PORTRAIT OF A NECESSARY PONTO-BALTIC ALLIANCE: POLISH COMMERCIAL ROAD PROJECTS TOWARDS THE BALKANS AND THE BLACK SEA, 1919 – 1926

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Abstract:

The economic expression of the Romanian-Polish military and political alliance undoubtedly had to be represented by the rebirth of the Baltic-Pontic commercial road, as the flow of products coming into and towards the Polish space had been artificially directed, during the 19th century, as a result of understandable political and economic interests, towards the North and the Adriatic Seas, instead of the Baltic and Black Seas. A Polish commercial road towards the Balkans obviously comprised economic, financial and strategic components. One of them referred to building an alternative to the continental routes dominated by Germany (Rhine, Main, Danube); the aim was chiefly to break a dangerous monopoly in the region of Central Europe and the Baltic area. Foreign commerce on the two relations did not enjoy, in any period between the two world wars, a spectacular evolution and never reached an important point. The arguments are based on strictly economic and financial elements: 1. Romania and Poland produced largely the same type of merchandise: there were basically similar raw materials (cereal, coal, oil), the products had a very low degree of processing, and one could earn more and more assuredly with the export type-products on traditional markets (mainly Western Europe); 2. Even if there was a great interest in a partner or a product on the other market, the transport thereof took a very long time. Between Warsaw and Bucharest there was a simple, inefficient and unsafe railroad; there was no preoccupation in the '20s for the revamping or modernizing of the transport and service infrastructure (telephone, telegraph, post) between the two states; 3. Last, but not least, although the two states had a great number of inhabitants – and, thus, an extremely important potential for buying and consumption – the potential was strongly handicapped by the standard of living. The scanty Polish projects and investments on the Baltic – Black Sea axis have completed – and have not influenced – the general frame of Romanian – Polish relations, essentially based on political, diplomatic and military interests.

Rezumat:

Expresia economică a alianței politice și militare româno-poloneze trebuia să fie reprezentată fără îndoială de renașterea drumului comercial baltico-pontic din vreme ce fluxul de produse care se îndreptau sau plecau dinspre spațiul polonez a fost îndreptat în mod artificial, în cursul sec. al XIX-lea, ca urmare a unor interese politice și economice firești, către mările Nordică și Adriatică în locul mărilor Baltică și Neagră. Un drum comercial polonez către Balcani conținea o dimensiune economică și financiară, dar și una strategică. Una dintre acestea avea în vedere construirea unei alternative la rutele continentale dominate de Germania (Rin, Main, Dunăre), obiectivul principal fiind acela de a sparge un monopol periculos în regiunea Europei Centrale și în regiunea Mării Baltice. Totuși, comerțul exterior în aceste două direcții nu s-a bucurat în niciun moment din perioada situată între cele două războaie mondiale de o evoluție spectaculoasă și nu a ajuns la o cifră însemnată. Rațiunile sunt de natură strict economică și financiară: 1. România și Polonia produceau în mare măsură același tip de mărfuri: este vorba în principal de materiale prime similare (cereale, cărbune, petrol), produse cu un grad foarte scăzut de prelucrare, iar acestea se putea vinde mult mai sigur pe piețe tradiționale (în special Europa de Vest); 2. Chiar dacă a existat un interes mare pentru găsirea unui partener sau a unui produs pe piața celuiilalt, transportul acestuia dura foarte mult. Între Varșovia și București a existat o cale ferată simplă, ineficientă și nesigură. Nu a existat nicio preocupare în anii '20, pentru modernizarea infrastructurii de transport și de servicii (telefon, telegraf, post) între cele două state; 3. În fine, deși cele două state au avut un număr mare de locuitori – și, prin urmare, un potențial extrem de important pentru cumpărare și consum –, acest potențial a fost puternic afectat de nivelul de trai. Puținele proiecte și investiții poloneze pe axa Marea Baltică - Marea Neagră axa au completat – dar nu au influențat – cadrul general al relațiilor româno-poloneze, bazate în esență pe interesele politice, diplomatice și militare.

Keywords: Baltic Sea, Black Sea, commercial roads, strategic axis, infrastructure, trade, common interests

1. Commercial roads and strategic axes of Polish influence expansion in the Balkans and the Black Sea region

The economic expression of the Romanian-Polish military and political alliance undoubtedly had to be represented by the rebirth of the Baltic-Pontic commercial road, as the flow of products coming into and towards the Polish space had been artificially directed, during the 19th century, as a result of understandable political and economic interests, towards the North and the Adriatic Seas, instead of the Baltic and Black Seas.

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referred to building an alternative to the continental routes dominated by Germany (Rhine, Main, Danube); the aim was chiefly to break a dangerous monopoly in the region of Central Europe and the Baltic area.

Immediately after the signing of the *Political and Military Agreement* of March 3rd 1921 (and as it was written in the *Secret Protocol "C"* of the political agreement), Poland began negotiations with Romania in order to create a *Commercial Agreement*. Between May 21st and July 1st 1921, the two teams of negotiators met in Bucharest and, for the discussion agenda, started right from the desiderata marked by the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Take Ionescu and Eustachy Sapieha. Actually, in light of the fact that the flow of Romanian exports and imports followed the water route (the Danube) towards Germany or the railroad through Budapest-Vienna, the Bucharest government was not so much attracted by the value of the *Commercial Agreement*, as by the symbol of strengthening the alliance that it would have created in the political and military spheres. On the other hand, in 1921, Poland was chiefly preoccupied by the purely commercial aspect of the document; the delegates of the Warsaw government had come up with a set of three basic proposals (at the same time minimal, in their opinion). Such proposals concerned:

1. the ratification (through the *Commercial Agreement* and through subsequent accords) of the transit between the Baltic and the Black Sea, on the railroad and on navigable rivers;
2. the ensuring, by Romania for the Polish state, of a *porto franco* status in Galați or Brăila and also fiscal facilities for the railroad transit from the maritime Danube harbours towards Poland;
3. the construction, based on common investments and projects, of a navigable canal between the two states¹.

During negotiations, Poland has also brought into discussion a complex project regarding the renting, in Galați or Brăila, of a 2,400 m² piece of terrain (for storehouses, warehouses and offices) and of another piece of terrain of 20,000 m², for the storing of non-perishable merchandise. Also, the Polish would have wanted to obtain, through advantageous contracts, the right of unconditional use of the existing harbour installations. In exchange for these facilities, the Warsaw government was willing to grant the Romanian state assurances regarding the duty-free

¹ Nicolae Dascălu, *Relațiile româno-polone în perioada interbelică, 1918-1939* (București: Academiei, 1991), 101-110.

transit of Romanian merchandise towards Germany and of German ones towards Romania, which would have considerably reduced the cost².

All these points were analyzed by Romania; all the same, according to the text of the minutes of the discussions from the last day of negotiations, July 1st 1921, none of them had been explicitly accepted by the Romanian delegates³.

*The Commercial Agreement between Romania and Poland was signed on July 2nd 1921, in Bucharest, and it settled, mainly, the economic relations between the two military and political allies. It must also be said that, for both states, such an agreement constituted a first in the regional economic and commercial practice after World War I. Romania and Poland started from a fundamental principle for the creation of a good and dynamic commercial relation: the mutual granting of the *most favoured nation* clause (art. 1). Also a first for Central Europe, and of very great importance, the right to acquire goods by the citizens of one country on the territory of the other was regulated, as well as the right to resort, in the case of a commercial or financial litigation, to the justice of the country where the person settled (art. 2). Extremely important for the essence of this Agreement were the stipulations according to which, in times of war, the parties reserved their right to apply commercial restrictions and prohibitions without affecting the interests of the other party (art. 4), and especially, that they guaranteed at all times – of peace or war – the transit of people, luggage or merchandise (art. 12)⁴. The Commercial Agreement remained valid until 1929, when another one was drafted; also, in 1925, a special Agreement has been concluded between Romania, Poland and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, one that regulated the transit of weaponry, ammunition and troops between the Black, the Adriatic and the Baltic Seas.*

In the context of outlining the bilateral commercial relation, it is absolutely necessary to make a remark, namely that, for starters, we notice a merger of the Polish commercial activity (or, to be precise, of the intentions) in Romania with the consular activity. Aside from the important

² *Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (hereafter, AMAE), fund Convenții P3, vol. 1, non-paginated. Notă a Ministerului de Externe al Poloniei către Legația Poloniei la București, 20 martie 1921.*

³ *Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warszawa (hereafter, AAN), Minister Spraw Zagranicznych, vol. 6409, f. 3-9. Proces verbal al ședinței delegațiilor română și polonă la negocierile privind semnarea Convenției comerciale, București, 1 iulie 1921.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 16-23. The text in *Monitorul Oficial* 182, November 19th, 1922, 8449-8461. See also Dascălu, 24.

general consulates in Cernăuți and Chișinău (with their role to mediate the approach towards the significant Polish communities in Bucovina and Bessarabia), in the '20s, Polish consulates were established in Brăila and Galați and in 1934, in Constanța. Romania, on the other hand, limited itself to opening only one general consulate in Poland – in Lwów, in 1927 – and then in the '30s accepted the foundation of honorary consular missions in Danzig, Gdynia, Poznań, Łódź, Wilno and Katowice⁵.

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3. Last, but not least, although the two states had a great number of inhabitants – and, thus, an extremely important potential for buying and consumption – the potential was strongly handicapped by the standard of living. In Poland and Romania, the average monthly wages have not allowed for a greater consumption capacity of foreign goods and services; moreover, the products of both states were not known (or too little known) on each other's markets, and the publicity campaigns were practically inexistent. By comparison, the Czechoslovakian products were intensely and dynamically advertised in the midst of the Romanian public opinion: the Czechoslovakian exports have constantly increased on the Romanian market, during the entire period between the two World Wars.

In 1922, Poland exported to Romania merchandise worth approximately 20 million Swiss francs, and in 1923, almost five times as much – 90 million Swiss francs (the Romanian *leu* and the Polish *mark* were in a continuous process of depreciation, and the expression of the quantum in one of these two currencies has no relevance). In its turn, Romania

⁵ Dascălu, 24.

proved its complete lack of interest in the Polish market, as it exported, in 1922, merchandise worth only 4.5 million Swiss francs, and in 1923 merchandise worth nearly 8 million Swiss francs⁶. The Polish export comprised almost entirely the textiles manufactured by the factories from Łódź, Białystok and Bielsk. Sometimes, Romanian importers were only mediators, because these textiles were boarded in the Galați harbour and, from there, sent to Bulgaria, Turkey, Egypt and Palestine⁷. The textiles represented nearly 60 % of the value of the Polish export in Romania: in 1930, from a total of 44.77 million zlotys, the textile alone amounted to 28.28 million zlotys⁸. The Romanian market also received from Poland: cast iron and primarily processed iron, machine tools and agricultural instruments, glassware, faience, haberdashery products, coal, herring and sugar⁹. The modest Romanian exports to Poland consisted of products with an extremely reduced processing, and thus, of minimal value: cereal, vegetables, fruit, wine, agricultural seeds, crude hides, fertilizers, timber.

From the point of view of the value evolution of export from Romania to Poland, the situation – reflected in millions of zlotys – was the following:

EXPORT AND IMPORT FOR ROMANIA (Table 1) ¹⁰
(in millions of zlotys)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1919	1,512	9.1	2.5	- 6.6
1920	46,994	64.4	105.3	+ 40.9
1921	182,885	162.8	627.8	+ 465.6
1922	127,479	1.517.6	453.6	- 1.064.0
1923	293,569	2.699.1	594.6	- 2.104.5
1924	277,849	1720.9	618.7	- 1.102.1
1925	247,536	2.043.9	563.0	- 1.507.8

⁶ Gheron Netta, *Relațiile economice polono- române* (București, 1924), 13-14.

⁷ The structure of the Romanian-Polish trade in *Buletinul Uniunii Camerelor de Comerț și de Industrie* (hereafter *BUCCI*) 3, nr. 9 (September 1928): 382-383.

⁸ „Comerțul român – polon în 1930,” *BUCCI* 6, nr. 3 (March 1931), 209.

⁹ Netta, 14.

¹⁰ *A.M.A.E.*, fund Convenții P3, vol. II, non-paginated.

THE POSITION OF DIFFERENT STATES CONCERNING
ROMANIA'S EXPORT AND IMPORT BETWEEN 1928 – 1929 ((Table 2)¹¹
- value evaluations -

EXPORT	
<i>Country</i>	%
Germany	27.6
Hungary	11.1
Austria	9.4
Italy	7.7
Great Britain	6.4
Czechoslovakia	6.2
Egypt	5.2
France	4.5
Greece	3.5
Poland	2.0
Belgium	1,6
Turkey	1.5
Spain	0.6

IMPORT	
<i>Country</i>	%
Germany	24.1
Czechoslovakia	13.6
Austria	12.5
Great Britain	7.3
Italia	6.9
U.S.A.	6.1
France	5.5
Poland	5.1
Hungary	5.0
Belgium	3.1

As we can clearly see in the above tables, Romania's foreign commerce was pre-eminently European, with rare attempts outside the continent (U.S.A., Egypt, Palestine, Turkey): almost 85 % of all the exports and imports with the first 10 commercial partners were conducted in and from Europe. Also, as we have already mentioned, Poland's position was not – and will not be, until 1939 – a significant one. Naturally, the same situation applies in the case of Poland: Romania did not manage to obtain a privileged position within the Polish foreign commerce, like Hungary and Turkey did, for instance.

In a speech made during the meeting of the Polish Merchant Union, in Warsaw, in June of 1928, the General Consul of the Bucharest Delegation, Feliks Chiczewski, tried to find a true but absolutely extravagant explanation, from the point of view of the Polish businessmen.

¹¹ Gheorghe Iacob and Luminița Iacob, *Modernizare-europenism*, vol. I-Ritmul și strategia modernizării, (Iași: Universității, 1995), 144-145. Non-complex analysis about Romanian maritime foreign trade and policies at *Constanța- port internațional.Comerțul exterior al României prin portul Constanța (1878-1939)* (București, 2006) and Eadem, "Navigație și comerț la Marea Neagră.Comerțul exterior prin portul Constanța (1934-1939)," in *Hegemoniile trecutului. Evoluții românești și europene*, eds. Mioara Anton, Florin Anghel and Cosmin Popa (București: Curtea Veche, 2006).

Czichewski pointed directly to the weak industrial development of Romania (but, we would ask, why did the Czechoslovakian products, of a much higher quality, enjoy such a large appreciation and sale?), to the lack of credit and of alternative on Romanian markets (which was perfectly true). *“The Romanian market is very spoiled – explained further the Polish diplomat. The Romanian merchant is used to the coming of the foreign firm’s representative to his store, so that he could show him the samples at issue, to talk to him in his store and make all the discounts that he asks for. In this respect, Germany and Czechoslovakia have both perceived this procedure and intensely work in this spirit”*¹².

Furthermore, invoking the “community of interests” resulting from the alliance and the political and military bilateral cooperation, Poland insisted on a significant involvement: an important step would have been the foundation, on January 25th 1929, in Warsaw, of the *Romanian-Polish Chamber of Commerce*¹³. The commercial attaché of the Romanian Delegation in Warsaw, economist Corneliu Bălăcescu, was elected for the position of president of the new system of bilateral collaboration, and two influential Polish businessmen, Władysław Ewert and Jan Miaciński, were appointed as vice-presidents. *The Chamber of Commerce* organized, among other things, the Romanian wines expo in Warsaw of 1929, and financed a project (one that was unfortunately abandoned) through which the Romanian harbours from the maritime Danube and the Black Sea were supplied with Polish coal from Silesia¹⁴. This way, both countries would have had to make their transport and communication infrastructure more efficient and, on the other hand, it would have increased the interest of Romania in the *porto franco* status granted to the Polish state in one or more Romanian harbours. There was also an ample project that we owe to the *Romanian-Polish Chamber of Commerce*, one aiming at the creation of a tariff-customs union between Romania, Poland and Bulgaria, meant to facilitate the transports and commerce between the Baltic Sea and the Aegean Sea, on land or even in the Black Sea. Again, being an integral part of the customs union project, we anticipated the construction of a railroad and highway bridge over the

¹² „*BUCCI*”, 3, nr. 7, July 1928, p. 305. For a more general image, see: Victor Axenciuc, *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice. 1859-1947*, vol. I (*Industria*), (București, Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1992); Victor Axenciuc, I. Tiberian, *Premise economice ale formării statului național unitar român*, (București, Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979).

¹³ *BUCCI*, nr. 1-4 (1929), 35-36.

¹⁴ *BUCCI*, nr. 9 (1936), 566.

Danube, in the Giurgiu-Ruse¹⁵ area: the project of the bridge would have been financed by the three countries, while the money recovery and exploitation would have been left to a company, with the financial participation of the governments from Bucharest, Warsaw and Sofia.

These last Polish plans, costly and ambitious at the same time, disclose the ampler programme that we have already mentioned, the one of expansion in the Balkan and Pontic space. From this point of view, with a bridgehead established in Romania (through multiple levers), the diplomacy from Warsaw perceived the exceptional importance, from all points of view, of the new Republic of Turkey, lead by Mustafa Kemal. Turkey, in the vision of the Polish objectives and strategies in the short and the long run, was indispensably linked to a few major points in the delineation and stratification of the areas of political or economic importance. Poland also wanted its partner's help, namely Romania, when it drew up the objectives of the penetration process into the Turkish space:

1. The commercial roads that crossed Turkey, even in the backward conditions of the '20s, represented the connection with the petroleum areas of Iraq, Iran and the Arab territories, where the Polish agricultural and industrial products could have been directed. Doubtlessly, Warsaw hoped to obtain a certain political influence in these regions, in case it was a success.

2. Kemal's Republic had, even as early as 1921, very close ties to the U.S.S.R. Poland started, since the '20s, a costly program meant to attract all neighbours of the Soviets, European and even Asian, in a common project of foreign policy. Aside from the special relations with the Baltic States and with Romania, the government of Warsaw established contacts at the highest level with Persia (Iran) and Afghanistan; surely, Turkey was the key to the success of such a policy and Warsaw approached the relation to Ankara in this direction.

The stable regulation of the relations between Poland and Turkey was done relatively late, after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic and the coalescence of the Romanian-Polish political and military alliance and

¹⁵ Ibid. See also Jerzy Zagorski, „Interesy polskie a most na Dunaju”, *Drogi Polski* 2, no. 6 (1938): 359-370. The same for Elzbieta Znamierowska-Rakk, „Polska-balkany. Zrodla inspiracji i zainteresowan w polityce Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej”, in *Rola i miejsce Polski w Europie, 1914-1957*, ed. Andrzej Koryn (Warszawa, 1994), 105-105. A Romanian history of bulding a bridge over the Danube, in Giurgiu-Ruse, inaugurate in 1954, at Magdalena Tiță, „Demersuri romano-bulgare privind Podul Prieteniei Giurgiu- Ruse”, in *Hermeneutica historiae et philosophiae technicae*, eds. Elena Helerea, Andrei Nicolaide and Angela Repanovici (Brașov, 2005): 91-94.

at the same time with the achievement of strategic advantages in relation to another important Balkan state: the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. The accreditation letters of the prime minister of Turkey in Warsaw, Yahia Kemal, have been received by president Ignacy Moscicki at July 22nd 1926, less than a month after the coup d'état in Warsaw. The new president of the republic, instated only three weeks before, declared in a very concise and convincing manner the great interest of his country for a long-term partnership with the Balkan state: "*Turkey is for Poland the key to the Straits, its ally against any Russia which would become imperialist*"¹⁶.

The Balkan dimension of the ambitious Polish projects was much clarified after the restoring of the relations with Bulgaria, immediately after the end of the First World War and the signing of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly. This happened during the visit of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Aleksandăr Stambuliiski, in Warsaw, at the end of the year 1920. The Bulgarian dictator tried to convince the Polish leaders of the necessary accession of the agrarian parties to a so-called *Green International* (and a discussion was conducted, in this respect, with the President of the Peasant Party, Wincenty Witos), and, on the other hand, of an intervention of Warsaw in Bucharest, so as to demand the opening of a Romanian-Bulgarian round of negotiations, supervised by Polish mediators, meant to solve – in Sofia's opinion – the problem of Dobrudja through the assignment by Romania at least of the "Cadrilater" region. This action of the impetuous Bulgarian leader encompassed some opportunities for Romania: as we have said before, Poland's head of state, Marshal Piłsudski, did not like rumours, gossip, and especially not keeping one's word, and he was, beyond his characteristic stubbornness, an honourable man. And, in the few meetings that Stambuliiski had in the Belvedere palace, in December of 1920, the marshal was simply revolted at the fact that the Bulgarian Prime Minister told him, with abundant details, the confidential discussions that the Sofia delegation had in Prague with the President of Czechoslovakia, T. G. Masaryk¹⁷. Without having any more diplomatic scruples, Piłsudski repudiated on the spot this type of diplomacy and, until 1923, the Polish-Bulgarian relations were practically frozen. All the more so, as Bulgaria started a defiant process of approach towards Moscow, right

¹⁶ A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 45, f. 345-346. *Raport nr. 2516 de la Alexandru Iakovaky, ministru plenipotențiar al României la Varșovia pentru Ioan Mitileneu, ministru de Externe, 22 iunie 1926.*

¹⁷ A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 33, f. 339-340. *Raport nr. 2979 de la Constantin Langa-Rășcanu, ministru plenipotențiar al României la Sofia, către I.G.Duca, ministru de Externe, 16 octombrie 1923.*

when the Romanian-Polish alliance was signed (which also corresponded to the signing of the *Amity and Alliance Treaty* between Soviet Russia and Kemal's Turkey). Thus, on February 24th 1921, in the *Sobranie* (the Bulgarian Parliament), Prime Minister Stambuliiski praised the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Bulgarian government accepted – a few days later – that the Bulgarian Communist Party made public a campaign to collect funds for the victims of the drought in the Volga area. The government from Moscow obtained permission to buy, at a minimal price, 1,200 wagons of cereals from the Bulgarian market. Much more serious, Warsaw was informed that Stambuliiski has asked for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Soviet Russia: discreet contacts were even opened between the Bulgarian Minister in Prague and the chief of the Soviet Commercial Delegation in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet official, P. N. Mostovenko, appreciated that this haste of the Bulgarians was mainly due to the new alliances that its neighbour, Romania, had made with Poland (March 3rd, 1921), and with the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (June 7th, 1921)¹⁸.

The instating of the Al. Tzankov government in Sofia (June 1923, following a coup d'état) determined the responsible factors in Warsaw to reconsider its policy towards Bulgaria. The new Polish objectives for the Balkan state were extremely ambitious; this is confirmed by the Polish Minister in Sofia, Wł. Baranowski (one of the closest friends of Marshal Piłsudski): "Our approach towards Bulgaria is absolutely necessary for us, as it will allow us to monitor together the attitudes and gestures of the Little Entente and to control its goals"¹⁹.

In this respect, it is completely obvious that Poland found out (without reacting officially) that Alexander Tzankov's Bulgarian government – supported by it from the very beginning – had helped, more or less discreetly, the anti-Yugoslavian "Macedonian cause". The action Committee of the terrorist organization ORIM had a special representation in Tirana – whence it received money, and also from the Italian government – having as liaison chief the Bulgarian Anghel Popvasilev, directly sustained by the General Consul of Bulgaria in Tirana, Toma Karaiovov²⁰.

¹⁸ Constantin Iordan, *România și relațiile internaționale din sud-estul european: probleme ale păcii, securității și cooperării (1919-1924)* (București: All, 1999), 123.

¹⁹ A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 33, f. 340.

²⁰ A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Bulgaria, vol. 1, f. 16-22. *Raport nr.3401 de la Constantin Langa-Rășcanu, ministru plenipotențiar al României la Sofia, către I.G.Duca, ministru de Externe, 20 decembrie 1923*. The same, Iordan, 71-72.

So as to fill-in the content of his Balkan strategies related to Bulgaria, the government from Warsaw started, after 1923, a costly and long project, meant to attract the government from Sofia at least by three main points:

1. *The creation of a common foreign policy in the Balkans and towards the U.S.S.R.* In exchange for “monitoring” the actions of Romania and of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom by Poland, Bulgaria promised to observe the *status quo*, until the occurrence of favourable external conditions. Nevertheless, Sofia transmitted several suggestions to Warsaw, concerning a Polish mediation in the problem of Southern Dobrudja.

2. Poland emphasized the pro-Slavic propagandistic current in Bulgaria, by exacerbating a common historic past – a Slav one – and through the fraternal relations between the two nations. *It was, undoubtedly, a Polish effort to substitute the Russian influence in Bulgaria.*

3. *The delineation of some economic programmes that would allow the Polish capital to enter Bulgaria and that would also spread Warsaw’s influence South of the Danube.*

Regarding the last point, Poland aimed at founding a Bulgarian-Polish economic society, that would grant commercial facilities to the Polish companies in the Bulgarian harbours from the Danube and the Black Sea (Ruse, Varna, Burgas), and the tax exemption on the railroads that crossed the Bulgarian territory and headed towards Greece and Turkey. The Varna harbour was designed to be an intermediate access point to the sea on the strategic axis Gdynia-Thessaloniki: its main purpose was the creation of an outlet for the Polish weapons and ammunition industry, in full expansion, in Bulgaria, Greece and Egypt²¹.

During the second half of 1928, the same way Hitler’s Germany operated a few years later in Greece, the Polish State Monopoly founded in Sofia and in other Bulgarian cities offices for the buying of raw tobacco; as the Bulgarian state could not even pay for imports, tobacco was given in exchange for the products of Polish textile factories, agricultural machinery and metallurgical products²². Already during the ’30s, it was towards Bulgaria and Greece that most of the Polish production of fighter planes, infantry weaponry, textiles, agricultural and industrial machinery, salt and petroleum was directed. According to certain plans drawn up in Warsaw,

²¹ A.M.A.E., fond 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 33, f. 344. *Raport nr. 937 de la Grigore Bilciurescu, ministru plenipotențiar al României la Sofia, către Constantin Argetoianu, ministru ad-interim de Externe, 14 aprilie 1928.*

²² *Ibid.*, f. 346. *Raport nr. 3030 de la Gheorghe Davidescu, însărcinat cu afaceri al României la Varșovia către Constantin Argetoianu, ministru de Externe, 4 octombrie 1928.*

especially after the instating of the regency in Romania and the complication of political life here, the ones responsible for the Polish economy would have wished that Varna – connected through a subsequent construction of the railroad bridge Giurgiu- Ruse – represented the new bridgehead of Polish commerce at the Black Sea²³. This intention also took into account the fact that the relation with Romania was already ensured from a military and political point of view; a shift of the Polish economic interest in the Balkans towards Bulgaria could have become a success, especially when the Bulgarian products – unlike the Romanian ones – could never rival the Polish products (and the markets did not coincide either).

Poland also took into consideration, among the options of its Balkan policy, the privileged position, from a geographical and strategic point of view and from the perspective of the alliances, of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (since 1929, changed to Yugoslavia). Following some minute investigations and analyses, the Warsaw diplomacy outlined, at the beginning of the '20s, a few elements that it had to approach for the construction of its objectives in South-East Europe. It regarded:

1. The possibility that Belgrade could become an excellent observation centre in what concerns Bulgaria and Hungary. The Polish diplomacy advanced the idea (the unjustified idea, in our opinion) that the Yugoslav political and military leaders were more open to an understanding with Sofia and Budapest than their Romanian counterparts.

2. The Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom was the only Balkan state that had very good relations and even an alliance with the most important regional partner of Poland: Romania. This could become, in a trilateral alliance, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and to the Adriatic Sea, a counterweight to the Little Entente and, if not, at least a force to be reckoned with, especially by the U.S.S.R.

3. Belgrade and the Karageorgevici Royal family did not have any qualms about showing a profoundly hostile attitude towards the Soviets, and also allowing the existence, on the territory of the kingdom, of numerous communities and organizations of the white Russian emigration²⁴.

²³ Ibid., f. 351-32. *Raport nr.935 de la Constantin Metta, consul general al României la Varna către G.G.Mironescu, ministru de Externe, 18 noiembrie 1929.*

²⁴ Anna Garlicka, "Polska-Jugosławia, 1918-1939", *Studia z dziejów Z.S.R.R. i Europy Środkowej* XII (1976): 97-98.

Nevertheless, both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, Romania's allies in the Little Entente, have constantly refused to consider cooperation with the government from Bucharest, in the event of an unprovoked attack at the Dneestr border. However, King Alexander insisted, in his discussions with Romanian diplomats, that his country will not "get closer" to the Soviets under any conditions whatsoever²⁵. Poland tried to agree with the Romanian partners that such a personal political attitude could extend to the entire state policy if the alliance with Czechoslovakia did not exist and if, instead of it, another one, directed from Warsaw, was created. The formation of the Balkan dynastic connections – the marriage of Princess Mărioara with King Alexander, of Princess Elisabeta with King George II of Greece and of Prince Paul (Yugoslavia's regent between 1934-1941) with the Greek Princess Olga – would have surely facilitated the political control. The governments from Warsaw approached the influence that they projected in the Balkan space under the prime aspect, of the increase in political and economic power and, just as important, in the effort to create the programme of encircling the U.S.S.R. through an alliance of European and Asian states, one that would be lead – naturally – by the Polish diplomacy. This is how we can explain, aside from the important contacts in the Balkans, the visit in the Polish capital of the King of Afghanistan (in 1927) and, in the following year (1928), of the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Gholi Amsarim²⁶.

*The commercial agreement signed on January 18th 1924, in Warsaw, between Poland and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom*²⁷ was a response to the one signed three years before with Romania. The fact that, of all the Balkan states, Belgrade was the one chosen, can only support our earlier assertions: through Belgrade and Bucharest, Warsaw tried to obtain the influence in the Balkans and, just as much, to diminish the role of Czechoslovakia and of the Little Entente as defensive alliance. Through the *Commercial Agreement*, both states settled the mutual granting of the most favoured nation status (art. 7), and guaranteed one another the freedom of merchandise and traveller transit (art. 12), including facilities for navigation companies of the two states that operated in the waters or the harbours of the other signatory party (art. 15). The common political declaration, which

²⁵ A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Iugoslavia , vol. 1, f. 44. *Raport al Legației române la Belgrad către Ministerul Afacerilor Straine*, 13 februarie 1924.

²⁶ Wiesław Balcerak, "Koncepcje integracyjne w polskie polityce zagranicznej, 1918-1939", *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (1970): 46-47.

²⁷ The text appeared in *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, nr. 35, April 25th, 1924, 530-539.

preceded the text of the *Commercial Agreement*, settled, under favourable conditions, the conclusion of a bilateral pact pertaining to the railroad transit and to the collaboration regarding transport on the railroad (art. 1)²⁸. *A secret clause, annexed to the agreement, guaranteed Poland the transit, under any conditions whatsoever, of the war material on the Yugoslav territory, fact also confirmed by the Polish-Romanian-Yugoslav trilateral accord, signed in November 1925*²⁹.

As in the case of the *Romanian-Polish Commercial Agreement* of 1921, the one signed in 1924 between the Polish and the Yugoslav did not directly concern the commercial relations as much as it concerned the guarantee, through international documents, of the transit towards Poland and, if it was possible, the grant of facilities to Polish companies. The problem of the transit – and especially of the military one – was essential in the delineation of the two *Commercial Agreements*, from the Polish point of view.

Continuing this idea, the government from Warsaw proved itself extremely active in the creation of projects regarding the increase of efficiency and modernization of the Balkan transport system, on the great commercial axes. Thus, aside from a railroad and highway bridge over the Danube, in Giurgiu-Ruse, the Polish engineers and diplomats brought into discussion the project of constructing another railroad and highway bridge over the Danube, in Turnu Severin – Kladovo³⁰, so as to facilitate the commercial transport from the Baltic region to Greece, especially towards Thessaloniki and the Yugoslav harbours from the Adriatic Sea.

In what concerns the Yugoslav space, the Polish strategists found at least two transport corridors for transit and political – military interests:

1. Thessaloniki – Niš – Belgrade – Subotica – Budapest-Warsaw
2. Thessaloniki – Niš – Prahovo – Romania – Poland³¹

Attracting the Yugoslav partner into the orbit of certain future Polish regional interests did not confine itself to the level of intention: the materialization took place in *Geneva, September 18th 1926*, through the signing by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two countries of the *Amity and Cordial Collaboration Pact between Poland and the Serbian-Croatian-*

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Garlicka, 99.

³⁰ Elzbieta Znamierowska-Rakk, "Koncepcje dróg strategiczno-tranzytowych na obszarze Europy Środkowo- Wschodniej w polityce polskiej i międzynarodowej okresu międzywojennego," *Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo- Wschodniej* XXX (1995): 65-68.

³¹ Garlicka, 102.

*Slovenian Kingdom*³². Without involving itself politically or militarily in any way whatsoever – Belgrade did not want to collaborate with an anti-Soviet policy, and Warsaw did not have the intention of giving another diplomatic strike to Hungary – the two states have wished, rather, to devise a symbol; it is actually the idea inferred from the text of the Pact, as the stipulations were extremely generous, but also very equivocal. What else could this mean: “the two parties commit themselves, in case there are international difficulties, to proceed immediately to the exchange of opinions”³³? It did not specify the conditions under which such “international difficulties” could occur, or what the consultations could consist of, or even if this first step could have had concrete consequences, whether they would be political, economic or military. The ambiguity was complete in what regards the concrete destination of the Pact, because none of the two states wanted to involve itself in the external matters of the other one. Warsaw considered that the alliance with Romania was enough for a prospective involvement in the complicated Balkan matters, and, furthermore, did not wish to conclude agreements with states that were declared hostile to Hungary: this way, it would have participated to the regional isolation of Budapest. King Alexander, in his turn, who was a very experienced politician, could not venture into an alliance with Poland, similar to the Romanian-Polish one, because this would have involved the transfer of tensions from the Polish borders into the context of the Yugoslav foreign policy; and it was not useful: Belgrade did not have diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R., Germany was far away, the relations with Czechoslovakia had the same regional purpose.

2. Polish transport-transit projects between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea

The idea and practice of the commercial roads from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, through Lwów and Cetatea Albă, dated back to the beginning of the Romanian states’ existence. The Polish Kingdom was interested in the existence and perpetuation of the influence; this was true until the end of the 18th century³⁴.

³² A.M.A.E., fund 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 45, f. 41-42.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Without even having the pretension of a minimal selective bibliography, we cannot ignore the following works: Nicolae Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chilie și Cetății Albe* (București, 1899); Nicolae Iorga, *Drumurile de comerț create ale statelor românești* (București, 1928); C.C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau orașe și cetăți moldovene din secolul al X-lea până la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea* (București, 1967); Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Marea Neagră de la origini până la cucerirea*

Its perennial nature was proven immediately after 1918, when, also from the Polish side (like before, in the medieval period), there were insistent offers of co-interest of the Romanian political and military partners in the ample project of opening a strategic axis from the Baltic Sea towards the Black Sea and from here even farther, towards the Orient and the Mediterranean³⁵. It is, after all, what senator Jerzy Iwanowski, the President of the Polish Chamber of Commerce, summed up in only one idea: “*The essence of the highest political interest of both states, Romania and Poland, is their unlimited control, as allies, of the entire road from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea*”³⁶.

As results from the earlier presentation, the Polish governments have approached the Balkan strategic and commercial item in two great stages, intrinsically linked to each other. The first, and maybe the decisive one, was represented by the creation and development of the political and juridical frame of the process. We are talking about the commercial agreements and accords or the ones concerning the transit, which Poland had signed, between 1921 and 1925, with Romania (1921), Greece (1922), the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (1924) and, in 1925, with Romania and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. Also, we must add the efforts regarding the commercial agreement with Turkey and the creation of mixed economic companies in Bulgaria. Finally, the second stage is represented by the devising and applying of the great axes and transport corridors that would connect – on land or water – the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea to the Adriatic Sea. We must also state that, during the years of the liberal government from the first decade of the period between the two world wars, Romania accepted very rarely and in

otomană, 2 vol. (București, 1988); Șerban Papacostea, “Începuturile politicii comerciale a Țării Românești și Moldovei (secolele XIV-XVI). Drum și stat,” in *Geneza statului în evul mediu românesc. Studii critice* (Cluj Napoca: Dacia, 1988), 151-204; Virgil Ciocâltan, “Raporturi moldo-lituanieni (1420-1429),” in *Românii în istoria universală* (Iași, 1988), 129-143; Alexandru Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* (București, 1992); “Comerțul și geneza orașelor din sud-estul Moldovei (secolele XIII-XIV),” *Analele Brăilei* 1 (1993): 171-237; P.P. Panaitescu, “Drumul comercial al Poloniei spre Marea Neagră în Evul Mediu,” in *Interpretări românești* (București, 1994), 83-98; Șerban Papacostea, “Drumurile comerciale internaționale și geneza statelor românești în viziunea lui N. Iorga și în istoriografia zilelor noastre,” *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* XVIII (2000): 45-56.

³⁵ A good perspective, at Michel Foucher, “Transitions géopolitique dans l’isthme mer Baltique- mer Noire: un entre-deux-mers au devenir indécis”, in *Transitions géopolitique sur le continent européen. Mutations dans l’isthme mer Baltique-mer Noire*, ed. Michel Foucher (Paris, 1998), 11-18.

³⁶ Jerzy Iwanowski, “România-Polonia. Perspective economice,” *BUCCI* 11, nr. 9 (1936): 561.

isolated cases the conferring of the most favoured nation's clause. Moreover, in the context of the protectionist customs system of the liberals, there were only three states with which the government from Bucharest had commercial agreements: Czechoslovakia, Poland and Turkey; usually, provisional accords were preferred (like the ones with Austria, Hungary or Spain) or to let things go their own way. In some cases even, like the economic relation with the U.S.A., the liberal governments have abolished the clause of the most favoured nation, so as not to perturb the national industry's development³⁷. This clearly renders the fact that the concessions and the preferential treatment granted to Poland through the *Commercial Agreement* of 1921 were the result of the bilateral commerce's entire activity, at least for the '20s.

The transport corridors devised by the Polish to link the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea had to be efficient, fast, secure and especially to have the quality of not being endangered by unprovoked interventions of the U.S.S.R. (especially when the railroad crossed, in its entirety, frontier regions). The two routes were named:

1. *Rompol* and
2. *Polrom*

and would connect the Baltic harbour of Gdynia to Cernăuți and Bucharest. From here, they should either head towards the harbour of Constanța, or towards the harbours of Galați and Brăila. A railroad ramification would have lead to Bessarabia, namely to Chișinău. The duration of the transport on the Gdynia – Constanța route was calculated at 129 hours and the transport on the Gdynia – Chișinău route at 116 hours³⁸ (calculated at the level of the end of the '20s).

Another type of commercial-strategic canal was the naval route, on the navigable rivers within the territory, on the Danube and on the Black Sea, through a complex network of canals, doubled by roads and railroads. Immediately after the First World War, at the initiative of a few ministries in Warsaw, (Industry and Commerce, Public Works, War, Foreign Affairs), engineer Alfred Konopka devised the project of a canal that would connect the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, using the flows of the Vistula, San, Dnestr,

³⁷ Ioan Saizu, *Politica economică a României între 1922 și 1928* (București, 1981), 145. Gheorghe Christodorescu, *Politica noastră comercială. Regimul exportului României în timpul neutralității și după război*, vol. II (București, 1928), 360-380.

³⁸ BUCCI 9 (1936), 566. More time after, in July 7, 2001, at Mangalia (Romania) was signed a *Memorandum* for modernisation a railway between Gdansk and Constanța (via Cracow-Košice-Halmeu-Dej-București). The route-2163 km- will be calculated at 18 houis, with 120-160 km/h. See *Adevărul*, July 10, 2001.

Pruth and Danube. President of the Ministry of Public Works, Alfred Konopka started from the premise that “Poland must consider, first and foremost, the effecting of those works that were meant to stimulate its own economic life”³⁹. The project proposed the construction of at least three successive river segments between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea:

1. the interlocking of the Vistula, San, Pripet and Dnepr rivers, on a length of 2,160 km;
2. the construction of the Vistula – San canal which, near the Polish town of Przemyśl, would have linked with the Dniestr – a total length of 2,070 km;
3. the construction of the Vistula – Dniestr – Pruth – Danube canal, going up to the small Bessarabian harbour of Reni, on a length of 1,560 km⁴⁰.

Alfred Konopka was convinced that project no. 3, the last one, was the most advantageous, for strategic and security reasons, because it crossed, in its entirety, the territories of the two countries and it avoided the border with the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, aside from the suggestion to build new harbour, industrial and transport infrastructures, this third variant centred on the already existing modules: the harbours of Gdańsk, Gdynia, Constanța, Galați, Brăila and on the industrial and commercial power of Lwów.

Another project was officially presented in May 1926, in Galați, during an official Romanian-Polish meeting. Minister Tadeusz Gabrowski wanted to create a common railroad segment between Gdynia and Constanța – Galați, with the parties’ obligation to double and modernize the Lwów – Cernăuți – Măreșești portion. Lwów would have acquired, in this project, the role of supervising, sizing and directing the flow of merchandise⁴¹. At the same time, Gabrowski asked the Romanians to hasten the modernization, in parallel, of the road segments that connected Romania to a few European capitals. The statistics of the Romanian Ministry of Public Works show that, at the end of the '20s, of the total of Romania’s roads, only 8 % were built at the European level. Of these, there were only three segments that connected the country directly to European states:

³⁹ Netta, 15.

⁴⁰ Florin Anghel, *Construirea sistemului „Cordon Sanitaire”. Relații române-polone, 1919-1926* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2008), 139-158.

⁴¹ A.A.N., *Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych*, vol. 450, f. 3. *Nota ministrului Tadeusz Gabrowski, șeful delegației polone la întâlnirea Presei Româno-Polone de la Galați către Ministerul de Externe al Poloniei, 25 mai 1926.*

1. Bucharest – Craiova, - Orșova – Belgrade
2. Bucharest – Brașov – Cluj – Satu Mare – Halmeu – Bratislava – Praga (with ramifications towards Budapest and Vienna);
3. Bucharest – Focșani – Roman – Cernăuți – Lwów – Warsaw⁴².

The *Rompol* and *Polrom* programmes involved thus the doubling and modernization of the Warsaw – Bucharest railroad, of the parallel road segment, and the commencement of works on a water communication system, through canals that would connect the Vistula, San, Dnestr, Pruth and Danube⁴³.

A significant role in the fast flow of the merchandise, people and services traffic on the great axes Baltic Sea – Black Sea (on dry land or water) was given to Lwów. An important industrial, commercial and cultural centre of Galitia was nominated as product coordinator and mediator – through the creation of a stock exchange, some banks, deposits, transport and storing facilities – so that the old tradition, from the medieval period, would be reborn and also that the Polish support would become dominant in a region where demography was favourable to the aliens (Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Russians). Lwów constituted, at the same time, a symbol of cooperation and political, economic and cultural relations between the Polish aristocratic Republic and, especially, the principality of Moldova during the 14th – 18th centuries. After Poland proclaimed its independence, the town of Lwów acquired again – little by little – its important role in the Polish – Romanian contact. Around its famous University, Polish-Romanian cultural and youth associations were created, and local and national intellectual personalities were thus associated. Thus, one of the most famous professors of the Lwów University, Dr. Emil Biedrzycki, specialist in the Romanian history, linguistics and civilization, published an article entitled “The Role of Lwów in the Polish-Romanian Commerce”⁴⁴. Professor Biedrzycki, the author of a substantial history of the Polish community from Bucovina, openly expressed his desire that Lwów should become again what it used to be a few centuries before, namely “the capital of the Polish-Romanian commerce”. He requested, for the materialization of this desideratum, that both governments should become even more involved and, for starters, to commence the necessary

⁴² N. Hoiescu, *În ce măsură se pune pentru România problema șoselelor moderne* (Cluj, 1928), 6.

⁴³ *La Presse Polono-Roumaine*, Procès verbaux, rapports, vœux et statut (Galați, 1926), 161-167.

⁴⁴ Emil Biedrzycki, “Rolul orașului Lwów în comerțul polono-român,” *Buletinul Uniunii Camerelor de Comerț și de Industrie* 4, nr. 11-12 (1929), 485-486.

works for the doubling of the Lwów – Cernăuți – Galați/Constanța railroad.

As we have already shown before, aside from revitalizing of Lwów's commercial functions, the Polish authorities were directly interested – idea expressed through the *Secret Protocol "C"* of the *Defensive Alliance Agreement* of March 3rd 1921 and the *Commercial Agreement* of the same year – in obtaining and utilizing the *porto franco* status in one of the Romanian harbours on the maritime Danube. The discussions advanced the name of the Brăila harbour which, according to the Polish authorities, met the required conditions. Explaining this choice, in the detriment of the neighbouring harbour of Galați, a report of the economic attaché of the Polish delegation in Bucharest, dating from January 17th 1925, showed that the Moldovan harbour town could not be taken into consideration because of the old port infrastructure, unfavourable taxes, the lack of financial companies that would ensure a fast capital transit and especially because of the numerous, bureaucratic and unqualified personnel. The variant of the harbour of Galați should not have been ruled out completely – the above-mentioned relation still attracted attention; it should have been kept and even analyzed in the context of the effort coordination for “the creation of a navigable route between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea which would logically require a technical effort, but which would open wonderful perspectives and would have unsuspected results”⁴⁵.

The entrepreneurs from Galați reacted vehemently when they found out about the Polish decision, accusing the Romanian authorities of the lack of interest in the dispute with Brăila: it is not less true, however, that, at that particular date, there were no material means for Poland to set into motion any of their advanced projects. The local administration of Galați accused, however, in an unprecedented press campaign, the responsible factors from the central level for the fact that “our harbour is shunned, it is rivalled, it lacks a good technical organization and it lies surrounded by the principles of a policy of retrograde and perilous nationalism”⁴⁶ (an obvious reference to the protectionist policy practiced by the liberal government of Ion I.C. Brătianu).

The Polish approaches concerning the utilization of Galați or Brăila as *porto franco* were obviously linked to several aspects; first and foremost,

⁴⁵ A.A.N., Minister Spraw Zagranicznych, vol. 450, f. 2-3. *Raport al atașatului economic al Legăției Poloniei la București către Ministerul de Externe al Poloniei*, 17 ianuarie 1925.

⁴⁶ *Vocea Galațiului*, October 15th, 1925. For a completion of the image, we have stopped at: Ștefan Zeletin, „Prin noi înșine” (Istoria unui principiu)”, in *Viața românească* 21, nr. 1 (1929); Virgil Madgearu, *Evoluția economiei românești după războiul mondial* (București, 1940).

it was about the making – in parallel – of a bilateral agreement regarding the facilities granted and, on the railroad, of the penetration into Romania, without paying customs taxes, of a clear number (a very large one, though) of Polish merchandise wagons. The Polish Minister in Bucharest, Józef Wielowieyski, explained to the competent authorities, at the end of 1923, that the Polish products' tax exemption both when entering Romania (by railroad) and when exiting the country (from harbours) could intensify the bilateral commercial relations. Wielowieyski admitted, however, that Poland desired the *porto franco* status more for "its use in Poland's trade with the Orient, and especially for the textile trade"⁴⁷. Not at all on a diplomatic tone, the Polish Minister attracted the attention to the fact that the cancelling of the facilities granted to the Polish commerce in Romania, the rejection of the suggested proposals (among which the concession of lands for the construction of warehouses of Polish companies) could produce "an embarrassing impression"⁴⁸ in the midst of the Polish public opinion.

The access to the railroad and naval strategic corridors, between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea, with an extension down to the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Near East, constituted one of the fundamental objectives of Polish policy in the Balkans, during the entire period comprised between the two world wars. We must state from the very start that the volume of the foreign commerce with certain Balkan states (we are talking strictly about Romania and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom) was by far a small one; it was, however, a valid pretext for an aggressive penetration into an extremely attractive and necessary area for the materialization of the propounded objectives. The construction of the commercial roads – designed to cross the two countries – was not supported by a financial justification; but at their end, there would have been fabulous regions, rich in raw material, excellent markets and, especially, influence areas that were vital for the great global politics.

The commercial route that Romania utilized the most, on which over 70 % of all imports and exports between the two world wars were directed, linked Bucharest to Budapest – Prague – Vienna and Berlin; from this axis, ramifications set off towards Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and Great Britain. Balkan commerce and extra-European commerce were situated, for Romania, at insignificant levels; also, there were no railroad

⁴⁷ A.M.A.E., fond 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol. 52, f. 109-110.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

routes or a fleet to enable the long-awaited and desired revival. The investments in public works and infrastructure – made by the Romanian governments during the '20s and '30s – were directed chiefly towards the modernization of roads, railroads and the river fleet that crossed Central Europe, towards Germany and Western Europe. The routes towards the Baltic Sea, through Poland, had neither opportunities for financing, nor an economic fundament for Romania; at the middle of the '30s, Romanian exports towards Poland did not total even 1 % of the foreign commerce's full value⁴⁹.

On the other hand, for Poland, the commercial and strategic axis towards the Balkans and the Black Sea was an absolutely vital one; the experience of the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1919 – 1920, when borders were blocked by all neighbours (except for Romania and Latvia) convinced the governments from Warsaw that this route was vital, being the only way of receiving help from the western and regional allies. Furthermore, *we believe that this regards Poland's impossibility to make a commercial and influential expansion towards the West and North (a space occupied by Germany, an attempt that would undoubtedly lead to a military conflict), the South (where there was Czechoslovakia, a state that was very close to France, Warsaw's main ally; at the same time, the government from Prague had influence in Bucharest too, in the very structures of decision of Poland's only regional ally), or the East (the U.S.S.R.). The only free route was the south-eastern one, the axis that – passing through Romania – crossed the Balkan Peninsula and reached the Aegean Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.* It is the only way we can explain the substantial efforts – with no subsequent economic achievements – to get to the various Balkan markets and to bring nearer, from a Polish point of view, the leaders of a few south-eastern states: with the exception of Romania, we are referring especially to the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom and Bulgaria. During the '30s, Greece and Turkey will acquire a significant role and, beyond the Balkans, Egypt too.

The Gdynia – Constanța axis, with extensions towards Thessaloniki and the Yugoslav Adriatic harbours, was designed, in the opinion of both discussion partners (Romanian and Polish), to compete with the great strategic continental route, dominated by Germany, on the Rhine – Main – Danube direction. The Polish project designers had already agreed that the linking of the two harbours, Romanian and Polish, opened – in its turn – another three extremely important segments which deserved to be covered:

⁴⁹ *Anuarul statistic al României, 1935–1936, 316–317.*

1) Sulina/Constanța – Alexandria (Egypt) – other Mediterranean harbours of North Africa;

2) Sulina/Constanța – Samsun (Turkish harbour at the Black Sea) – Baghdad (on the Anatolian railroad built at Kemal Atatürk's order);

3) Galați/Brăila – Giurgiu – Ruse – Varna – Thessaloniki.

From the Greek harbour, one could cover both the routes which reached North Africa and Southern Europe, and the continental areas from the Near and to the Middle East.

The segments that were designed by the Polish engineers and diplomats had the purpose of rapidly obtaining access and participation to the Eurasian oil, timber, cereal, animal and mineral transactions and transports. The petroleum extraction centres from Polish Eastern Galitia and from the Prahova Valley could have been linked, in various ways, to the extraction fields in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, thus facilitating the operation of the Romanian and Polish refineries and, in the future, the construction of others, with an increased capacity. Romanian, as opposed to Poland, already possessed an important network of pipelines through which the extracted oil was transported, either for export (the Câmpina – Constanța, Băicoi – Giurgiu and Ploiești – Giurgiu pipelines), or for processing (Băicoi – Bucharest)⁵⁰. There were even offers of foreign capital (Belgian) for the construction of another pipeline that would have linked the extraction centres from the Prahova Valley to the Brăila harbour⁵¹.

This complicated system of transport through pipelines would have allowed for a circulation of the oil from the extraction centres of refineries to the Gdynia and Constanța harbours; from the Black Sea, an active economic involvement of the Romanian and Polish states would have permitted the transportation of the oil from Baku (Azerbaijan) and the Georgian harbours. This way, the Black Sea could have become in a short while the main basin of European oil. The economic and social effects would have appeared soon: relatively backward areas, like Eastern Galitia and Dobrudja would have acquired a significant economic importance, and towns like Gdynia, Lwów, Brăila or Constanța would have had an unprecedented „boom”.

⁵⁰ *Enciclopedia României*, vol. IV, 69.

⁵¹ Saizu, 141. See also M. Pizanty's study, "Conductele petrolifere în România", *Analele economice și statistice* 19, nr. 9-11 (1936).

We believe there were at least two decisive factors that prevented the materialization of the ambitious Polish objectives of Balkan and Near East expansion:

1. The almost identical structure of the industrial and agrarian production of the two countries and, obviously, of the exported products. Unlike the other Central-European states, Poland was – much like Romania – a producer of energetic raw materials (petroleum, gasoline, gases, coal), and also an exporter of these materials. The Romanian state represented, in the 1921 – 1925 interval, a state that exported cereals more than anything else, namely an average of 45 % of the value and quantity total. It was, after all, a never before seen phenomenon, as even the great exporters like Argentine and Canada had smaller ratios in the value of the total export: 41,3 % and 35,7 % respectively. Even more convincing than that, between 1920 and 1924, Romania supplied almost three quarters of Europe's net oats export and over one tenth of the global market's total (not including the U.S.S.R.)⁵². But this surplus could not be transferred on the Polish market, because the neighbouring state was itself an exporter of this type. The other Balkan states that would have entered the great project drawn up by the Polish (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey, partly Greece) were dominated by the agricultural and the small commercial sector and represented markets with an extremely low purchasing power. Furthermore, each of these states represented a market for the great European economic powers (Germany, Great Britain, Italy), and it was difficult for a state with limited resources, like Poland, to obtain a privileged position. Only the textile production and the one of the military industry have favoured Poland's penetration into an extremely narrow sector of the Balkan market, in what the number of consumers and the payment capacity are concerned: we are talking here, in the '30s, about Bulgaria and Greece. The commercial agreements concluded by Poland with some Balkan states (Romania, Greece, the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom) have exclusively served the project of organizing Poland's defence and ensuring the war material's transit towards the Baltic Sea, in the eventuality of another blockade imposed by neighbouring states (see the 1925 Romania-Polish-Yugoslavian threefold accord).

2. Romania's low interest in the opening and modernization of a commercial road (railroad, highway or naval route), which would connect it to the Baltic region, while the majority of Romanian exports was directed at Central and Western Europe. The governments from Bucharest were preoccupied to finance the modernization projects for the highways and

⁵² Saizu, 151-152.

railroads on the Bucharest – Budapest – Vienna – Berlin route, as well as that of the river fleet, on the Danube, which ensured transport towards Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. There would have been a Romanian preoccupation for this course if Poland had facilitated, from the point of view of the infrastructure and finances, Romanian exports towards Germany (in transit through Poland) and the transport from Germany and the North Sea harbours towards Romania. The Baltic and Scandinavian states' markets – which would have opened through the Gdynia harbour – were unknown to Romanian firms, and the transport of the products would have proven to be hard and costly, lacking some agreements, accords or bilateral regulations. Also, Romanians did not know the products of these countries; naturally, Poland offered to mediate, but without making concrete proposals and without being directly interested.

The scanty Polish projects and investments on the Baltic – Black Sea axis have completed – and have not influenced – the general frame of Romanian – Polish relations, essentially based on political, diplomatic and military interests.

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