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SECTION **Targoviste 1999**
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Tome I

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American public and official attitude On the political developments in Romania (1930-1939)

*Ion STANCIU**

Detaching this narrow aspect from the broad context to whom it belongs might not be an easy task. It is, instead, a rewarding one taking into account the fact that it can reveal how the American perceived a major political development in the distant South-Eastern Europe just on the eve of the Second World War.

Charles and his political intentions had first come to the attention of the American public in the year 1930, on the wave of the general improvement taking place ever since 1928 in the American-Romanian relations. The change was due to the National Peasant Government led by Iuliu Maniu, which coming into power in November 10, 1929, engaged itself openly in a systematic effort to dissipate the feeling and even dislike with which Romania was regarded in many foreign countries in the past.[1] Many of the well known economic measures taken by the new government (the amendment introduced in The Mining Law, the stabilization lown ... etc) were all designed to modify the negative impression previously created by the liberals. The promises made to the foreign interests had indeed succeeded to produce a more favorable impression abroad about Romania, including in the American press which presented the Maniu government as "a chance" to "democratize" Romania. Iuliu Maniu had even added a special stress on his American sympathies, publicly declaring that "it is my aim to introduce into Romania American efficiency and scientific management. Indeed, both politically and commercially the United States has always been my ideal of a state".[2]

The King Charles himself was also paying a special attention to encouraging better relations with the U.S. and as a result he shared the same favorable impression on the part of the American press and public. Even before his return to Romania, while staying abroad and preparing his political future moves, he had carefully included in his press conferences, along with mentioning other powers, appeals to the American economic and financial interests, to help rebuilding Romanian economy.[3] Following

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his accession to the throne, one of the first constitutional acts that Charles the 2nd did, was to promulgate the telephone concession to the American trust ITT, which also happen to be the first major concession made to foreign investors, in Romania, under the new law on the organization and administration on commercial bases of the public enterprises (March 16, 1929). The new monarch has also declared to the press that in his plans for Romanian's development a particular importance was attached to the participation of American interests and that personally, he had "a great admiration" for the American people.[4]

In a conversation with Trandafir Djuvara, responsible in the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs for the American problems, Charles the 2nd has confessed to be, in 1931, "greatly interested in the US and especially in cultivating as much as possible friendly relations with the Americans", an interest which dated, as Djuvara put it, back in 1920, from the time of Charles first visit in the United States.[5]

In the general effort under way in 1930-1931 to build a special relation with the United States, Charles the 2nd has obviously become a central figure as the Romanian Minister to Washington, Citta Davila, was quickly to understand. Owing his appointment to Iuliu Maniu, in October 1929, Davila was strongly convinced that Romania had to have closer ties the US, especially economic relations because, he believed, "The XXth century would be, no doubt, the American century and Romania could not afford not to be present on this market" (American market); in connection with this he noticed, in a report in 1931, the good reputation that king enjoyed in the US and its key importance, emphezing that "the return of His Majesty King Charles has produced in America a consolidating impression and the belief that the conflicts and the discussions over the Romanian dynasty will be terminated". Davila also mentioned that all the prominent Americans who had recently met the King "came back with the extremely favorable opinion and conviction the his Majesty's personality would be able to press for more discipline in the political life and would be a guarantee for foreign investors".[6]

Along with the economic propaganda organized in the US by those American firms interested in attracting public attention on Romanian's economic perspectives, the King's posture and promises has sensibly improved, in the years 1930-1931, the American attitude towards the Romanian affairs. Even the problem of Jewish protests in the US against anti-Semitic disturbances in Romania, which had previously caused a great concern among Jewish organizations seemed now to solved, as the King promised that he would not tolerate any Semitic policy.[7]

But during the next period, while the economic cooperation has been subjected to the influence of the unfavorable general conditions created by

the recession, the American public was also confronted with another image about Charles the 2nd of Romania. Starting the very summer of 1931, the American press was flooding with details on the King's private life, following his divorce. Even the Californian press registered such details together with the first comments speculating on a possible royal dictatorship in Romania.[8] As these details were to become richen the following years, it was increasingly obvious that the American press was preferring the bad news about the dynasty to the good ones concerning the economic achievements of the Romanian governments after 1930. Repudiating such inadmissible news became, soon one more task intrusted by the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Romanian legation in Washington. Interventions were made to the big American press agencies to stop publishing news about the royal family and camarila, agreements have been concluded with the buros of the same agencies abroad, especially in Vienna, where most of the news were coming from, but in spite of all efforts and the important funds spent on this counter-actions, the negative news about Charles the 2nd could not be stopped but on the contrary, they proliferated.[9] The Romanian legation staff was doing "everything possible",[10] but the bad news once published it was very hard if not impossible to be repudiated. In the same time, all qualified members in the Romanian mission were involved on other different fronts, trying to explain to the American public the unsound revision propaganda, which after 1931 was on the rise in the United States. In 1935 this propaganda reached a peak, while after the murdering of I.G. Duca, in December 1933, by the Iron Guards, increased, once again, the American concern about the Jewish problem. In 1935 the all leading American newspaper were taken a dim view of this situation in Romania,[11] and in January 1936 both the Secretary of States and President Roosevelt showed a special interest in the matters.[12] This was mostly more projection of the fears created by the anti-Semitic measures taken in Nazi Germany, and the American legation in Bucharest answered to such fears conveying assurances that in Romania the situation wasn't the same and the fears were baseless.[13] On the whole, in 1936 the impression about Romania, as revealed by the American press, was however contradictory. Everything leads to the conclusion that this impression was confused; not all the factors acting to influence the situation in Romania were known and understood in the U.S. At one point, in 1936, the American press predicted a new pro-German orientation in the Romanian foreign policy.[14] This proved to be undone and a few months later the same press praised the determination showed by the Tatarescu Government against the disturbances of the extreme right movements, while other American newspapers remained skeptical, suspecting Tatarescu Government of anti-Semitic intentions. In November 1937 the new

Tatarescu Government was even more credited with such plans, and the American press was also critical about the electoral pact concluded by the National Peasant Party with the Iron Guard.[15] The same American press which for years had presented Iuliu Maniu as the main promoter of democracy in Romanian political life was now openly engaged in blaming him for discrediting his party because of this alliance with the legionaries.[16]

However, at the end of 1937 in the United States, as well as in Europe, the public attention was focus, once again, on Charles the 2nd political intention. The old apprehensions as to his plans for a dictatorship were reviving especially among the American high officials. Both the State Department and the White House have insistently questioned Davila on the prospects of continuing democracy in Romania and President Roosevelt has even asked the Romanian minister to convey a message to the King, "expressing hope that he would be able to keep Romania within the sphere of Democracy".[17] This development strengthened Davila's own position vis-a-vis his superiors in Bucharest, as a conflict between them had broken out on the problem of what should be the main purpose of Romanian propaganda in the United States. Ever since the beginning of the bad press against the King, Davila has been convinced that it was rather natural for the Romanian diplomat in the US not to get too much involved in disputes with the sensational press on this subject[18] and in 1937, when Romanian Government had sent in the United States a special propaganda mission, led by Nicolae Ciotori,[19] Davila took this as a personal offence as well a clear sign that his views were no longer consonant with this superiors. On December 6, 1937 Davila announced his resignation and on January 15, 1938, in a report addressed not only to his chiefs but also to the press, the political leaders and to the King himself, the former minister to Washington tried to warn on the fact that "the great majority of our political life has as far as our action in America is concerned wrong ideas, I think". In any anticipated American participation in a peace conference, he wrote, not the American public but the political leadership, the senators and the President will decide on the US action in the Romanian problems "and such an action can be only in our favor if Romania proceeds in accordance with the principles of American democracy". "If we cannot mention this impression (that Romania is a democracy), no propaganda, no matter how costly, will ever have an effect here, and if domestic reasons makes such a dictatorship necessary in Romania – he went on – it would require big founds to explain to the American this need and the result would remain however doubtful as the English press would be more convincing in the opposite direction".[20]

This warning came at the very moment when in the US the protest in reaction to the measures taken by Goga Government against the Jewish

immigrants reached a peak, in January 1938[21]. By the time the royal dictatorship was set up (February 10, 1938), the American press depicted the event in the gloomiest way. This image also dominated the comments regarding the situation in Romania during the following months but one can also detect signs of a new development. A change was under way, in American reaction, as the tense international relations in Europe asked for more realism. The complexity of the Romanian domestic and foreign situation seemed to get more meaning at least for some of the American newspapers which concerned with a possible weakening of Anglo-French influence in Romania and in the whole South-Eastern Europe, was ready now to read the events differently and accept the royal dictatorship somehow as a happy solution to the crisis of Romanian democracy and a streghening of the Anglo-French positions.[22]

In the high political quarters in Washington this change was even more obvious as in the press. In June 1938 President Roosevelt was making positive remarks on the situation in Romania during "a long and friendly" audience granted to Dimitrie Gusti, the commissioner intrusted to organize the Romanian participation to the New York World Fare, in 1939. The Romanian's reputation was to rise sensibly in the eyes of the American public especially as a result of her loyal stand during the Munich crisis, which didn't remained unnoticed in the United States.[23]

In October 1938, while arranging at the State Department for his formal meeting with President Roosevelt, in order to present his credentials, the new Romanian minister in the United States, Radu Irimescu was surprised, for instance to the great interest paid by the secretary of State Cordell Hull to the Romanian situation, in the light of "what next after Czechoslovakia".[24] While Irimescu was trying to describe the royal dictatorship as a "menaged democracy" and "organized democracy", Cordell Hull advised him not to pay attention, on this matter, to the press attacks.[25] The Under Secretary of State Summer Wells showed also the same concern as to the international situation in Eastern Europe and the President Roosevelt himself, if we are to believe Constantine Brown, a well known American journalist acting in Vienna, was deeply interested in the developments in Central and South-Eastern Europe, although he publicly canceled this interest. In February 1939, the President had expressed, during a long conversation with Brown – his views that the US borders were no longer on the Pacific and Atlantic but in Finland, Romania, Turkey and Persia, as any new Nazi victory over countries like these meant another threat, a closer one, for the United States.[26.]

In the Spring of 1939 Romanian's position was obviously better known in the United States owing both to her resistance to the revisionism and aggression and to the general dramatic conditions in Europe. More

favorable comments in the American press were advocating for supporting the Romanian effort to buy arms and ammunitions from the United States,[27] and participation in the New York World Fare turned not only into a successful exhibition but also in a major opportunity to express American public sympathies toward Romania. On May 6, 1939, at the official opening of the Romania pavilion, the New York Major, La Guardia urged Romania "to resist the barbarians" while the audience was applauding franticly his words.[28] President Roosevelt promised also to Dimitrie Gusti, in June 1938, to use his influence with the King of England in order to help efficiently Romania.[29] The American president was convinced, and voiced his opinion to the King during his visit in the United States, that Romania would have to be supported by every possible means. This attitude was highly appreciated in Bucharest, as being symptomatic for the symphaty Romania enjoyed at that moment in the United States.

As a conclusion, one should say that to those Americans watching, for different reasons, the political situation in Romania under the Royal dictatorship, 1938 and 1939 were very interesting, contradicting their common image about the work of democracy and dictatorship in South-Eastern Europe.

Notes:

1. U.S. National Archives, in Washington, Record Group 59, decimal file 1910-1929, doc. nr. 87100/239, to be cited as USNA, RG. 59, d.f. ... doc...;
2. "Romania" (New York), July 1929, p. 47;
3. State National Archives in Bucharest, Fond Casa Regala, Carol al II-lea, folder 105/1930, Letter by Henry Mayerson to M.C. Dumitrescu, the King's secretary, dated New York, July 20, 1930;
4. "La Nation roumain", June 13, 1930;
5. State National Archives in Bucharest, Fond Casa Regala, Carol al II-lea folder 87/1931, p. 6;
6. Ibidem, p. 9-10;
7. Ibidem, folder 112/1930, telegram of the Romanian Jewish Committe of America, to Charles the 2nd, dated August 2, 1931;
8. See "The San Francisco News", August 4,1931;
9. See State National Archives in Bucharest, Fond Casa Regala, Carol al II-lea, folder 114/1936, Davila's letter, from December 14, to King and Foreign Minister, folder 54/1937, p. 1-5, 55/1937, p. 1-2;
10. Ibidem, folder 96/1938, Davila's letter,January 8, 1938;
11. Ibidem, folder 1928/1935, p. 23;

12. USNA, RG 59, d.f. 1929-1939, doc. 8714016 Jewish/37;
13. Ibidem, doc, 8714016 Jewish/36;
14. The Archives of the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, in Bucharest, Fond 71/1920-1944, vol. 11, USA Presa p. 33; cited as MFAA, ...
15. Ibidem, p. 277, Rosenthal's report, December 4 1937;
16. Ibidem;
17. USNA, RG 59, d.f. 1928-1939, doc. 87100/557 (Memo on a conversation on 31 Dec. 1937);
18. State National Archives, Fond Casa Regala, Carol al II-lea, folder 174/1932, p. 1;
19. MFAA, Fond 71/1920, vol. 37 SUA, p. 259-263
20. Ibidem;
21. Ibidem, see p. 290, 294, 295, 300-303, 308;
22. Ibidem, see p. 309;
23. Ibidem, vol. 12 SUA, presa, f. 344;
24. Ibidem, vol. 30, probleme economice SUA, p. 177-185, Irimescu's report, dated November 1, 1938;
25. Ibidem;
26. Ibidem, vol. 13 SUA presa, p. 173, 174;
27. Ibidem, see p. 217-218;
28. Ibidem, vol. 38 SUA, p. 47, 100;
29. Ibidem.