

A Consulate as much as a Legation: the Role of the Romanian Consulate in Istanbul in the Romanian-Turkish Relations in the 1920s

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ABSTRACT

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The paper analyses the activity of the Romanian Consulate in Istanbul, more precisely that of Consul Vasile Anastasiu, during a complicated period, both in terms of internal developments in the Republic of Türkiye engaged in reforms, and in terms of Romanian-Turkish relations. Given the differences of opinion between Bucharest and Ankara regarding various contentious issues, the Istanbul Consulate provided, especially under the leadership of Vasile Anastasiu, an additional source of analysis of Turkish realities, through reports sent, in many cases, directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania. The consular activity did not stop at only specific issues (passports, various situations faced by Romanian citizens)

but also, in parallel with those of the head of the diplomatic mission, Anastasiu offered his reflections on bilateral relations and developments in the Republic of Türkiye.

Keywords: Diplomatic reports, Romanian Consulate, Kemalist reforms, Turkish-Romanian relations at interwar period, Vasile Anastasiu

ÖZ

PLOPEANU, Emanuel, Elçilik Gibi Çalışan Konsolosluk: 1920'li Yıllarda Romen-Türk İlişkilerinde İstanbul'daki Romanya Konsolosluğunun Rolü, CTAD, Yıl 21, Sayı 43 (Güz 2025), s. 985-1004.

Makale, hem reformlar yapan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ndeki iç gelişmeler hem de Romanya-Türkiye ilişkileri açısından karmaşık bir dönemde, İstanbul'daki Romanya Konsolosluğu'nun, daha doğrusu Konsolos Vasile Anastasiu'nun faaliyetlerine dikkat çekmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Büyükelçi ve Ankara arasında çeşitli tartışmalı konulardaki görüş ayrılıkları göz önüne alındığında, İstanbul Konsolosluğu, özellikle Vasile Anastasiu'nun liderliğinde, birçok durumda doğrudan Romanya Dışişleri Bakanı'na gönderilen raporlar aracılığıyla, Türk gerçeklerinin ek bir analiz kaynağını sağlamıştır. Konsolosluk faaliyeti yalnızca belirli konularla (pasaportlar, Rumen vatandaşlarının karşılaştığı çeşitli durumlar) sınırlı kalmamış, aynı zamanda diplomatik misyon şefine paralel olarak Anastasiu, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ndeki ikili ilişkiler ve gelişmeler hakkındaki düşüncelerini sunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diplomatik raporlar, Romanya Konsolosluğu, Kemalist reformlar, iki savaş arası dönemde Türk-Roman ilişkileri, Vasile Anastasiu

Introduction

Romanian-Turkish relations in the interwar period are defined, mainly, by reference to the community of views that led to the establishment of the Balkan Pact (Athens, February 9, 1934) and the new Straits Convention, signed in Montreux (July 20, 1936). They are also centered on the two great diplomatic personalities that emerged from these countries, Nicolae Titulescu and Tevfik Rüştü-bey. However, the dynamic of bilateral relations is much more complex. The positive rhetoric of both diplomacies and various positive evolutions are predominant (except for some punctual cases) but the diplomatic definitive *rapprochement* proved to be much more difficult and time consuming. This ambivalence was remarked upon in the Romanian historiography.¹ The main

¹ We mention, without claiming exclusivity: Mehmet Ali Ekrem, *Relațiile româno-turce între cele două războaie mondiale* [Eng. trans.: Romanian-Turkish relations between the two world wars], Editura Științifică,

sources of it are derived from the different positions adopted by Romania and Turkiye Republic regarding the Soviet Union (mainly in the twenties). Romanian diplomatic reports, in the first decade, stressed, permanently, the importance of the Soviet factor, both for the bilateral or regional positive developments. In the first case, Turkish fear of a Romanian-Soviet war on the Bessarabian question (as remarked in the Romanian reports), which would bring great pressures as to the Straits use, lead to the Turkish side refraining from improving bilateral relations, until, not coincidentally, the signing, in July 3-4, 1934, of the Convention for the defining of aggression and territory, in London. This document, which the Soviet Union also signed, was seen as an important tool against treaty revision through war (or other forms of aggression), especially in the contested area of the Balkans, and opened the way for bilateral diplomatic achievements (the Friendship, Non-Aggression, Arbitration, and Conciliation treaty of October 17, 1933) and multilateral diplomatic achievements: (the Balkan Entente (February 9, 1934), the Montreux Convention of the Straits (July 20, 1936). Again, not surprisingly, the preamble and the first article of the Romanian – Turkish treaty stipulated that;

“having in mind that both states are among signatories of the Pact from Paris, from August 27, 1928, referring to the renouncing war, and of Conventions which define the aggression, from July 3 and 4, 1933 [...] it is

Bucureşti, 1993; Eliza Campus, “Les relations entre la Turquie kémaliste et la Roumanie pendant l'entre-deux guerres”, *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, XX, 1981, No. 3, pp. 411–433; Mircea N. Popa, “Quelques aspects des relations roumano-turques durant la période comprise entre les deux guerres mondiales”, *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, XX, 1981, No. 4; pp. 753-760; Constantin Iordan, “La Roumanie, la Turquie kémaliste et les Balkans (1921-1925): interferences politiques et diplomatiques”, *XI. Türk Tarîh Kurumu*, Ankara, 1994, pp. 2523-2533; Florin Anghel, ”De la legație în Imperiul Otoman, la Constantinopol, la ambasadă în Republica lui Atatürk, la Ankara: începiturile noilor relații dintre România și Turcia (1924-1929)” [Eng.trans.: ”From legation, in Ottoman Empire, at Constantinople, to the Embassy, in Atatürk Republic, at Ankara”], *Secoul armoniei: relații româno-turce (1923-2023)/Uyum Yüzyılı: Romanya – Türkiye İlişkileri (1923 – 2023)* [Eng.trans.: *The century of harmony: Romanian-Turkish relations*] Silvana Rachieru (coord.), Editura Universității ”Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2023, pp. 27 - 38; Emanuel Plooreanu, ”Romanian-Turkish Relations in Interwar period: issues, perceptions and solutions. The case of Black Sea Straits' regime and Turkish-Tatars emigration”, *Revista Istorica*, XXIII, No. 5-6, 2012, pp. 433 – 477. Most recent works: Liliana Boşcan, *Diplomatic and Economic Relations Between the Kingdom of Romania and the Republic of Turkey during the Atatürk period (1923 – 1938)*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara, 2019; Daniela Popescu, *Navigând în ape învolburate. România și Turcia în vreme de pace și de război* [Eng. trans.: *Navigating turbulent waters: Romania and Türkiye in times of peace and war*], Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2023; For the antebellum period, see Silvana Rachieru, *Diplomați și supuși otomani în Vechiul Regat. Relații otomano-române între anii 1878 și 1908* [Eng. trans.: *Ottoman diplomats and subjects in the Old Kingdom. Ottoman-Romanian relations between 1878 and 1908*], Editura ”Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2018.

and it will be inviolable peace, sincere and perpetual friendship between the Kingdom of Romania and Turkish Republic and their peoples".²

It is worth mentioning that only in relation with Romania, Türkiye had geopolitical reservations, the treaties with the future partners in the Balkan Entente (Greece and Yugoslavia) being signed before the London Convention, as a result of resolving the *bilateral issues*. As for Romania, the main issue was not concerned with the level of the bilateral relations but the danger (in the eyes of Türkiye) of a Soviet-Romanian war and the mistrust (from the Romanian side) in a neighbour that had good relations with Soviet Union.

In the case of the Turkish historiography, we must mention, that the works dedicated to the bilateral relations are relatively rare. A new bibliographic instrument only confirmed this assertion.³ More frequent are studies which deal with the Türkiye foreign policy in general, with some references to the Balkan Entente or the Montreux Convention. The presence of both countries in the Balkan Entente was a logical consequence of the London conventions, mentioned above, and of the rising revisionist trends, even in the Balkans, Bulgaria being perceived as a threat by Türkiye.⁴ Very few (to none) considerations are made about bilateral relations. We could mention the Ph.D. thesis of Metin Ömer, which uses, in a predominant manner, sources from the Romanian Archives or Romanian published works, besides Turkish diplomatic documents and general works dedicated to Türkiye's foreign policy. The author connects the difficult Soviet-Romanian relation with the stymied Romanian-Türkiye relations from the 1920s.⁵ One other study by the same author focuses on the activity of Turkish Ministry of Legation, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, in support of the Turks and Tatars departure from Romania to Türkiye.⁶ Another

² *Relații politice și militare româno-otomano-turce 1878-1989. Documente*, vol. I, 1878-1938 [Eng.trans.: *Romanian-Ottoman-Turkish Political and Military Relations 1878-1989. Documents*, vol. I, 1878-1938], Editura Militară, București, 2023, p. 440.

³ *Romania tarihinde dair Türkiye'de hazırlanmış bilimsel yayınlar bibliografyası/The Bibliography of Turkish studies on Romanian history*, edited by Ahmet Taşdemir, Millî Savunma Üniversitesi, Yenilevent/Istanbul, 2024.

⁴ Türel Yılmaz, "Balkanlar ile İlişkiler" [Eng.trans.: "Relations with the Balkans"], *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2008* [Eng. trans.: *Turkish Foreign Policy 1919 - 2008*], Ed. Prof.Dr. Haydar Çakmak, Barış Platin Kitap, Ankara, 2008, pp. 199-206.

⁵ Metin Ömer, *Atatürk Dönemi Türkiye-Romanya İlişkileri (1923-1938)* [Eng.trans.: *Türkiye - Romanian relations during Atatürk period*], Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2011, pp. 54-57.

⁶ Metin Ömer, "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver'in Romania Türklerinin Göçüne Dair Faaliyetleri (1931-1938)" [Eng.trans.: "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver's Role in the Immigration of Romanian Turks (1931-1938)"], *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, No. 35, 2012, pp 125-143.

contribution which falls in the category of Romanian-Turkish relations is that of Yonca Anzerlioğlu.⁷ More recently, two important contributions are that of Berk Emek and Dilek Barlas.⁸ The second one is dedicated to both countries' diplomatic reactions to revisionism and aggression and the way in which those threats changed both Bucharest's and Ankara's way of conducting diplomacy.

After the major breakthroughs from 1933-1934, bilateral relations are more consistent and major issues – as that of the Turkish and Tatars migration from Romania to Türkiye – are peacefully solved.⁹ The regional security was assured by the Balkan Entente and both countries, despite some initial reluctance from Romania, adopted similar positions as to the new regime of the Black Sea Straits, established in 1936. The efficiency of the Balkan Entente, especially at the end of the 30's, is highly debatable, as some of the members choose to conclude separate agreements (Yugoslavia with Italy, for example). And it could be argued that the Balkan Entente offered a sense of security but without being tested. One important episode, regarding the Türkiye position, proved that, on the one hand, Türkiye will honor its obligations, in the case of a Bulgarian demand over Romanian Dobrudja but, on the other hand, Türkiye was relieved that the Romanian – Bulgarian Treaty of Craiova (September 7, 1940), through which Southern Dobrudja was ceded to Bulgaria, eliminated the possibility of testing in practice the treaty obligations.

In conclusion, the bilateral relations during the interwar period could be divided in two major periods: 1922-1933, one of different positions but with positive evolutions, though without a general *rapprochement*, based on a mutual treaty; 1933-1939, one in which the causes for the dispute are reduced by the existence of a bilateral treaty and multilateral regional agreements, both, in turn, based on the multilateral convention for defining the aggression.

The Romanian diplomatic reports also highlight this difference and, in our opinion, those from the 20's are highly illustrative, showing, on one hand, the

⁷ Yonca Anzerlioğlu, "Bükres Büyükelçisi Hamdullah Suphi ve Gagauz Türkleri" [Eng.trans.: "Bucharest Ambassador Hamdullah Suphi and Gagauz Turks"], *Bilig*, No. 39, 2006, pp. 31-51.

⁸ "Savaş Arası Dönemde Türkiye ve Romanya'nın Ulus-Devlet Yapılanmalari ve Bölgesel Yansımları" [Eng.trans.: "Nation-State Structures of Türkiye and Romania in Interwar Period and their Regional Reflections"], *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Year 18, No. 35, 2022, pp. 267 – 298; "Diplomacy Within the Security Framework in Turkey and Romania During the Interwar Period", *Turkish Historical Review*, Vol. XV, Issue 1, 2024, pp. 27 – 50 (with Dilek Barlas).

⁹ Metin Omer, *Emigrarea turcilor și tătarilor din România în Turcia între cele două războaie mondiale* [Eng. trans.: *The emigration of Turks and Tatars from Romania to Türkiye between the two world wars*], Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2020.

complexity of the political environment in which both countries were acting (and, consequently, the areas of agreement and disagreement) and, on the other hand, the complex dynamics of Türkiye's process of modernization (subject of our paper). Throughout this process, and during a period of still-detached relations, the role of the Romanian Consulate was very important, as it was a source of important evaluations, a role which will subside after 1933.

The Road to Rapprochement: The 1920s

For the 1920s, the one in which divergences and rapprochements overlap the bilateral area of relations, several points of inflexion emerged related to the two countries pursuing differing foreign policy strategies. We can mention the different relationship with the Soviet Union, with which Türkiye had a treaty of friendship¹⁰ as one of these points but also different views about logistical accommodation. The issue of moving the Royal Legation from Istanbul to Ankara represented a subject of real controversy, between the Romanian side, dissatisfied with the inhospitality of the capital of the young republic, and the Turkish side, which saw the delay in relocation as a real affront to national prestige and honour: "the lack of contact - for so many years - between Romania and Ankara has always saddened the Turkish government and did not make it easier for the Romanian government to understand the true situation of the Turkish Republic", said Tevfik Rüstü-bey.¹¹ However, the Romanian reluctance was only due to the lack of attractivity of the new capital city, not to political reasons. Romanian diplomats and Bucharest officials did not challenge, between 1923 and 1929, the legality or fairness of the Turkish Republic and did not express any interest for the passed away Ottoman Empire.¹² Romanian side has little impulse to abandon the confort and luxurios way of life which Istanbul offered in exchange with the minimum life environment from Ankara, also placed in an arid and uncomfortable area. This problem would only be solved in 1929.

During this period, however, there was also a constant tendency towards rapprochement, and we can recall, for example, that in the first half of the 1920s, Romania refused to comply with Great Britain's proposal, from September 1922, to land troops in Istanbul or to accede to the proposal made by the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Aleksander Stamboliiski, during his stop in

¹⁰ Signed on March 16, 1921, in Moscow: *Soviet Treaty Series: A collection of Bilateral Treaties, Agreements and Conventions etc., Concluded between the Soviet Union and Foreign Powers*, vol. I, edited by Leonard Shapiro, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1950.

¹¹ Florin Anghel, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Bucharest on his way to Lausanne (November 1922), who proposed Bulgaria's neutrality towards a Soviet attack against Romania in exchange for Romania's support for Bulgaria's exit to the Aegean Sea, that involved territorial claims to Greece and Turkish Thrace.¹³ Ismet Pasha's unofficial visit to Bucharest on February 13-14, 1923 (on his return from Lausanne) only strengthened the trend of rapprochement between the two countries.¹⁴

A year later, a visit- cancelled for personal reasons- of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu¹⁵ was in line with the same positive direction, reflected in 1925, in Romania's reluctance, transmitted to Ankara, towards Greece's offer to conclude a bilateral alliance or to join the Little Entente.¹⁶ In February 1926, Tevfik Rüstü-bey informed the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Gh. Duca, of a project concerning a Balkan Entente.¹⁷ An obvious fact results from this development: Türkiye perceived Romania as a reliable partner, of increased importance, both for the bilateral relationship as well as in the regional strategy of the new republic, which was increasingly active in this regard.

In this context, declarations of friendship also appear. One such example from a 'Turkish personality' conveyed to a diplomat in Sofia, stated that

"Among all the Eastern powers, we are fully convinced that the only one with which we will establish sincere relations that will lead us to a close rapprochement is Romania. Romania is the only state strongly consolidated and in whose sincerity and loyalty we put all our trust. The governments in Bucharest have always kept their word. Romania is the most tolerant country, the most welcoming, the most devoid of chauvinism."

This exchange was, later, relayed to Constantin Langa-Răscănu, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in Sofia, in February 1924.¹⁸ Another message would arrive from the same Balkan capital, during that month.

¹³ Constantin Iordan, *op. cit.*, p. 2527.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2528. See also Mehmet Ali Ekrem, *op.cit.*, p. 24-33, containing a broader inventory of rapprochement actions, beyond the sphere of political relations.

¹⁵ Constantin Iordan, *op. cit.*, p. 2529.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2530.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2533.

¹⁸ According to the Report of February 1st, 1924, by the Romanian diplomat, sent to Ion Gh. Duca, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in *România- Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; *Romania – Türkiye. Diplomatic relations*], vol. I, 1923-1938, edition by Dumitru Preda, Bucharest, Editura Cavallotti, 2011, p. 7. The last phrase is also quoted by Mircea N. Popa, *op.cit.*, p. 758.

In a meeting with Enver-bey, the consul general of Türkiye in Sofia, he recounted to the mentioned Romanian diplomat a passage from a speech given in front of the National Assembly in Ankara, by the president of the Council of Ministers, Ismet Pasha: "*everywhere, our representatives were badly received. Only one state gave a friendly welcome to our envoy: this is Romania...*"¹⁹ In a sign of reciprocity, at the presentation of the credentials of Gheorghe Filality, on April 24, 1924, Mustafa Kemal prolonged the conversation with the Romanian diplomat, affirming his sympathy for the Romanians and Romania, while hoping that "the relations between the two countries should be as friendly as possible", and expressing a desire to visit Romania, "*which he only passed through a few years ago and of which he had only a very vague idea.*"²⁰

Assesing the Türkiye's main evolutions in the twenties. Views from the Romanian Consulate in Istanbul

In this bi- and multilateral diplomatic development, the importance of observing the interests and objectives of the Republic of Türkiye was insistently safeguarded, for the entire interwar period the positions of minister in Ankara and consul in Istanbul were occupied by experienced diplomats. The importance given to the mandate can be seen, first of all, from the numerous reports covering the 1930s, as well as from their subject matter, covering a variety of domestic policy issues as well as the foreign policy options of decision-makers in Ankara. Many of these observations are sourced in direct conversations with the head of Turkish diplomacy, Tevfik Rüstü-bey, which demonstrates a reciprocal interest in becoming acquainted with one another.

Another important evidence concerns the work done by the Romanian diplomats because of the interactions mentioned above. The two senior Romanian diplomats -the minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary, respectively the consul - conducted observations and formulated analyses as a team so that the situation was monitored at all times and no periods were left uncovered, with reports and even conclusions sent from Istanbul on a

¹⁹ Report of February 29, 1924 by Constantin Langa-Rășcanu, envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary in Sofia, to Ion Gh. Duca, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, in *România-Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; Romania – Türkiye. *Diplomatic relations*], p. 9. See also Florin Anghel, „Noul curs” în relațiile dintre România și Turcia, 1927 – 1928 [Eng. trans: The "new course" in Romanian-Turkish relations, 1927-1928]", *Tătarii în istoria românilor* [Eng.trans.: *Tatars in Romanian history*], Constanța, 2004, p. 74. Mircea N. Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 758.

²⁰ Report of April 24, 1924, by Gheorghe Filality, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in Istanbul, to Gheorghe Gh. Mărzescu, ad-interim minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding the presentation of letters of accreditation to Mustafa Kemal, *România-Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; Romania – Türkiye. *Diplomatic relations*], p. 12.

consistent basis (my analysis concerns the period when Romania's diplomatic representation was still present there).

Another subject of interest for this study is Vasile Anastasiu, first secretary, counsellor of legation, and consul of Romania in Istanbul between 1925-1934, stationed for the period in which the mission holders were Gheorghe Filality, Theodor Scortzescu, Ion P. Carp and Edmond Ciuntu. Moreover, Gheorghe Filality had only words of praise for the activity and skills of Vasile M. Anastasiu.²¹ The latter had a career dedicated exclusively to diplomacy, starting from the bureaucratic levels of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: copyist, editor, chancellor and deputy head of office (1907-1914), attaché, secretary, first secretary, and counsellor of legation (1918-1932 in Thessaloniki, Vienna, Istanbul, Holy See) or representative in the Straits Commission. And Consul in Istanbul (1932-1943), of course.

In his capacity as consul, Vasile Anastasiu had to fulfil numerous punctual tasks related to this position, from problems related to passports to the organization of official visits, culminating with that of Nicolae Titulescu, from October 1933. Amidst all these responsibilities, those observational-based and analytical ones were also part of his attributions, in tandem with the four heads of mission under which the Romanian diplomat served.

One of the recurring themes of Vasile Anastasiu's analysis focuses on the pace of modernization of the Turkish state. The Romanian consul captured, in his reports, a multitude of initiatives adopted by the authorities in Ankara. Thus, in an extensive telegram dated September 8, 1925²², Vasile Anastasiu described the context and measures taken by the republican government to close the religious establishments in the eastern part of Türkiye ("tekke", monasteries, mausoleums, sanctuaries), following the revolt of Sheikh Said from February-April 1925, which received support and shelter from these institutions. In the same report, another measure is presented, which regulated the dress of civil servants (according to the Western model). In Vasile Anastasiu's opinion,²³

²¹ In an address dated June 5th, 1928, Gheorghe Filality proposed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Gh. Duca, the promotion of Vasile M. Anastasiu from the position of First Secretary to that of Counselor of Legation AMAE, fund 77/Dosare Personale (Personal Files), A 32, vol II, (Anastasiu Vasile), vol. II, f. 37.

²² The telegram from September 8, 1925, from Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Ion Gh. Duca, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding the abolition of monasteries and religious congregations and the regulation of clothing for officials in *România-Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; Romania – Türkyie. *Diplomatic relations*], p. 22-23.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

"the social reform carried out now by the Ankara government completes the complete secularization of the Turkish Republic. All measures were taken to implement the above-mentioned decree, closing here, in Constantinople, the 200 monasteries and "tekkes" that existed until now, as well as in the other localities. No one dared to protest and the government's decisions were executed without hesitation because the current dictatorship regime does not allow to discuss the reforms initiated from Ankara."

Regarding the dress issue, Vasile Anastasiu appreciated that "*the government from Ankara, led by the President of the Republic, is convinced that, by forcing officials to wear the usual clothing in other countries and inviting the Turkish population, in general, to follow this example, will contribute to the civilizing of Türkiye.*"²⁴ However, despite the discourse being dominated by strong formulas ("dictatorship") and the insistence on the idea of modernization, certain aspects were, in Vasile Anastasiu's opinion, still deficient and criticism did not take long to appear:

"What should, however, concern the government is the change not only of the clothes but also of the mentality of civil servants. Despite all the reforms carried out in the last two years, the same spirit of intolerance towards Turkish citizens of a religion other than the Muslim one and a feeling of pronounced hatred against all foreigners in general"²⁵

continues to exist in the Turkish Republic.

Vasile Anastasiu awarded a special interest to the transition to the Latin script, a subject related to two significant reports. The first of these, dated August 14, 1928²⁶, detailed older or more recent developments regarding "*a new and important reform [...] about to take place in Türkiye by adopting Latin characters for writing the Turkish language*". This was supposed to be a large-scale reform:²⁷

"For more than a year this issue had been discussed, and it had been discussed in principle whether the reform would be feasible. Some time ago, a special commission composed of scientists, professors, and deputies was appointed in Ankara to study closely the most suitable means for adopting the Latin characters. This commission now meets regularly here in Constantinople, and having established the Turkish

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Report of August 14, 1928, by Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Constantin Argetoianu, ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding the transition to the Latin alphabet and the stimulation of the literacy process in Türkiye, in *Ibid.*, p. 53 -54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

alphabet with Latin letters is working very diligently to form a grammar, syntax, and dictionary of the new characters.”

Notably, the role of President Mustafa Kemal is mentioned, referencing the speeches given, in which the president emphasized the need for reform. The concrete measures taken by Mustafa Kemal are not missing from Anastasiu's report: the inauguration of a course at the Dolmabahçe Palace - the Istanbul seat of the Presidency of the Republic - for the learning of writing and reading by the staff of this institution but also by “*several deputies located here and ladies from the local Turkish society.*”²⁸ Because the personal example must be the engine of the reform “*Ghazi personally attends the course taught by a Turkish teacher and is very satisfied with the progress made by the people who follow this course.*”²⁹ Following his example, the People's Republican Party (CHP) would organize similar courses for civil servants who would also benefit from evening classes, learning the new script being, of course, compulsory. The entire reform program was carried out under the close and permanent supervision of Mustafa Kemal, including the work of the language commission.³⁰ The calendar of reform also included the introduction of writing with Latin characters in Turkish schools from the autumn of the same year.

The Romanian consul, as in the previous report - dedicated to the abolition of religious establishments and the introduction of mandatory Western dress for civil servants - did not complete his report without emphasizing the effect of the direct involvement of the president and the impediments that were to be, more or less, overcome. In the first instance, the report states that “*since the Ghazi personally took the leadership of the movement for the introduction of Latin characters, it is to be expected that great efforts will be made from all sides to carry out this important reform.*”³¹ As for the difficulties, “*in practice, enormous difficulties will be encountered and it will still be years- how many, no one can predict- until the Turkish language will be written in Latin letters by all book connoisseurs.*”³² However, the literate were only a minority at that time: “*Even Ghazi had to state, in public, that in this century of light and civilization, it is shame for a country like Türkiye, where the percentage of literate people*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

is barely 10%.”³³ According to the account, the prospects are, nonetheless, gratifying:³⁴

“In parallel with the efforts now commenced for the introduction of the Latin characters, the Turkish rulers seem determined to work with great perseverance for the enlightenment of the people, establishing numerous schools and forcing even adults to learn to read. All these efforts towards culture and civilization are commendable and prove the deep desire of the Turks to break with the past.”

The topic of changing the spelling was revisited by Vasile Anastasiu, two weeks later.³⁵ The president's proclamation (following the August 14 report) regarding the need to implement the Latin script led to *“feverish and commendable activity, which was immediately manifested throughout the country for the propagation of the new alphabet.”* The press started to publish “as a test” a small article written with the new characters. According to Anastasiu, *“These newspapers consider the alphabet reform one of the last stages of the national struggle and no less sacred than the actual battles that secured the nation's independence.”* Information is provided, again, regarding the courses held at the Dolmabahçe Palace, where the number of participants had increased, including *“all the deputies present here, in number of more than 100, led by the Ghazi and the President of the Council”*, the ministers of Interior and Finance, the president of the National Assembly.³⁶

The propagation of the reform was done quickly, organizing courses in state institutions, universities, private companies, and banks, and the linguistic commission had prepared a spelling manual and a new dictionary. The progression was also geographical in scope, soon enveloping the rest of Türkiye, starting with Ankara, and continuing with Trabzon, Samsun, Bursa, and Izmir.³⁷

Regarding the educational system, according to Vasile Anastasiu's reports, the Ministry of Public Instruction decided to start schools late (in November) during which, on the one hand, teachers were initiated into the new script and, on the other hand, fundamental books and textbooks were made available for student learning. The short period of time to accomplish this task could also be

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Report of August 27, 1928, by Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Constantin Argetoianu, *ad-interim* Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding the transition to the Latin alphabet and the stimulation of the literacy process in Türkiye, in *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

seen from the insistence with which teachers were recommended (at the Congress in Ankara, held a few days before the issuance of this report) “*to double their efforts to teach the new characters to all the children of the country.*”³⁸

In Vasile Anastasiu’s view, the “*meritorious*” efforts that were being made in the implementation of this reform were described as follows:³⁹

“[the efforts] prove how great and powerful Ghazi's ascendancy is over the entire Turkish people. The President has on various occasions expressed his great satisfaction at the promptness with which his appeal was answered. On the occasion of a trip he made to Rodosto [Tekirdağ], the Ghazi declared that he was surprised to see that the population of that locality- and even the illiterate- had learned the new alphabet, without even having a guidebook at hand subject to the approval of the competent authorities. <<It is not at all difficult to form an idea- said the Ghazi at last- about the future fate of the Turkish nation which, in this matter, sees and feels as I do, and which is energetically determined to break with the past, removing all the obstacles that have stood in its way so far, towards progress and civilization”.

Even the changes in political behaviour- in the modern sense- are not neglected in the observations undertaken by Vasile Anastasiu. In this respect, I note a Report of September 15th, 1928, which analyzes “*a great speech*” by the president of the Council, Ismet Pasha, in Malatya (his electoral district) “*following the example of the heads of government in European countries with a democratic regime.*”⁴⁰ In Vasile Anastasiu’s opinion, Ismet Paşa’s approach to clarify Türkiye’s foreign and domestic policy was all the more important as “*Türkiye is not a country of public opinion and [...] the electoral body does not yet possess the necessary political education.*” Consequently, “*this speech constitutes a happy beginning for the enlightenment and civic education of the masses who, until recent years, lived in complete indifference regarding public affairs*”,⁴¹ expressed the Romanian diplomat.

Vasile Anastasiu’s report was focused on the parts of the speech related to Türkiye’s foreign policy (specifying that he would return with a report dedicated to content related to domestic policy). However, he put emphasis on Ismet Paşa’s introductory remarks, dedicated to the importance of internal stability: “*Before anything else, the country needs order and security to be able to continue its*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Report dated September 15, 1928, by Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Constantin Argetoianu, ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding a speech by Ismet Paşa regarding the general policy of Türkiye, in *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

*revolutionary march towards progress and civilization.”*⁴² Regarding foreign policy, Ismet Paşa said: “*Türkiye is one of the countries that has made the greatest efforts for peace, signing numerous diplomatic documents to establish mutual trust in its relations, either with its neighbours or with the states located far from the Turkish borders.*”⁴³ Afterwards, Vasile Anastasiu proceeded to recall all the main foreign policy issues that the speaker referred to: the treaties with Afghanistan, Persia, Italy, the Turkish-Bulgarian and Turkish-Greek relations, the recent visit (August 1928) to Budapest of the head of Turkish diplomacy, the relations with the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, Germany and Japan, or the Briand-Kellogg Pact, to which “*Türkiye gladly acceded because its foreign policy conforms in everything to the pacific program of the pact signed in Paris.*” However, “*the Turkish government, communicating its accession, of course, formulated the same reservation made by other states, namely that <<the Multilateral Pact neither suppresses nor restricts the right of self-defence of a country attacked by another power>>.*” Having said this, in Ismet Paşa's opinion, the Briand-Kellogg Pact represents “*a new obstacle to the desire of countries that would eventually throw themselves into war, and this represents a happy fact worthy of respect.*”⁴⁴

Vasile Anastasiu's mission was not limited to reporting and analyzing the reform initiatives of the Ankara authorities. In several situations, the Romanian consul found himself in the position to meet with Tevfik Rüstü-bey, the head of Turkish diplomacy, and have discussions where he agreed or disagreed with his host. He would, then, transmit the conclusions of these meetings to Bucharest.⁴⁵ On such an occasion, on August 5th, 1927, his distinguished host declared himself;

“...very pleased to know that at the helm of the country is a strong government, which also includes my friend Mr. Duca, whom I met at Geneva when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs. At that time, I discussed with Mr. Duca the policy of our respective countries in the Balkans and we completely agreed on all the points discussed. Türkiye, like Romania, pursues a policy of rapprochement between the Balkan states and I see with joy the tightening of relations between these states.”⁴⁶

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ Information from August 5, 1927, by Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Nicolae Titulescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding Turkish-Romanian and Turkish-Soviet relations, in *Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs would also declare his dissatisfaction with the period in which Ion Gh. Duca was no longer part of the government, where it noted to have said that:⁴⁷

“[...] there has been a change in Romania's attitude towards us. Our minister in Bucharest always suggested a policy of close friendship with Romania, and I was a partisan of such a policy; however, I had the clear impression that our wishes did not find the expected echo in Bucharest. Then we naturally thought it was time to be reserved. However, the line of conduct of my policy has not deviated, and I have done everything in my power to maintain good relations with your country. I cannot, however, be asked to express a policy of insensitivity when it comes to the interests or prestige of my country. We, the governors of the Turkish Republic, are perhaps too susceptible, but the matter is to be understood, because we must not forget that we are running a new country, which has nothing in common with the old Ottoman Empire. This excess of susceptibility is perhaps a defect of newly formed countries, but a temporary defect nonetheless.”

The conversation also reached topics under contention, representing a point of divergence between the two diplomats. Tevfik Rüstü-bey insisted on the fact that Türkiye does not accept the interference of the Soviet Union in its internal affairs and tried to assure his guest of this: *“We also do not allow the Bolsheviks to organize coups against neighbouring countries on our territory; you, the Romanians, can be sure of this.”*⁴⁸ Tevfik Rüstü-bey asked the interlocutor to convey what was stated *“with the hope that the relations between Romania and Türkiye will become more and more cordial.”* For his part, the Romanian consul brought up the “so clear” statements of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, *“in the direction of developing good relations with all countries, without distinction.”*⁴⁹ Vasile Anastasiu's report concluded with a personal conclusion regarding the Turkish - Soviet relationship. In the opinion of the Romanian diplomat, *“friendship with Soviet Russia is a burden that they need to bear”*, until *“the Turkish Republic will find loyal support and disinterested friendship in another direction.”* Then, *“friendly relations with the Bolsheviks will weaken”*, Vasile Anastasiu citing the improvement of relations with Italy as an argument, even tried to offer a solution: *“as other countries will also realize the usefulness of removing the Turks from under the Bolshevik protective shield, the situation will change in this part of Europe.”*⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Vasile Anastasiu's report and the request expressed by Tevfik Rüstü-bey triggered a correspondence between Nicolae Titulescu, in his first mandate as holder of the Foreign Affairs portfolio (1927-1928) but, at that time, stationed in Geneva, and Ion Gh. Duca, who held the Interior portfolio and the interim Foreign Affairs portfolio, during Nicolae Titulescu's absence. The latter affirmed, on August 22, his complete readiness to "*resume the close friendship relations of the previous governments*" but warned: "*Among us, the information I have on Türkiye's relations with the Bolsheviks differs little to this day from that declared by the Turks.*"⁵¹ A week later, Ion Gh. Duca informed Nicolae Titulescu that he had conveyed, "*in agreement with Brătianu*", to the Turkish minister in Bucharest, the availability "*to give our relations with Türkiye a character of closer and cordial friendship*"⁵², but not before Ion Gh. Duca sent the following comment to Nicolae Titulescu at the Hotel Bergues in Geneva: "*I will talk to the Turkish minister, but don't think that I take everything he says as good either.*"⁵³

The reactions to these communications were observed and analyzed by Vasile Anastasiu in a report dated September 5, 1927.⁵⁴ He visited Tevfik Rüstü-bey, a day earlier, taking advantage of the presence of the head of Turkish diplomacy in Istanbul, on the occasion of successive government meetings under the direct leadership of Mustafa Kemal. During the meeting, Tevfik Rüstü-bey said:⁵⁵

"I am pleased to learn that the Romanian government wants to resume relations of close and cordial friendship with Türkiye [...] please also convey to Minister Duca, together with my warm thanks, the assurance that the government of the Republic shares in everything the feelings and good intentions of the Romanian government and sees with the same joy the strengthening of friendly relations between the two countries."

⁵¹ Telegram dated August 22, 1927, from Nicolae Titulescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, to Ion Gh. Duca, Minister of the Interior and ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarding Romania's desire to resume close friendly relations with the Republic of Türkiye, in *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵² Telegram of August 29, 1927, from Ion Gh. Duca, ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, to Nicolae Titulescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding the development of close friendly relations with the Republic of Türkiye, in *Ibid.*

⁵³ *România-Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; *Romania – Türkiye. Diplomatic relations*], p. 45.

⁵⁴ Report of September 5, 1927, by Vasile Anastasiu, consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to I.Gh. Duca, ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding Turkish-Romanian relations, in *Ibid.*, p. 46-48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Then the Turkish minister explained his attitude from their previous conversation, stating that the reason for the bitterness expressed was related to the lack of success of the Turkish minister from Bucharest, Husein Raghib-bey, in his efforts to convince the Romanian side to sit down at the negotiating table for a new trade agreement. Consequently, Türkiye unilaterally denounced the existing stipulations.⁵⁶ But that was not all, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the young republic also revisited the criticisms from the previous conversation, stating the heart of the matter:

“As long as Mr. Duca led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the previous government, we were also kept informed by Romania about Balkan political issues. After the departure of Mr. Duca, we were not informed of anything [...] with the return to government of the Liberal Party, in which we have friends, we expect a development of relations between Romania and Türkiye.”⁵⁷

Vasile Anastasiu's report also includes references to a “*debate*” of the mentioned problem - the trade convention - with different points of view related to denunciation, expiration, negotiation (of a new document), or deadlines. Moreover, it includes a firm rejection, by Tevfik Rüstü-bey, of several assumptions made by The International Straits Commission, where, in his view, some attributions were exceeded four years earlier, in the convention signed in Lausanne.

Vasile Anastasiu's conclusions left no room for doubt:

“In general, the meeting [...] took place in the most cordial and friendly terms, his Lordship showing himself very willing to find solutions to solve the various issues that interest us [...]. Tevfik Rushdi-bey [Rüstü-bey] has asked me to convey to Your Excellency his respectful and very friendly greetings. I had the clear impression that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was extremely flattered and even moved by the kind communication that Your Excellency made to him through Husein Raghîb-bey. This proves the importance that the Turkish government attributes to friendly relations with Romania.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 47. See, in detail, Liliana Boşcan, *op.cit.*, p. 268, et seq.

⁵⁷ Report dated September 5, 1927, by Vasile Anastasiu, Consul of Romania in Istanbul, addressed to Ion Gh. Duca, ad-interim Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, regarding Turkish-Romanian relations, in *România-Turcia. Relații diplomatice* [Eng.trans.; *Romania – Türkiye. Diplomatic relations*], p. 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

These are just a few episodes from a consistent series of analyses, which originate from the headquarters of the Romanian diplomatic mission in Istanbul. Only those that demonstrate the intense activity carried out at the level of the consulate, through its holder, Vasile Anastasiu, were highlighted. In a period when, on the one hand, the Republic of Türkiye was experiencing radical transformations and, on the other hand, Romanian - Turkish relations were moving from the stage of testing the ground, towards a reserved rapprochement (imposed by different regional options, to which bilateral tense aspects were added). This rapprochement would know an impulse in 1927, with the exchange of the Duca – Titulescu -Tevfik Rüstü-bey messages, whose reactions were also observed by the aforementioned Romanian consul, in direct conversations with the head of the Turkish diplomacy. The Anastasiu reports became an important source of information's for the Bucharest decision-makers, especially regarding the road to modernity of the new republic.

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