, have followed, whether they were or not aware of, the “Joint Declaration of common goals of the independent central European nations” from Philadelphia, from October 26, 1917, the principles that we had then adopted. And who could contest the great progress the Baltic States or Poland and Czechoslovakia, or the Balkan states have made*

⁸ Alexandru Averescu, *Notițe zilnice de războiu, 1916- 1918* (București, 1928).

⁹ Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, vol.3 (1918- 1919) (București, 1995).

¹⁰ Vasile Stoica (1889 - 1959), Transylvanian militant for the Union, Romanian Minister in Tirana (1930 - 1932), in Sofia (1932 - 1936), in Riga and Kaunas (1936 - 1939), in Ankara (1939 - 1940) and in Hague (1946 - 1947), secretary-general of the Romanian Foreign Ministry (1945 to 1946), died in the political prison at Jilava.

Wan light of Lithuania in Bucharest. The sources of a non-declared divorce (1918-1926) from 1919 to 1938? The current war found them in full economic and cultural rising. Their destiny demanded its compensation for the past slavery".¹¹

After December 1, 1918, when Romania was able to achieve its national unity, the elites from Bucharest had agreed, by the need to obtain international recognition of the union, but also for the case of possible resistance to an aggression from the East that would have contested it by force, to get involved in the building of the geopolitical system called the "*cordon sanitaire*", of French inspiration and active participation of Poland.¹² Thus, until the outbreak of World War II, the diplomatic relations (from 1934 to 1941) between Bucharest and Moscow were rather frozen on two contentious issues impossible to be avoided: the Romanian treasury evacuated in Russia in 1916-1917 and, even worse, the failing by the Soviets to recognize the Union of Bessarabia with Romania. Then, in the background, the diplomatic relations with the ephemeral Ukrainian state or those with Latvia, Estonia and Finland had always been filtered exclusively through the light of the specific interests of Poland.

In the period 1919-1923, when the strategic alliances of Romania were built and until the federalist projects inspired by Józef Piłsudski failed, the Bucharest diplomacy had completely ignored the international legal status of the independent state of Lithuania, by refusing any official contacts with the authorities from Kaunas. Meanwhile, Romania had established normal diplomatic relations with Latvia, Estonia and Finland and opened in Helsinki, for a brief period of time, a permanent mission. Moreover, in the midst of negotiations concerning the conclusion of the Romanian-Polish Convention on defensive alliance (signed on March 3, 1921 in Bucharest by the two foreign ministers, Take Ionescu and Prince Eustachy Sapieha), Warsaw had made consistent efforts to convince Bucharest that the text of the document - which defined not only the Eastern policy of the two countries, but also the whole "*cordon sanitaire*" system - should refer to both Soviet Russia/USSR, and to Lithuania. The Romanian diplomacy had not given a positive answer to the Polish allegations but, until 1923, it had maintained a full caution to the Lithuanian State.

Since summer 1923 until summer next year 1924, the governments from Bucharest and Kaunas, through the Romanian and Lithuanian legations, had started in Prague exploratory contacts, designed to open negotiations for establishing diplomatic relations. The insistences coming from

¹¹ Vasile Stoica, "Sub zodia Marii Uniri. De la Baltică la Egee", *Magazin istoric* 12 (1992), 8.

¹² Basic texts in this regard would be the works of the Finnish historian Kalervo Hovi, *Cordon sanitaire or barrière de l'Est? The Emergence of the New French Eastern Europe Alliance Policy, 1917-1919* (Turku, 1975) and Hovi, *Interessensphären im Baltikum. Finnland im Rahmen der Ostpolitik Polens 1919-1922* (Helsinki, 1984).

Lithuania can be fully understood: the aim was the weakening of the Polish pressures in favour of building a federation and against the independence. After one of these Lithuanian insistences, initiated during the dead season of summer holidays, the Romanian ambassador in Prague, Dinu C. Hiott, communicated to his Foreign Minister, I.G. Duca on August 25, 1923, that he had received enough signals from Polish diplomats who had suggested him the restriction of contacts with government representatives from Kaunas. Hiott believed, however, that Poland was proving an excessive position and in any case was opposed to the interests of Bucharest as Romania had no reason to continue ignoring a European geopolitical fact: the existence of Lithuania.¹³ I.G. Duca found it necessary to consult also the Romanian ambassador in Warsaw, Alexandru Florescu, in order to obtain a competent view on the relations with the allies in the event of a favourable response to Kaunas. *"Lithuania - wrote the Romanian Foreign Minister on July 20, 1924 - urges us, for more than one year, to establish diplomatic relations. Because of the difficulties it has with Poland, so far we have managed to avoid giving a response. But now we can not postpone a favourable response. Furthermore, we would not want to be offensive to Poland by our decision"*.¹⁴

I.G. Duca asked Al. Florescu to draw up, in the shortest time possible, a comprehensive report reflecting the views of the politicians from Warsaw, in order to obtain the most realistic possible view on the impact of a Romania's favourable decision towards Lithuania. The Romanian Foreign Minister wanted to be known, however, that Bucharest had no reason to refuse the request of Kaunas on the establishment of diplomatic relations.¹⁵ If, however, Poland would have proved unsatisfied with this initiative - continued his exposing Duca - Romania was obliged to take this into account and to decline the Lithuanian's offer¹⁶.

Al. Florescu received with reserve the indications from the Romanian chief diplomat: on August 2, 1924 he visited Count Aleksander Skrzyński, state secretary at the Polish Foreign Ministry, to whom he reminded of the Lithuanian offer and the hesitation of I. G. Duca. Skrzyński insisted that the text of the bilateral Convention on defensive alliance be interpreted as a common position towards both the Soviet Union and Lithuania. Faced with such a radical choice of reading, the Romanian ambassador in Warsaw made an appeal to more calm and rejected in an elegant, but clear manner,

¹³ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (hereafter, AMAE), folder Lithuania 71/1920-1944, vol.4, 251.

¹⁴ Ibid., 253; report no. 38 111 of 20.07.1924 from I.G. Duca (Bucharest) to Alexandru Florescu (Warsaw).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

any plan for joint action against Lithuania, disagreeing also with the excessive interpretation according to which the government from Kaunas would be already a "Sovietized" one.¹⁷ "For me - explained Florescu to Skrzyński - it is becoming increasingly clear that Lithuania is a source of instability, where the flame of a new large conflagration could break out. Romania has as definite aim to keep Lithuania away from those political forces that try to push the government from Kaunas in the common arms of Germany and the Bolshevik Russia".¹⁸

The lack of any impediments to the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with Lithuania - other than those which were due to the categorical position of Poland - but definitely also the attempt to avoid a deliberately abusive interpretation of the text and spirit of the Convention on defensive alliance from March 3, 1921, by including Lithuania with the Soviet aggression factor - led the Romanian Foreign Ministry to take a quick and positive decision. On August 24, 1924, Romania (the last European country, except Poland) announced that it formally recognized the Republic of Lithuanian and that it established diplomatic relations with it at legation level.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, the Romanian gesture was a mimetic one, inspired by foreign policy philosophy from Bucharest to promote and to support the concept of collective security and to deal friendly with all small and medium states in the region in order to maintain the spirit of the peace treaties of 1919-1920, especially the territorial *status quo*. Beyond the formal act, the Romanian- Lithuanian relations remained practically frozen, no actions of solidarity or courtesy being found out. During the two interwar decades neither can be reported even a single visit at government level having taken place, nor it is possible to make an appeal to some important bilateral documents. The human, trade, intellectual exchanges between the two countries had remained at ridiculous levels and there was no large-scale project designed to put an end to the deep hostility, built almost exclusively by the Warsaw regional strategy of alliances. The ephemeral common, historical Romanian-Lithuanian memory, from the time of the reign of Alexander the Good of Moldavia (1400- 432)²⁰ was never referred

¹⁷ Ibid, 255; report no. 3358 of 3.08.1924 from Al. Florescu (Warsaw) to I.G.Duca (Bucharest).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 254.

²⁰ See, e.g.: Constantin Rezachevici, "Ringala-Ana. Un episod dinastic în relațiile moldo-polone- lituaniene din vremea lui Alexandru cel Bun", *Revista de Istorie* 8 (1982): 917- 923; Virgil Ciocîltan, "Raporturi moldo-lituaniene, 1420-1429", in *România în istoria universală*, ed. Gheorghe Buzatu (Iași, 1988), 129-143; Gheorghe David, "Repere româno-lituaniene", *Magazin istoric* 4 (1992): 60. In the latter text one can read an account from 1574 of the Polish traveller Maciej Strykowski who had noticed many similarities between the popular

to in the political and diplomatic relationship: the Polish propaganda clichés invaded in the years '20s, here including even the geographical Lithuanian names, while the Romanian media constantly quoted *Kowno* (and not *Kaunas*), *Litva*, *litoan* (and not *Lithuania*, *Lithuanian*) or *Vilna*, *Wilno* (never *Vilnius*).

The anti-Lithuanian baubles in the Romanian intellectual discourse are not many but they had been taken by the most famous representatives of the elites, and on a concrete level, they had devastating effects on the image of the young republic. Thus, in 1924, invited to take a series of conferences at several universities in Poland²¹, N. Iorga arrived also in Vilnius, the city regained by military means by General Lucjan Żeligowski, on behalf of the Marshal Pilsudski. Here, the scientist launched a strong accusation against the Lithuanian state, widely publicized, arguing that the entry of Lithuania into the Soviet sphere of influence had made it a European threat that must be resolved, including by military means. The capital of Kaunas is the target of heavy irony: “*temporary and artificial city*” which managed to gather shortly after the independence “*individuals chasing a fast career*”, in order to eliminate any Polish historical footprint.²² In another text, printed in 1926 in the magazine “*The Romanian People*” („*Neamul românesc*”), the scientist and politician condemned the “*Marxist Russia*” and its allies, citing as right solution the application of the spirit of the Romanian-Polish Convention of 1921.²³

One year after the normalization of the bilateral relations between Bucharest and Kaunas, the Romanian ambassador in Warsaw, Alexandru Iacovaky, accredited also and in the capitals of the three Baltic republics, was asked by the Foreign Minister to draw up a sum up report. The diplomat, a very experienced professional, with extensive relationships in the good Polish social environments (he was on duty in Warsaw since 1919, when the Romanian Legation had been opened), found it necessary to

customs of commemoration of the dead persons in the villages of Lithuania and in some regions from Moldavia and from Walachia. “*The people from Lithuania, the Litvans - writes Strykowski - use to celebrate the memory of the dead persons, of parents, of mothers and of their relatives, usually in October or, sometimes, at every celebration, singing laments on the graves and weeping, especially the women who enumerate with virtues, the characteristics of householders of their husbands. This custom is kept also in Moldavia and in Walachia, as I have certainly seen in several towns, in Buzău, in Rusciuc, in Giurgiu on the Danube and in Bucharest, the city of residence of the prince of Great Walachia, where in addition to those customs, people light candles and incense the graves.*”

²¹ The impressions were collected in Nicolae Iorga, *Note polone* (București, 1924),

²² Iorga, “*Un colț de Lituania*”, in N. Iorga, *Pe drumuri depărtate*, ed. Valeriu Râpeanu (București, 1987), 535- 538.

²³ Iorga, “*Tratatul cu Polonia*”, *Neamul românesc*, year XXI, no. 73, March 30, 1926.

undertake an extensive pilgrimage among his acquaintances, statesmen and leading politicians. On August 26, 1925, Duca received a highly critical text on the Lithuanian statehood, the internal and external policies of the authorities from Kaunas, impregnated with many assumptions and versions circulating in the Warsaw elite circles. Iacovaky insists on some very tough words like "*Lithuanian xenophobia*", situation of fact which would be intended to destroy, among other things, the German character of the city Memel (Klaipeda). The Romanian diplomat was condemning, without providing conclusive evidence, "*the suspected approaching*" of Lithuania to USSR, inducing the idea that Kaunas effectively participated in the Kremlin's propagandistic diplomacy.²⁴

3. From Kaunas to Bucharest, again through Warsaw

The substantial modification of the internal political regime in Warsaw in mid May 1926 through the coup d'état done by the Marshal Józef Piłsudski, amplified the rumours transmitted by the Polish officials in Bucharest on a possible disintegration of the fragile regional geopolitical balance, by the armed intervention of Lithuania, possibly supported by the Red Army.

Somewhat surprised by this avalanche of rumours, the new Romanian Foreign Minister, I. Mitilineu, installed in early April 1926, requested an accurate assessment of the situation, in the idea of analyzing the opportunities opened by the Romanian-Polish bilateral defensive Convention and also the frozen relations with the USSR. On June 28, 1926, Alexandru Iacovaky sent a comprehensive document on the relations between Warsaw and Kaunas, composed on the basis of the information obtained from the key Polish decision makers. "*Lithuania - wrote Iacovaky to Mitilineu - remains for Poland the Achilles' heel of its international relations*".²⁵ "*When in Warsaw swept over the Civil War*²⁶ - continued Iacovaky -, *the Lithuania's chargé d'affaires in Prague said to Beneš*²⁷ *that the civil war will conquer the whole Poland and that in this situation, Lithuania can not remain indifferent to the fate of its brothers who were under the Polish yoke*".²⁸

²⁴ AMAE, folder Poland 71/1920-1944, vol. 49, 138, report no. 3412 of 26.08.1925 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I.G. Duca (Bucharest).

²⁵ Ibid., 228; report no. 2581 of 28.06.1926 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I. Mitilineu (Bucharest).

²⁶ The street fights from mid May 1926, when the army and Piłsudski seized the state power

²⁷ Edvard Beneš, Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia, the only Member of the Little Entente which had a permanent diplomatic representation in Kaunas.

²⁸ AMAE, folder Poland 71/1920-1944, vol. 49, 228; report no. 2581 of 28.06.1926 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I. Mitilineu (Bucharest).

In parallel with the coup d'état from Warsaw, on the Lithuanian political scene equally important events were taking place: in May 1926 the parliamentary elections for *Seimas* had shaped the defeat of the Christian Democratic Party, the main force of the country after the independence, in favour of the Left (the Social Democratic Party and the Popular Party). Mykolas Sleževičius was sworn Prime Minister in June 15, 1926 and at the end of June the *Seimas* elected the new President of the Republic, in the person of Kažys Grinis. Both were not among those who composed and signed the *Declaration of Independence* of February 16, 1918.²⁹ A complex process of liberalization was started, in the spirit of the Constitution of August 1, 1922, the martial law, in force since 1919, being abolished. The unexpected signature on September 28, 1926, in Moscow, of the non-aggression pact between Lithuania and USSR and the fears of the traditional political, military, intellectual and clerical (Catholic) elites of an annexation of the republic to the Soviets, led to a feverish opposition, grouped around Antanas Smetona and his political group, the Nationalist Lithuanian Union (Lietuviu Tautininku Sąjunga). Together with leaders of the army, during the night of December 16 to 17, 1926, Smetona removed by coup d'état, the constitutional executive power (the President of the Republic and the government) and the legislative (*Seimas*), and installed an authoritarian political regime with a new Constitution, which turned Lithuania into an undemocratic state.

Broadly speaking, one can find a number of similarities between the two actions - Warsaw, in May 1926 and Kaunas, in December 1926 - and between the two new installed regimes. However, the reactions in Bucharest were, as usual, as different and as subjective as possible: as Józef Piłsudski was a close personal friend of the royal family and of the Romanian political elites, the Sanacja masterminded by him was perceived with a great relief and, in many environments, with enthusiasm. The whole critical message against the parliamentary government and against the state established by the Constitution of 1921 was taken over and unanimously approved in Bucharest. Moreover, Piłsudski became, from that moment, a figure of legend, venerated both in the official speeches and in the Romanian press from Bucharest.

However, the action from Lithuania received a glacial reserve and, above all, a general suspicion in both political and diplomatic circles and in public information, although from Warsaw and from Riga the projects and the unfriendly actions against the USSR from the new power in Kaunas

²⁹ "Lietuvos Taryba skelbia Lietuvos neprisklausomybę", *Lietuvos Aidas*, Vilnius, year II, no. 22 (70), February 19, 1918.

were confirmed. Relevant to the attitude adopted by Romania is the fact that neither the Prime Minister, General Alexandru Averescu, nor his Foreign Minister, I. Mitilineu, had found that it would be useful to send to Kaunas an exploratory mission led by the Plenipotentiary Minister in the Lithuanian capital, Alexandru Iacovaky. General Averescu is far from being a partisan of outright position towards Poland and its regional policies: in his previous term as head of government (March 13, 1920 to December 17, 1921), although he accepted the negotiations (led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Take Ionescu) and the conclusion of the Convention of alliance with Poland (on March 3, 1921), he categorically rejected all offers from Warsaw of political and military collaboration, of territorial reconfiguration of the Eastern space by extending the Romanian administration in southern Ukraine.³⁰ Averescu's deep distrust in the capacity of the Polish elites was now exceeded by the inclusion *ab initio* of the Lithuanian state in the of USSR's foreign policy.

In this situation, even before Christmas 1926, the Prime Minister called Al. Iacovaky to prepare a comprehensive paper on the effects of the coup d'état from Kaunas in the joint Romanian-Polish regional policy and in the prospect of the attitude towards USSR. The Romanian Minister in Warsaw requested and immediately obtained on January 8, 1927, a meeting with the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski. *"Immediately after the end of the Great War - was transmitting to Bucharest the chief diplomat in Warsaw, through Iacovaky - the Polish public opinion was divided when it came to the importance of the Baltic problems. Today, these differences of views do not exist any more and all agree to believe that the existence of the independent Baltic states is one of the foundations of our foreign policy, based not only on the recognition by Poland of the right of each nation to dispose of its own fate, but also on the knowledge of the true interests of the Polish state, interests that are, such as experience teaches us, not just those from a recent past, but those gained during the centuries.(...) But our relations with Lithuania are not such as we would have wanted to see them. The Lithuanians will understand that it is impossible to continue their policy of suicide, that the understanding and the friendship with a*

³⁰ See in this regard: Florin Anghel, "Okupacja Pokucja przez Armie Rumuńska (24 maja-początek sierpnia 1919) i początki stosunki polsko-rumuńskich", *Przegląd Historyczny* LXXXIX, 2 (1998): 251-261; Anghel, "Între latrodictium și ordine legală. Perspectivele alianței româno-polone în contextul conflictului militar dintre Polonia și Rusia Sovietică (1919-1921)", *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană* VI (2007): 5-12. For the entire political and military activity of Alexander Averescu, see the excellent monograph of Petre Otu, *Mareșalul Alexandru Averescu- militarul, omul politic, legenda* (București, 2005).

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*strong Poland is the best basis and the best guarantee of a favourable development of their national independence.”*³¹

In this long expose of his interlocutor, Iacovaky considered necessary to convince General Averescu that after the political changes occurred in Warsaw and Kaunas, within just half a year, it was expected that the nationalist regime of Antanas Smetona repudiates the good traditions in the relations with Germany and the Soviet Union and seeks a rapprochement with Poland, under the choice of “lesser evil”. *„The view often heard in Poland - wrote the Romanian minister in Warsaw on January 12, 1927 - is that between two powerful and greedy neighbours (USSR and Germany), Lithuania will ultimately choose the third one (Poland), which can more easily guarantee the independence, without threatening it with the danger of absorption”*³² Moreover, the Romanian Premier also learned that, within the new political context, Marshal Pilsudski was more willing than ever to make peace and that, under these conditions, he offered to the authorities from Kaunas projects of collaboration. The General Averescu knew already, through a document sent one day before, on January 11, 1927, by the same Al. Iacovaky (before he met August Zaleski) that *“what Pilsudski wants is to restore trade relations (between Poland and Lithuania), and especially the navigation on Niemen, then the access on the Lithuanian territory to the Polish citizens on the basis of passports in order and rail transit on the Lithuanian railway. Pilsudski also said that he will not annex any meter from the Lithuanian territory that what he wants is the end of the state of war and the reestablishment of normal relations”*.³³

The arguments of Marshal Pilsudski and his Foreign Minister, August Zaleski, in favour of the Polish-Lithuanian reconciliation had failed to persuade General Averescu. First, the head of the Romanian government was extremely irritated by the fact that Warsaw avoided to transmit to Bucharest its references on the ideological characteristics of the regime Smetona. Then Averescu had not clearly known the intentions of the authorities from Kaunas with respect to the relations with the USSR, Germany and Poland, especially since the Prime Minister no longer wanted to hear about a new dispute on the interpretation of the text of the Romanian-Polish Convention from March 3, 1921. A state of conflict on the Polish-Lithuanian border conflict would attract, as the General knew well, an unexpected request by Romania to intervene immediately, politically

³¹ A.M.A.E., fond Poland 71/1920/ 1944, vol. 1, 170; report no. 172 of 12.01.1927 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I. Mitilineu (Bucharest).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., vol. 48, 252; telegram no. 117 of 11.01.1927 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to General Alexandru Averescu (Bucharest).

and militarily. The Prime Minister did not want such a situation - he had rejected it unequivocally also in 1921 - but now he was terribly concerned also because of the internal situation, following closely the cancer disease in terminal phase of King Ferdinand I. As the future king, Michael, was only six years, the future of the Romanian constitutional monarchy was put in a quite questionable light. For these reasons, in early February 1927, Al. Iacovaky received the mission to obtain from Marshal Pilsudski and from the Foreign Minister, August Zaleski, as many details as possible about the regional strategic Polish intentions and about the new configuration of the Lithuania's foreign policy. It would be worth emphasizing, once again, that General Averescu did not have the initiative to send his envoy to Kaunas, to meet Antanas Smetona and to get the expected answers.

Therefore, on February 8, 1927, August Zaleski sent to the authorities from Bucharest, through Al. Iacovaky, some of the requested messages. *"The Government from Kaunas - the Polish Foreign Minister set forth - does not enjoy a parliamentary majority, it is at the discretion of a military occult that represents the integral nationalism and prohibits both an approach to Russia and an enfeoffment to the Germany's policy. Recently, Germany has proposed a loan to Lithuania, which it would have had great need, but it put as a condition the conclusion of a customs union between Germany and Lithuania. The military government opposed the proposal. The relations with Russia are also bad; the measures taken against the Lithuanian Communists angered the Soviets".* ³⁴

Zaleski confirmed to the Romanian diplomat what he had learned from Jules Laroche, the French ambassador in Warsaw, a few days earlier, namely that *"Lithuania's relations with Germany and Russia are far from being good ones and the moment is appropriate to restore contact between Lithuania and Poland."*³⁵ Both Laroche and Zaleski had sent also their deep reserves on the nature, more than transitory, of the regime established by Smetona, focusing on the lack of popular support, other than a small and improvised army. The chief of the Polish diplomacy said even that he found that the Lithuanian nationalist leader would have been rather the prisoner of an inspired act by some ambitious officers with clear political aspirations. *"At the head of the Lithuanian military conspiracy - he said to Iacovaky during their long meeting on February 8, 1927 - are two Russian officers: the former admiral Dovkont, who became today Dookontas, and a former Polish officer from the guard, Plechowicz, who became today Plechovicus. The two men compel recognition to the mass of improvised Lithuanian officers both by the superiority of their military culture, and by courage. They have in hand the whole army. Their*

³⁴ Ibid., folder Poland 71/1920-1944, vol. 1, 174; report no. 600 of 8.02.1927 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I. Mitilineu (Bucharest).

³⁵ Ibid.

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action is exercised in secret but it is also the determining factor of Lithuanian politics".³⁶

Two days later, on February 10, 1927, in the well heated halls of the small palace Belwedere, Marshal Piłsudki was receiving, extremely friendly, the emissary of the Romanian Prime Minister, expressing satisfaction that he could prove to General Averescu, also a hero of the World War I, the practical utility of their bilateral alliance. The Marshal did not hide his fear of a revaluation, in Moscow, of the Soviet strategies towards the European neighbours, in the context of an apparent isolation of the USSR. In this context, hoped Piłsudski, Romania will rethink its strategic relationship with Poland and agree to become more active in the Baltic region, in order to succeed, through joint efforts, a new strategy on medium and long term. *„I do not believe - continued the Marshall - that there is currently any connection between Germany's and Russia's policies. Germany can not accept that at its own borders, in Lithuania, develops freely a Bolshevik propaganda (...). The concordance of the German-Russian interests having ceased, with respect to the policy of these two states in Lithuania, the Soviet leaders fear not to miss Germany's support in general matters.”*³⁷ Piłsudski also wanted that Romania maintained on short and medium term its reserved relationship with Lithuania, strictly controlled by Warsaw. This was necessary, in the Polish view, as long as the regime from Kaunas was redefining its relations with the USSR and Germany and, of course, set highly personalized relationship with Poland.

Iacovaky was very sceptical regarding a new geopolitical optimistic strategy, due to some spectacular Lithuanian actions. He advised the General Averescu rather not to promise anything to the Poles and to await a possible thawing of the relations with the regime from Kaunas. *„Germany - considered, on May 25, 1927, the Romanian Minister in Warsaw - will not consent to reconciliation between Warsaw and Kowno (Kaunas) than in return for specific benefits. Otherwise it has no interest in getting out of the Poland' heel the thorn that is for her the Lithuania's intransigence with respect to question of Vilna. (...) The anti-communist tendency of the dictatorial government from Kowno is expressed in the measures it takes against the Soviet agents.”*³⁸

The very limited observations that the Romanian diplomacy had used whenever it was about its relationship with Lithuania were due to the lack of first-source information, the lack of imagination in the configuration of

³⁶ Ibid., 175.

³⁷ Ibid., 175-178; report no. 655 of 11.02.1927 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to I. Mitilineu (Bucharest).

³⁸ Ibid., folder Lithuania 71/1920-1944, vol. 1, 4; report no. 2282 from 25.05.1927 from Alexandru Iacovaky (Warsaw) to the General Alexandru Averescu (Bucharest).

normal political and diplomatic relations, to the full ascendant of the Polish diplomacy with respect to the Romanian interests in the North and North-Eastern Europe and, last but not least, to the comfortable feeling of doing not much on one's own will. The authorities from Bucharest chose to consider the Baltic region as a marginal one in terms of interest and direction of action and, therefore, they have cancelled all strategies, objectives and own means. Only in the late '30s, when it was becoming obvious that there were deep connections and information on the belonging to the same geopolitical space claimed by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, timid efforts of collaboration and mutual support were initiated. Any glimmer of hope was brutally destroyed in June 1940, with the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Herta region to the USSR.

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