

NICOLAE TITULESCU'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY DIPLOMACY¹

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Abstract

Nicolae Titulescu's personality cannot be ignored when discussing the evolutions in contemporary diplomacy in the 20th century. From his training as a lawyer to the highest position held within the League of Nations for two years in a row, Nicolae Titulescu influenced the development of international relations, always having Romanian interests at its core. He refused to be intimidated by both internal and external pressures and pursued his ideas, looking forward to develop them to the benefit of the country. Probably, the most debated aspect is that of the negotiations developed with Soviet Russia, in an attempt to regulate, once and for all, the status of Bessarabia. As a visionary spirit, he envisaged the ascension of Nazi Germany and made all possible efforts to ensure that Romania will not be threatened. Unfortunately, he was forced to resign before he could have accomplished probably the most unexpected alliance with the Soviet Union, one that would have definitely changed the faith of the Second World War.

The aim of the present article is to analyse the role Titulescu played in the development of international relations, focusing on his specific type of diplomacy. In this regard, several examples shall be provided, in order to exemplify his work and results.

Keywords: diplomacy, territorial integrity, equality, sovereignty

I. INTRODUCTION

A multi-lateral developed personality, Nicolae Titulescu was a lawyer, a diplomat, Minister of Finances, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and President of the League of Nations, for two years in a row. He was a strong defender of Romanian interests, both internally, and especially externally, the most eloquent example in this regard being that of his attempts to solve the issue of Bessarabia in the aftermath of the First World War.

Apart from his work as a diplomat, Titulescu contributed to a great extent to the development of several issues of public international law. His influence in their regulation made them valid even nowadays. Thus, Titulescu contributed to the launching, fundamenting and development of principles of international law, focusing on matters such as: sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality of rights among states, the principle of non-interference in a state's internal matters, the principle of non-aggression, the principle consecrating the respect of international treaties (*pacta sunt servanda*), the peaceful resolution of disputes among states, the legal regime of the sea, neutrality, the incrimination of international political

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terrorism, the legal regime of straits, the role of small and medium-sized states in the development of international relations, the principle of nationalities, the principle of good-faith in international relations.

As a diplomat, and especially as President of the League of Nations, he did considerable efforts to establish principles which would lay at the foundation of diplomatic relations; these principles have remained intact until present and are still valid today.

II. TITULESCU'S DIPLOMATIC CONCEPT

Titulescu's diplomatic perception needs to be conceived of as a mathematical system, consisting of principles, theories and representations, having an intrinsic logic. According to Mircea Malița, "Nicolae Titulescu contributed to the formation of diplomacy as an independent system. He thought of it as a science – having method, logic, and multi-shaped and systemic pieces of information – as well as through the talent he used in deciphering the lack of perception among human relations; he turned it into an art"².

Rene Cassin referred to Titulescu as follows: " His never-ending endeavour to look for a system of international relations based on equity, equality and mutual respect...Titulescu intended to place nations in a security system which would keep them away from the wrath of war"³. And it was this desire to avoid conflict, which constituted the founding element of his diplomatic strategy. In order to avoid war, states need to have all elements which would allow them to be independent actors within the international community. In this regard, all states need to have equal rights and be provided with the right to independence, sovereignty, freedom of existence and development⁴. Such an attitude had been possible due to Titulescu's visionary perspective, especially given the fact that at the time, the international community was undergoing significant changes.

As he was very much connected to the realities of the Western environment, due to his studies and his higher position within the Romanian administration, Titulescu felt that the interwar period would be highly likely to witness massive changes as far the construction and the development of states was concerned. And the centre of these changes was the state. Ergo the emphasis laid on the respect of sovereignty and national independence – "The acknowledgement of state sovereignty is the foundation of contemporary international life"⁵. There is another element to be taken into consideration when analysing his approach to state sovereignty and rights on an international level. Titulescu has always been a defender and supporter of Romanian interests. By upholding the consecrating of small and medium-sized states within public international law, Titulescu also upheld Romania's interests and position within the international community – "(...) nothing is priceless than one's homeland; I

² Mircea Malița, *Nicolae Titulescu*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1969, pp.7-8.

³ Rene Cassin, *Drepturile omului mai presus de orice...*, in *Laureați ai Premiului Nobel răspund la întrebarea: Există un secret al celebrității?*, București, Editura Politică, 1971.

⁴ Ion Grecescu, *Nicolae Titulescu. Concepție juridică și diplomatică*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc, 1982, p. 178.

⁵ Nicolae Titulescu, *The Dynamics of Peace*, Conference held in the Reichstag on May 6th, 1929, in *Documente diplomatice*, București, Editura Politică, 1967.

consider myself to be deeply human, but I have the courage to state publicly that humanity is none of my interest, should Romania not find its place among it”⁶.

The dominant aspect of his diplomacy is the defence of Romania’s fundamental interests in a larger context of general consolidation of world peace and security. Thus, he stated the fact that the right to an initiative in international relations does not belong simply to larger states, but also to smaller ones, should they be able to plead their case. Significant in this regard is the comparison of Romania’s position at the beginning of his activity and at the end of it. During the Conferences held in Versailles, in 1919-1920, Romania had the status of a country with ”limited interests”⁷. Later on, in 1936, when Titulescu was forced to step down from his position in the government, he had already linked the country to the dynamics of the international community, having it present as a signatory in major treaties and as a voice in international affairs, especially in light of his two-year in a row chairmanship of the League of Nations.

He began his diplomatic activity at the end of the Great War, in 1918, when he joined Take Ionescu in one of his visits to London, and then as a delegate to the Peace Conferences, where he was in charge with signing the Trianon Treaty and negotiating and finalising the Paris Protocol of October 1920. In light of his achievements in Paris, he was later appointed to the Romanian diplomatic mission in the United Kingdom. During his mission in London, between 1921-1927, Titulescu focused on applying the treaties to the letter and thus created the foundation of his diplomatic thinking. He militated for leaving aside economic disputes and establishing trade relations between the post-war nations, which were likely to pave the way for political-diplomatic dialogue in the future. He thus envisaged the foundation of the European project that Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann would later create.

A fierce defender of the order established in Versailles in 1919-1920, Titulescu approved of any sort of action which increased the security of European states. However, he disapproved of the system of unilateral guarantees established in Locarno, in 1925 and projected a similar system, this time a ”Locarno” which would provide for Central Europe, and would cover the lack of efficiency of the first treaty for this area. In this regard, he argued that the” distinctions between borders do not correspond to the real prerequisites of peace”⁸.

As far as Titulescu is concerned, lasting peace is organically connected to the respect shown to state sovereignty, national independence and equal rights for all states, be they large or small. This was clearly expressed in his opinions on the matter – ”we are looking forward to gaining the friendship of all Great Powers, without any discrimination: France, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, USSR. We are ready to offer all these Great Powers tangible evidence of our sincere desire to live in peace and friendship. But, in return, we will never give up, in favour of neither and none of the Great Powers, to the principle of state equality, which is translated as the sovereign right to dispose each of our faith and not to ever receive a decision concerning us, to which we have not contributed”⁹.

⁶ Nicolae Titulescu, *Documente diplomatice*, București, Editura Politică, 1967, p. 645.

⁷ Walter M. Bacon Jr., *Nicolae Titulescu și politica externă a României. 1933-1934*, Iași, Institutul European, 1999, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

III. TITULESCU'S APPROACH TO SOVIET RUSSIA

There are two noteworthy elements, as far as Titulescu is concerned: his relations with the Eastern partner of Romania – the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the importance of cultivating diplomatic skills and relations, on the other. As a matter of fact, as far as the Romanian cause is concerned, the two are in direct connection, as he managed to bring the question of Bessarabia into discussion by resorting to a close working relation with the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov.

Even after his removal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his leave in exile, Titulescu used his internationally -acknowledged position in order to gather momentum for the Romanian cause. His approach might seem a doctrinaire one, but by focusing on theoretical aspects, aspects which were also vital for the interwar Romania, he was leading forward the fight for a better position of the country among other European nations. His conferences held in Oxford and London, entitled "On practical methods to maintain current peace", "The current international situation" and "The orientation of European democracies within international politics", highlighted his realistic views on the need to maintain the European peace. He even resorted to asking the Foreign Office for support in order to strengthen those institutions whose main activity was the preservation of peace. In this regard, he stated that there were multiple reasons to maintain such institutions: the Anglo-French friendship, the French-Soviet Agreement, other regional alliances in which Romania was a member state, not to mention the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact. The League of Nations is the foundation of collective security, but its pact must be improved by regional military alliances. In this sense, Titulescu foresaw the difficulties to be experienced by the United Nations, the successor organization of the League of Nations.

In close relation with the cultivation of diplomatic skills and relations is the resort to the diplomacy of international conferences. During the interwar period, Titulescu attended many of these conferences, starting with the ones in Versailles, in 1919-1920. It is within such a framework that many deals could be brokered, provided that several rules of protocol are obeyed. In order to achieve success on the issues raised up for debate within these conferences, Nicolae Titulescu highlighted the need for these events, *en ensemble*, to pass through several stages: the first stage is that of lack of trust. This stage is characterized through the predominance of national particularities, and the intransigence of points of view. The second stage is that of explanations, when all those present communicate their views in an impeccable manner – a sheer example of the politeness which characterizes diplomacy. The first two stages are the more difficult to go through as they represent, in some form, the "getting acquainted part of diplomacy". The third stage is that of sympathy, when diplomats have finally understood what their counterparts are asking for and relieved to see that the opponent is not entirely bad. It is at this stage that the conference usually takes off to a new start, with diplomats getting more and more involved and attempting to transform even the most unexpected solutions into viable ones¹⁰. Titulescu was a strong supporter of such relations, and cultivated them to a high degree. A good example in this regard is the Montreux conference, held in 1936, where Titulescu played a great part in the protection of Romania's national interests, as well as of those of countries surrounding the Black Sea. The outcome of the conference translated into a new legal regime of straits, which is valid even

¹⁰ Grecescu, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-203.

nowadays. Additionally, the convention signed in Montreux had the significance of a legal instrument, which contributed to the strengthening of the country's security, by ensuring the regular functioning of the regional agreements and alliances to which Romania was a signatory.

As far as the relations with the Soviet Union are concerned, Titulescu used the debates concerning the pact on the definition of the aggressor in 1933, as well as the rapprochement performed by many of the other states towards the Soviet Union, in order to initiate himself a new form of friendly and normal relations with the Soviets. As a visionary spirit, he understood that in the event of closer relations between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Romania would be caught in the middle. Moreover, a normalization of the relations with the USSR would allow Titulescu the necessary channel to achieve a definitive resolution on the matter of Bessarabia, an issue left unsolved after the Peace Conferences in Versailles. In order to achieve his intentions, Titulescu resorted to a clever strategy: he openly supported the acknowledgement of the USSR by the United States. The Romanian-American relations were good at the time, with one minor difficulty – the Colby Note of 1920, which did not recognize the changes performed to the frontiers of Tsarist Russia, and thus did not recognize Romania's sovereignty over Bessarabia. By helping normalize relations between the United States and the Soviets, Titulescu hoped of getting a more favourable perspective from Moscow on Bessarabia. He even instructed the Romanian Ambassador in Washington to offer in exchange for the recognition by the Soviets of Romania's sovereignty over Bessarabia, several advantages, such as the renouncing to the Romanian claims over the Thesaurus deposited in Moscow during the First World War, a non-aggression pact and diplomatic acknowledgement from the Little Entente¹¹. Furthermore, Titulescu recognized the value of the conventions defining the aggression as a concept, which have been introduced as a proposal by the Soviet Union in 1933; in his view, such an agreement could pave the way for an individual pact of non-aggression, which Titulescu himself attempted to negotiate with Litvinov later on. The refined manner of negotiation covered Titulescu with praises from the entire international community. However, the most important of all was the praise from Maxim Litvinov, who declared, in the aftermath of the signing of the conventions, that “ Titulescu is one of the most intelligent and most talented diplomats of contemporary Europe. He intends to achieve a stabilization of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Romania. I think he will manage to achieve it; either way, I wish him the best of luck”¹².

The most explicit sample of Titulescu's work concerning diplomacy as a means of protection of a country's territorial integrity and national interests is its fight to protect Romanian interests. Territory is the *sine qua non* condition of a country's existence, as well as for its development within the international community – “International cooperation and peace are inconceivable in the absence of respect for a state's territorial integrity”¹³. Defending the territorial integrity of Romania has been one of the constant preoccupations of Titulescu's diplomacy and foreign policy. This is visible in his interpretation of the League of Nations' Pact, the definition of the aggression and the aggressor, the organization of the Little Entente and the creation of the Balkan Pact, the good neighbourhood policy, the rejection of

¹¹ Bacon, *op.cit.*, pp. 94-95.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 99-100.

¹³ Grecescu, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

any other document which might have attempted to the territorial *status-quo*, the denouncing of any attempts to infringe upon territorial integrity and sovereignty, as was the case of the invasion of Ethiopia and Manchuria, etc.

Titulescu placed great emphasis on the need to strengthen alliances in order to ensure a better protection of borders - ” Indeed, ever since I took over the department of foreign affairs, I covered, from a political perspective, all of the country’s borders: the Western one, through the new statute of the Little Entente, the Eastern one, through the conventions with the USSR, the southern one through the Balkan Pact”¹⁴. These alliances and conventions need to be seen as peace instruments, whose intention was to prevent aggression and the use of force against the territorial integrity of signatories.

The importance of Nicolae Titulescu to contemporary diplomacy, as well as his role in the modelling of international relations within the European continent in the interwar years is most obviously stated in the concern formulated by the foreign cabinets immediately after his removal from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Many feared that the removal of Titulescu would be a fundamental change in the Romanian foreign policy. The Romanian government issued reassurances that nothing shall be changed, and that his successor – Victor Antonescu would continue Titulescu’s line of thought and approach. Naturally, this was not the case, especially as far as the Romanian-Soviet relations are concerned, which did not continue after Titulescu’s leave. The misfortunate event also left uncompleted the agreement initiated by Litvinov and Titulescu on July 21st, 1936, in which Romania would have obtained a clear *de jure* acknowledgement of its border on the Dniester.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

It is a fact that all throughout his life and work, Nicolae Titulescu constantly placed the needs of Romania in the larger context of the development of international relations within the international community. While his struggle resulted in several concepts which have become fundamental elements of public international law until present, he was also strongly involved in advancing Romanian interests. He relentlessly worked in order to achieve a state of facts that would position Romania on the same level as other European countries, leaving aside differences in size and power. For him, all countries were alike and equal in rights and sovereignty. His most endeavoured project – that of obtaining a definitive acknowledgement of Bessarabia as Romanian soil would not be completed on account of the many animosities he was confronted with on a national level. However, the diplomatic efforts he made, as well as the manner of negotiation and the type of diplomacy he advocated, turn Nicolae Titulescu in a true ambassador of Romanian interests, both at home and abroad. Furthermore, his incessant work as far as international law is concerned turned him into an innovator on public international law concepts and theories.

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¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

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