

## **The Premises of the Romanian-Polish Alliance on the Backdrop of the Military Conflict between Poland, Ukraine and Soviet Russia (1919-1921)**

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**Abstract:** This article approaches background of the alliance between Romania and Poland in the complex circumstances of the remaking of the political and ideological map of East-Central Europe in the aftermath of World War I. Poland was deeply involved in the process and a war broke out between Warsaw and Moscow, regarded with reserve in Bucharest. From a larger span of possibilities, a compromise was reached and a political - military alliance concluded between Poland and Romania in March 1921. The new alliance had no roots in historical continuity or tradition. The mutual attitude towards Moscow prevailed in the general framework of relations.

Poland's regained independence and the unification of all territories inhabited by the Romanians into one State – Greater Romania (after the plebiscites of 1918 March 27/Bessarabia, November 28/Bukovina, December 1/Transylvania) called for the establishment of a new type of relations in the geographical and political space between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

Research work into the Romanian archives showed that the official recognition of the Polish State by Romania was announced in January 1919. In a previously unpublished letter addressed on January 12, 1919 to Ion I. C. Brătianu, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Polish Premier Ignacy Paderewski voiced the interest of Warsaw in finding a common way of establishing "*friendly relations*" which would promote the "*grandiose work of civilization in Europe*". In quoted mentioned text, Paderewski also underlined: "The *avantgarde* of Western culture, Romania and Poland, in collaboration with the great civilized democracies, will work together to implement the great project of organizing new Europe, where political and social pacification are guarantees and preexistent conditions of the decisive triumph of the principles of justice and right" (Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe/AMAE fond 71/1914, vol. 190, p. 4; letter by Ignacy Paderewski to Ion I. C. Brătianu, January 12, 1919; Anghel, Mareș, Preda, 2003: 9-10).

On January 17, 1919, Mihail Pherekyde, President of the Senate and Prime Minister *ad-interim* of Romania, announced that the public opinion in Romania had "*witnessed the reestablishing of Poland in her rights and independence by Europe*". In agreement with Paderewski's expectations, the head of the Romanian government officially declared that "*our countries will assume the noble mission devolved upon them in the face of the danger of anarchy which is threatening from all parts*" (AMAE, Fond Problema 82, vol. 94, p. 5; letter by Mihail Pherekyde to Ignacy Paderewski, January 17, 1919).

Do the two texts point to a convergence of objectives, strategies and means adopted by diplomats in Bucharest and Warsaw? Certainly not. Basically, the two states had to defend a reality occurred at the end of the World War I. However, the action taken by each had its own particularities.

Romanian élites aimed and acted so as to preserve the *statu-quo* created at Versailles, under the circumstances in which her territories were claimed by neighboring state: Bessarabia, by Soviet Russia; Transylvania, by Hungary; Southern Dobroudja, by Bulgaria; part of the Banat, by Serbia.

In order to preserve the political realities of the peace treaties of 1919 – 1920, Romania also embarked upon military operations. In response to the provoking actions by the Communist government of Budapest, the Romanian troops marched into Hungary and established a military administration in Budapest in August-November 1919, undoubtedly with the consent of the Allies. Similarly, in order to prevent a territorial link between Communist Hungary and the Red Army through Northern Bukovina, Bucharest agreed to Poland's proposal of military collaboration in Eastern Galitia (Alexandrescu, Preda, Prodan, 1994; for the Hungarian standpoint Juhasz, 1979; Denize, 2003: 90-106).

The Romanian troops administered Pocutia (the South-Eastern area of Galitia) in May-August 1919 (Anghel, 1998; Anghel, 2007: 5-12; Stepniak, 1992).

The signing on March 3, 1921 of the political and military alliance with Poland was an important stage in the international evolution of Romania. It was the first treaty of alliance signed by the government in Bucharest after the end of World War I (outside the Little Entente) and, in fact, one of the only three bilateral treaties signed by Romania in the entire Inter-War period (in 1926, with France and Italy).

Bilateral negotiations for the signing of treaties of alliance were lengthy and closely determined by development on the Polish-Bolshevik front. Romania's attitude changed with the progress of the Red Army. Thus, when the Bolsheviks posed a serious threat to Bessarabia (March 1920), military negotiations were held at Warsaw, in which the Romanians showed their willingness to cooperate with Poland in the implementation of the federalist project in Eastern Europe. General Tadeusz Rozwadowski's visit to Bucharest (May 1920) coincided with the success of the Polish offensive in Ukraine (occupation of Kiev). On the occasion, King Ferdinand of Romania voiced his intention to interfere directly, with military support to the Polish troops; however the plan was rejected by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Take Ionescu, and by the leaders of the Liberal Party (Dascălu, 1991; Bulhak, 1973). The Prime Minister himself, General Alexander Averescu, conditioned negotiations for the signing of a convention upon the ending of the Polish -Bolshevik war and the acceptance of a peace between the two belligerents (Bulhak, Zielinski, 1980: 179-190; Dascălu, 1991).

Romania's position towards the Polish- Bolshevik war was based on several essential political and military issues:

1. The propagandistic support to Polish actions by the political class, the intellectual élites and the Romanian public opinion was evident. The press of the time- the most notable newspapers -, as well as the public stands of prominent figures testify to it.
2. Romania was highly interested in an international recognition of her new territorial status. The Union of Bessarabia to Romania on March 27, 1918 had been disavowed by the Bolsheviks and Nationalist Ukrainians. There is no doubt that Poland could help Romania in this direction.
3. Romania was extremely sensitive to revisionist actions by Hungary. Peaceful and calm relations between Poland and Hungary were a preoccupation to the Romanian government; at the same time, the Romanians firmly rejected the idea of Warsaw insisting on and mediating the relations between Bucharest and Budapest.

One may add that Romania's relations to Soviet Russia and to Nationalist Ukraine were

constant kept at a low level; the Bolsheviks did not recognize the incorporation of Bessarabia into the Romanian State and were a constant menace at the border on the Dneestr. The Nationalist Hetman Semion Petliura made a consistent offer to the Romanian State: “*the imposed border*” on the Dneestr could become a “*permanent border*” (terms employed by Petliura himself) (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 301, p.115; Duțu, 2001: 31-50; Rotari, 2001: 51-65), provided the Romanian troops withdrew immediately from Pocutia (in the Summer of 1919) and any political and military support to Poland in the issue of Eastern Galitia was stopped (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 301, p.110). Romania rejected this offer as categorically as she had rejected the Polish projects of collaboration in the administration of Ukraine. There is information that Warsaw proposed Bucharest the establishment of a “*Romanian-Polish protectorate in Ukraine, under the authority of the Society of Nations*” (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 61, p. 8-10; Anghel, 2001: 5-9), in the idea of a common anti-Soviet front, and even the partitioning of Southern Russia on condition that the Romanians occupy the Northern shore of the Black Sea, with the port of Odessa (Moisuc, 1991: 241).

So as to collect as much information as possible on the attitude of in Polish political circles in some issues essential to Romania (especially the relations to Hungary), as well as on the military and political capacity of Poland to put up resistance against Soviet Russia, the Romanian diplomacy made at the beginning of the Summer of 1920 a survey of the Polish leaders. The minister in Warsaw, Al. Florescu, began by contacting Roman Dmowski. The leader of the National Democratic Party appeared to be an advocate of the Romanian – Polish alliance and openly rejected the idea of a Polish- Hungarian rapprochement, since he believed that “*Hungary will always gravitate to Germany*”. Dmowski suggested to the Romanian diplomat that the government in Bucharest should oppose any support to an independent Ukraine (formula put forward by Pilsudski), as the first action of any government in Kiev would be to claim Galitia and Bessarabia (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 302, p. 60-63).

In his turn, Prince Eustachy Sapieha insiste on a novel political formula, namely an alliance among Poland, Romania and Hungary. The Romanian- Polish collaboration was considered essential to international relations in Central Europe. However, Sapieha believed that Poland would be in favor of a mediation followed by an agreement between Romania and Hungary. In answer to this daring project, Al. Florescu remarked that this proposal “*is beyond human limits*”, since “*the only relations that Romania can have with Hungary are those of friendly neighborhood*” (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol.61, p.137-138), under the circumstances in which tension and diffidence prevailed in the relations between the two countries. The Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs Stanislaw Patek offered the Romanian Minister to Warsaw a general plan of military operations and political reorganization of Ukraine which, undoubtedly, did not convince. The conclusion to be reached was that Poland could not be trusted in her capacity to put up resistance against Soviet Russia or in her ability to organize Eastern Europe – be it into a federation. It is in fact what Al. Florescu transmitted to Bucharest on June 1, 1920: “*For the time being, close friendship and permanent contacts with Poland; however, not political agreements*” (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 302: 59).

The bilateral Romanian- Polish alliance settled on March 3, 1921 was a political-military project with no roots in historical continuity or tradition. The mutual attitude towards Moscow prevailed in the general framework of relations. No less true is the fact that some essential strategic elements were taken into consideration by the Romania, when settling this alliance. Perhaps this is why Bucharest looked with reserve upon the Polish campaign in the East and did not participate in the plans of federalization of Eastern Europe. Quite telling for the Romanian perception of the Polish- Bolshevik conflict is a confidential report by the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed to the Prime Minister on November 7, 1919: “*the Poles do not wish to forget their past, they are hypnotized by the idea of their historical borders. Intoxicated with the memory of their past grandeur, the Poles are even*

*more intoxicated with the success, quite deserving, although somewhat easy, of their armies which are making their way into the heart of Russia, without much resistance. It seems that the Poles do have a clear idea about a line not to be crossed*" (AMAE, Fond 71/1914, vol. 61, p. 39).

Based on these testimonies, we can explain the differences among the official, public support to Poland's actions in the East (including diplomatic and military measures, as in the case of Pocuția) and the reluctance to become directly involved in the conflict against the Soviets and Ukraine.

The memoirs or journals kept by the Romanian political figures of the time testify to the sympathy for the Polish cause. Reference is made here especially to Queen Maria (Maria, Regina României, 1996), the Prime Ministers - Ion I. C. Brătianu and General Al. Averescu -, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Take Ionescu (Take Ionescu, 1921) or the prominent scientist and politician N. Iorga (N. Iorga, 1940). One should necessarily add here the consistent efforts by the Polish Minister to Bucharest, Count Aleksander Skrzynski, to obtain the needed support. Skrzynski's relations to the Romanian elite, the Royal Palace (especially Queen Maria, an advocate of the idea of a common border), the political and university circles, and the leadership of the most prominent newspapers in Bucharest contributed no doubt to a better strengthening of bilateral relations. The key moments in the Polish- Bolshevik war, especially the occupation of Kiev and the battle at the gates of Warsaw, greatly aroused the interest of the Romanian public opinion. As a rule, Romanian newspapers published on the front page the latest news from inside the country or abroad with direct implications on the situation in Romania (the military campaign in Transylvania and Hungary of May- November 1919 or the daily squabbles with the Bolshevik bands on the Dneestr, in Bessarabia). However, the war waged by Poland became a major topic to the Romanians, and the developments on the front, as well as the talks and negotiations carried out by Warsaw with the Allies and the Bolsheviks became widely publicized in the Romanian press.

In order to bring the light the clear intentions of the Romanian diplomacy towards Poland, we wish to bring into discussion two other events that occurred at the end of the military Polish – Bolshevik conflict, in the autumn of 1920. To begin with, Romania got over the press campaign of "Rzeczpospolita" against the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs Take Ionescu. With as a starting point the idea of rejecting the plan of the Little Entente with 5 participants, as promoted by Take Ionescu, the Polish newspaper launched a heavy and unprecedented attack against the Romanian dignitary in its issue of October 7, 1920: "*when the Bolsheviks armies were marching into Poland and when the public opinion in Bucharest was overexcited with the fact that the government was considering the possibility of offering us assistance, the newspapers inspired by the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs sweetly explained that despite all the love for Poland, Romania could not take such an unwise step*" ("Rzeczpospolita", Warszawa, 7.10.1920). It was already demonstrated that things stood differently.

In addition, at the beginning of November 1920, Take Ionescu made an official visit to Warsaw, in an effort to persuade Poland to enter the Little Entente and, on the other hand, to review the project of bilateral conventions of alliance. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, an advocate of the Polish cause in Galitia before Paris, was very interested in the progress of negotiations with the Soviets and the future Romanian- Polish policy towards the Soviets (Xeni, 1933); at the same time, the idea of collaboration despite the tensions with Hungary (for Romania) or Czechoslovakia (Poland) was decisively triumphant.

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