

Gabriel MICU

**BESSARABIA, ROMANIA AND THE  
GREAT POWERS' GEOPOLITICS  
(1914-1947)**



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## **PREFACE**

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### AN IMPORTANT MONOGRAPIC STUDY REGARDING ROMANIAN-SOVIET REPORTS

Gabriel Micu, PhD in history's book deals with a subject of capital importance for knowing the relations of the Romanian people with its great and terrible Eastern neighbor: Czarist Russia, then Democratic Russia and finally Bolshevik Russia. Gabriel Micu's monograph is the result of prolonged and serious research. He examined an impressive bibliography on the subject, studied published documents regarding external policies, but also – very important – identified and introduced new documentary springs, discovered in different archives, in the scientific circuit.

The time at which this study sees the light of printing is also important. We are witness to an unprecedented offensive of the neo-Stalinist historiography trend representatives, that bluntly justify the Bolshevik regime internal and external policy, including the USSR expansionist policy in the Balkans. Thus, in 2006, the Russian historic Mihail Meliduhov printed a monograph trying to prove that Bessarabia's soviet rapt of 1940 was nothing more than a campaign of liberation of the Prut-Dniester space<sup>1</sup>. As a response to the Moldavian Republic interim President's Decree of June 24th 2010, by which June 28th 1940 was declared "soviet occupation day", the leaders of the Russian Foundation "Historical Perspective" decided to reprint Mihail Meliduhov's monograph under a different name<sup>2</sup>, in the preface the heads of the Foundation underlining: (at June 28th 1940) "Bessarabia was freed from Romanian occupation and reunited with USSR. With regards to the north of Bucovina, in this case, this territory was united with USSR and the new boundary between the Prut and the Carpathians was established"<sup>3</sup>. And as if the Russians' effort in the tendentious Soviet-Romanian relations were insufficient, at the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Melitiuhov Mihail, *Osvoboditelniĭ pobod Stalina. Bessarabschii vopros v sovetsko-rumânschih otnošeniiab (1917-1940)* (Stalin's liberation Campaign. The problem of Bessarabia in Soviet-Romanian relations (1917-1940)), Moscova, Editors „Yauza" and „Exmo", 2006. - 512 p.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Bessarabschii vopros mejdu mirovimi voïnami. 1917-1940* (The problem of Bessarabia between the two world wars (1917-1940)), Moscova, Editor „Vece", 2010. - 464 p.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

2010, in Chişinău, an excellently executed book sees the light of print, in which two controversial historians, the authors, vehemently defend the position of imperial Soviet historiography<sup>4</sup>.

This is why the apparition of Gabriel Micu's monograph is, at this time, especially important. The book is a competent, balanced study, knowingly edited, without "nazarian" hysterics.

After an introduction in which the author convincingly argued the choice of this theme, the chronological frame etc., G. Micu portrayed the historiographic aspects of the Bessarabian issue in the policy of great powers. Not exhaustively, but selectively, the author presented the most important points of view regarding the Bessarabian differendum in the 1914-1947 period, showed historical, legal, geopolitical arguments used by the authors of the examined studies.

The first compartment refers to the subject related to Bessarabia in the period from Romania's neutrality in the First World War and up to the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920). The author studied the situation of the Romanian Kingdom in the eve of the First World War, its alliances with the Great Powers, reminded of the Russian Empire's interests in the Balkans and for the straits. The conditions in which Romania entered the Great War are shown, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of Bucharest joining the Antanta countries.

Naturally, the author analyzed the conditions of constitution of the Country's Counsel, of proclamation of Bessarabia's independence (The Moldavian Democratic Republic) from Russia, grasped by the Bolsheviks, that proclaimed the right of non-Russian countries to self-determine until the constitution of independent states. Gabriel Micu exposed in detail the conditions in which the Country Counsel – the legitimate Parliament of Bessarabia at that time, decided willingly, with an absolute majority of votes, the Unification of Bessarabia with the Romanian Kingdom. The author insisted throughout many pages on this historic act that expressed the will of the absolute majority of Bessarabians to find themselves in a unitary state. The reaction of Bolshevik officials towards the Unification of Bessarabia and Romania were mentioned; we will only highlight the fact that Romania, along with the Allied States, did not recognize the Bolshevik regime.

Another moment upon which the author insisted was that related to certain efforts by the Soviet officials in 1920, through which they were willing to recognize the Unification in exchange for the Romanian Thesaurus deposited in Russia.

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<sup>4</sup> Nazaria Sergiu, Stepaniuc Victor, Problema basarabeiană și interpretările ei în istoriografie: de la apariție la Tratatul de la Paris (1917-1947)(The Bessarabian problem and its interpretations in historiography: from apparition to the Paris treaties (1917-1947)), Chişinău, 2010. - 392 p.

Meaning that, at a certain point, the Bolshevik leaders did recognize Bessarabia's Romanian character and the legitimacy of its unification with Romania.

The author analyzes in detail the stages of solving of Bessarabia's problem at an international level, examining with the same attention the documents of the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) and attracts attention upon the utmost importance of the October 28th 1920 Convention through which the Allied Powers acknowledged Romania's sovereignty on Bessarabia.

G. Micu is perfectly right when stating that the Protocol (or Convention) was about to take effect at the moment of its ratification by all signing parts; this condition was going to affect the validity of the treaty to a great extent, because, in the end, it was not ratified by all signing parts (we refer here to Japan, who by rejecting ratification decided upon the fate of the October 28th 1920 treaty). "The importance of this protocol, says the author, consists of the fact that, through its contents, Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia was recognized *de jure*". The author of the monograph is also right when insisting on the two historic acts – the march 27th (April 9th ) 1918 Unification of Bessarabia with Romania and the October 28th 1920 Bessarabian Convention, that played an important part in the work of reunification and international recognition of contemporary Romania.

The study's author paid special attention to Kremlin's policy towards Romania: namely Bessarabia became a problem for Moscow, not the Romanian people, who reunited under the principle of nationalities, recognized by the Paris Peace Conference. Gabriel Micu reveals several stages of the Soviet policy towards Romania, shows the Bolshevik diplomacy efforts in various international forums regarding the re-annexing Bessarabia, but also through direct military diversionary interventions, such as, for example, the so-called "insurrection" of the Tatar-Bunar (1924) and - eventually - by establishing "the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Moldavian Republic" with the center at Balta, then Tiraspol - genuine bridgehead for Bolshevik expansion in Romania and the Balkans.

Gabriel Micu demonstrates that, along with the establishment of diplomatic relations of the great Western powers with the Bolshevik regime, Romania's position to defend its right over Bessarabia became increasingly vulnerable. At one point, the great powers removed themselves from ensuring Romania's eastern border (in this sense, are impressive, but exact, the words of Titulescu). Only Poland, the author points out, was the state that showed unconcealed interest towards the problem of Bessarabia in favor of Romania.

The author of the monograph analyzed Romania's foreign policy and its relations with the USSR in the 30's of last century, demonstrated the importance of the efforts made by diplomacy to defend the country's territorial integrity. G. Micu drew attention, and rightly so, on two cardinal events regarding Bessarabia

membership. The first refers to Convention of definition of the aggressor, signed on July 4th 1933 by the USSR, the Little Entente, Turkey and other countries, through which the USSR recognized Bessarabia as a component part of Romania. Based on a document archive, the author quotes the declaration of Maxim Litvinov, who, using Bolshevik rhetoric, said: "I know that signing this convention, I gave Bessarabia to you. If I can not officially recognize this, it is because of the difficulties that I would have with my public opinion, especially that in Ukraine. But, when I commit to never commit an aggression against Bessarabia and that I cannot demand any review, not only [for] that the USSR is not a member of the League of Nations, but also because, in principle, we are against revision, because it means war, through what [other] way could I get Bessarabia back? "

Thus, the most authorized and competent Soviet man of the state in the matter of foreign policy clearly recognizes that Bessarabia is a Romanian territory. Otherwise, Litvinov could not give that which did not belong to him and "difficulties regarding public opinion" is pure demagoguery: what kind of public opinion was there in the USSR? The aggression Litvinov was referring to could be directed (and eventually was!), not against Bessarabia (such state existed at the time), but against Romania.

The second document on which G. Micu insisted is the Romanian-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact initialed by the USSR People's Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov and the Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister, Nicolae Titulescu, on July 21st, 1936, in which the Dniester River is nominated twice in an explicit manner as being a "line of demarcation of territories belonging to the two states, Romania and the USSR". The author of the study believes that a mistake was made by the dismissal of Nicolae Titulescu from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs and provides evidence to defend the opinion stated. He notes the fact that, by the late 30's of the last century, Romania drew closer to Germany, leading to tensions in the relations with the USSR.

The paper presented concludes with topics related to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences for Romania, then rapture of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, the Herța region, as well as with Romania's involvement in the war against the USSR for the liberation of these territories, annexed by force in June 1940 and the consequences of Romania's participation in the Second World War.

The rigors of a preface do not allow us to expose more broadly the content of the monograph signed by historian Gabriel Micu. I am convinced, however, once the lecture started, the reader will not cease until he reaches the end of the paper.

Congratulations to the author, pleasant lecture for the readers.

Anatol PETRENCU, Ph.D.

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of the thorough study of this paper's subject appeared when I coordinated, as Director of the Moldavian Republic Direction of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Romania, the bilateral relations with its neighbor state, deeply flawed by the emphasis of anti-Romanian steps taken by representatives of the Communist Party of Moldavian Republic (PCRM), after they took power in Chişinău in 2001. Thus, from the need to find appropriate solutions to manage the existing situation, when the Romanian nation is divided within the territory of two states, and non-negligible forces are engaged in the process of mystification of the past and distortion of historical reality, by seeking to accredit the existence of a people - Moldavians, different from the Romanian one and of a non-existent language - Moldavian language, different than Romanian, the concern arose to research the history of the Bessarabia problem. A problem arisen from the kidnapping and annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812, as a result of a long process of territorial expansion of Tsarist Russia.

This paper reviews the actions of European diplomacy during World War I, the interwar period and during the Second World War, up to the Paris Peace Conference of 1947. Also, another set of considerations is that in the interwar period, there were changes in the European policy plan for Romania, whose finality was marked by the adverse events from 26th to 28th June 1940. Interwar period in Romanian history was marked by the realization of the national unity ideal.

Of the same magnitude as this historic act, followed one of the most tumultuous phases in the history of Romanian diplomacy. The creation of Great Romania meant to the collective mentality of Romanians, experimenting a feeling of fullness and national perfection. On an international plane followed a period of struggle for the imposition of international recognition of this historic event, moment that marked the quality and content of Romania's relations with the great powers throughout the interwar period. It should be noted that, after reaching the national goal in 1918, the sequence of events reveals that the Great Union of 1918 was cause for dissatisfaction for some decision-makers who had leverage on the stage

of international policies. Thus, parallel to the international recognition of unification steps, Romania faced multiple problems in view of defending its territorial integrity, threatened by revisionist forces. Subsequently, these actions with pronounced revisionist character were going to mark the collapse of Great Romania at the end of the interwar period.

A major aspect in the context of the policies of the great powers towards Romania is its relations with the Soviet Union. In this context, throughout history the Romanian state repeatedly had to resist its eastern neighbor. With the coming of the Bolsheviks to power in Russia and the reunification of Bessarabia with Romania, the political situation between the two countries worsened. The Moscow government did not cease for a moment to try putting pressure on Bucharest, both directly and indirectly, through a policy of persuasion of the other great powers of Europe, which could influence the balance of Romanian-Soviet relations in favor of the Soviet Union. For these reasons, the Romanian-Soviet relations during the interwar period held an important place in European diplomacy concerns of that time<sup>5</sup>. Soviet-Romanian relations, that throughout the interwar period represented a defining part of Romania's relations with the great powers, including in the eve of the Second World War, were majorly influenced by the Bessarabia problem. Considering the sustained interest shown by the Soviet Union in claiming this territory, it can be stated that the problem of Bessarabia was much more complex than a simple diplomatic dispute between Bucharest and Moscow. Through its international implications, the Bessarabia issue was one of the "hot" issues of interwar Europe<sup>6</sup>.

The year 1940 would end the "negotiations" stage within the Romanian-Soviet relations initiated by the act of March 27th, 1918. Meanwhile, the Bessarabia issue constituted a sensitive subject, both in Romania's foreign policy approaches in relation to European countries, as well as the relations with the USSR through the various assessments formulated by the two sides with regards to the status of the region between the Prut and Dniester. On the other hand, regarding this issue, Soviet Russia, also treated its relations with the Romanian and the rest of Europe in terms of this problem. In this context, the present paper aims to reevaluate the events that, for some reasons, were not sufficiently understood in specialty literature or that were treated in a distorted manner. Another aspect to be reflected upon in the contents of this book and that derives from the perspective of the topics submitted to research name, concerns interwar Romania's relations with the great European powers. Of course these relations were overshadowed by the same Bessarabian problem.

Historiographical contributions on this issue also show in great measure that overall relations between Romania and France, Germany and other great European

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<sup>5</sup>Lidia Pădureac, *Relațiile româno-sovietice (1917- 1934)* (Romanian-Soviet relations (1917-1934)), Editura Prut Internațional, Chișinău, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Octavian Țăcu, *Problema Basarabiei în relațiile sovieto-române* (The problem of Bessarabia in Soviet-Romanian relations), Editura Prut Internațional, Chișinău, 2004, p. 3.

powers were very much influenced by the prospect of solving the problem mentioned.

Due to favorable international circumstances, Romania managed at the end of World War I to achieve the supreme national desire, by integrating all historical lands, fact that prompted and defined the main objectives of Romania in the international arena, in the interwar period, until the eve of the World War II: international recognition and preservation of its territorial integrity. These goals made Romania one of the most ardent supporters of maintaining the construction of Versailles, as well as one of France's most loyal allies in Eastern Europe. Given that the main revisionist force of the political system of Versailles was Germany, this obviously encouraged any element that could affect the relations between the two states. Thus, at a certain time Romania was at the turn of the pressures that came from Berlin and Moscow, with the purpose of influencing Bucharest's foreign policy decisions.

Another aspect on which it was considered necessary to focus in this paper is Romania's entry into the Second World War. Just as, immediately after the Versailles Peace Conference, Romania tried to maintain order instituted in Europe after World War I along with France, then, after the change in balance of forces in Europe, the same goal was pursued by building relations between Romania and Germany on the eve of the Second World War, and especially after 1940. Bucharest became aware that France's assistance became more ephemeral and good relations with Germany could defend Romania from its neighbors' revanchist tendencies. Given that Romania was deprived of certain territories, it could not remain outside the war any longer. In such circumstances, the only argument that determined Romanians to side with the Germans was prompted by the belief that only the latter was able to confront the Soviets. Before referring to the historiographic aspects of the problem proposed for research, some statements are required to be made regarding the theme of the work itself. This is meant to be a specific one, through the chronological markers delineating the temporal segment in research applications.

Its specificity results from the incorporation within the period 1914-1947 of three relatively differentiated stages in terms of political realities, that led Romania to adopt an appropriate policy for each situation created.

In principle, this paper's entire content is organized based on these three chronological, factual markers. Therefore, the political and diplomatic circumstances existing around the World War I and its consequences for the Romanian people, who became materialized through the Great Unification, are referred to.

This is followed by a new conjectural reality in the field of international relations, which marked the entire interwar period. During this period, Great

Romania tends to avoid a simple passive participation, through which it would only circumscribe to the torrent of events produced on the European political arena.

Bucharest actively expresses its political maturity tone, becoming involved in shaping European policy, hence configuring the character of its national policy. But, this stage was marked by the great powers' disagreement regarding its national unity achievements, this ultimately finding expression in the next stage, which is addressed in the last part of the thesis. This is the year 1939, marked by the Ribbentrop - Molotov Pact, which by stating the Bessarabia problem, coming from the inertia of interwar influences, highlights even more the Soviet-Romanian relations. This year can be considered as reaching a maximum high of a complex period of fierce confrontations between Moscow and Bucharest, paving the way for a new reality of European policy.

If for Romania the year 1939 is part of the logic of interwar policy, then the year 1941 is part of a phase which subscribes in the logic consistent with the period of the Second World War, which meant its active involvement in military actions. In fact, in this year, a war began for Romania, for the liberation of the two provinces and for ridding itself of the shame of the summer of 1940<sup>7</sup>. To some extent, 1941 is a logical continuation of the cycle of events started with the Ribbentrop – Molotov Pact, but from the perspective of Romania's relations with the great powers it can be considered that this is a crucial moment. It is the turning point that marked a shift from one historical stage to another, change highlighted through key changes in Romania's relations with the great powers, that also had an impact on its internal situation. The political shock produced by the Soviet ultimatum notes distorted Bucharest's whole system of alliances, built in the logic formulated in the spirit of prewar realities.

But the evolution of the Second World War led to a tragic destiny, Romania being forced to accept the terms of armistice imposed by the Soviet Union, as first violin of the United Nations Coalition, through the Convention of Moscow of September 12th, 1944. The Romanian borders were those established on January 1st, 1941, except for the border with Hungary.

This meant that Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina and Herța remained under Soviet occupation and the Quadrilateral under Bulgaria. On the other hand, the Vienna Dictate of August 30th, 1940, was de facto annulled, the border between Romania and Hungary being that of January 1st, 1938. The economic terms established very difficult rewards, restitutions and compensation for the Romanian state. The provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty draft have reproduced the main points of the Armistice Convention of September 12th 1944, with an additional

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<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Ciachir, *Istoria politică a Europei de la Napoleon la Stalin* (The political history of Europe from Napoleon to Stalin), Editura Oscar Print, București, 1998, p. 286.