

BEFORE THE WAR: KING CAROL II'S VISIT TO POLAND (25 JUNE – 1 JULY 1937)

DANIEL HRENCIUC

Several visits at the highest level between Romania and Poland took place in the summer of 1937, over short periods of time, which makes this year a special landmark in the relations between the two countries.¹ Additionally, the year 1937 was no less important for the destiny of the relationships between the Kingdom of United Romania and the Second Polish Republic.² The negotiations for arranging the visits at a high level proved to be difficult, as the Poles expected King Carol II to visit Poland first.³

A compromise was eventually reached, with Prince Mihai, the heir to the Romanian throne, paying a short visit to Poland on his way back from London. On the occasion of his journey to Warsaw (25 May 1937), he was decorated by the Poles with the Order of the White Eagle. Also, Mihai took the opportunity to officially invite the chief of the Polish state to visit Romania.

The President of Poland himself, Ignacy Mościcki,⁴ a well-known and highly appreciated chemist, as well as a former professor at the Roman-Catholic University of Fribourg (Switzerland), one of the few Polish political personalities with Swiss citizenship, was to travel to Romania first, for a very short but important visit.

On 8 June 1937, the important Polish guest, accompanied by his Foreign Affairs Minister Józef Beck, was welcomed at Mogoșoaia railways station with great honors, in accordance with his rank and in the spirit of the friendship between the two peoples. The visit was short, marked by a military parade in Bucharest, in front of the Royal Palace. During the reception at the Palace, Carol II spoke about the "friendship between the two peoples,"⁵ while Ignacy Mościcki emphasized the fact that "Romania and Poland cannot but remain close to one another."⁶

The moment did not go unrecorded by the press – for the first time the Polish President was going on a visit abroad, choosing, not accidentally, Romania. "Chwila," "Wieczór Nowicki," and "Nowy Czas," together with other newspapers, published news and

¹ Henryk Bułhak, *Polska a Rumunia 1918-1939*, in vol. *Przyjaźnie i Antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1918-1939*, Wrocław, 1977, p. 338.

² Daniel Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia 1932-1939: Relații politice și diplomatice*, Suceava, 2005, p. 66.

³ Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (hereafter: AAN), fund Ambasada RP w Bukareszcie (hereafter: ARPB), Report of the military representative of Poland in Bucharest signed by lt. colonel Tadeusz Kowalewski, ff. 116-119; Carol al II-lea, *Între datorii și pasiune. Însemnări zilnice (1914-1939)*, vol. I, București, 2003, p. 188.

⁴ Stanisław Schimitzek, *Drogi i rozdroża misionej epoki. Wspomnienia z lat pracy w MSZ (1920-1940)*, Warszawa, 1976, p. 399.

⁵ Daniel Hrenciuc, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁶ Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice, 1 ianuarie – 30 iunie 1937*, vol. II, ed. by Stelian Neagoe, București, 1999, p. 268.

comments related to the event.⁷ In Czechoslovakia, the visit of the Polish President and the speeches held in Bucharest on the occasion caused real worries,⁸ the Czechs noticing with great anxiety the signs of a Romanian-Polish collaboration that could affect the stability of the Little Entente.

The Swiss newspaper "La Tribune de Genève" (10 June 1937) wrote: "Over the past years, the Romanian-Polish alliance has become an important historical and political factor in the sometimes confused system of influences acting in the Danubian and Balkan Europe. The meeting in Bucharest between King Carol II – n. by D.H.) and President Mościcki symbolizes the persistence of the relationships created between the two countries by Józef Piłsudski and King Ferdinand I. This meeting is all the more significant as the President of Poland is for the first time visiting a foreign country."⁹

When analyzing the contents and significance of the Polish President's visit, the "Gazette de Lausanne" (12 June 1937) was wondering: "Will the Polish visit to Bucharest mean a new attack on the Little Entente?"¹⁰

The text of this article reveals a good knowledge of the relations between Poland and the Little Entente, including the fears and essential preoccupations for the stability of Central-Eastern Europe. In reality, the visit of the Polish President, accompanied by the chief of the Polish diplomacy, was rather reflecting the preoccupation of the two states to maintain the basic fundamental alliance in the defensive strategy towards the Soviet Union.

The decision of Carol II to visit Poland was not accidental or devoid of meaning, especially as it appeared as a consequence of the Polish President's visit to Romania. The visit of Carol II to Poland (25 June – 1 July 1937)¹¹ took place on the background of increased tension in the international life and the reiteration of the Romanian-Polish relations after Nicolae Titulescu's removal from office.

The Romanian guests arrived in Poland in the evening of Saturday, 26 June 1937. Carol II and his son Mihai were welcomed at the railway station of Lviv by an important delegation of the Polish government, including Colonel Grodzki, the commandant of 57th Infantry Regiment of Poznań.¹² The high Romanian officials had been received with "special honors"¹³ in the stations of Lviv, Przemyśl, and Warsaw, the route being organized by the

⁷ Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe – București (hereafter: AMAE), fund 71/Polonia, vol. 58, f. 267. The speeches of the two chiefs of state were illustrating their different position on the issue of European security: Carol was referring to the League of Nations and Ignacy Mościcki to the fact that "during hard times, a country must first depend on its own forces," without mentioning anything about the Geneva organization; *apud* Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁸ Lucian Blaga, *Din activitatea diplomatică (Raportare, articole, scrisori, cereri, telegrame), anii 1927-1938*, vol. III, ed. by Pavel Țugui, București, 1995, doc. no. 318, p. 275.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 276.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Marian Leczyk, *Polska i sąsiednimi. Stosunki wojkowe, 1921-1939*, Białystok, 1997, p. 373.

¹² "Glasul Bucovinei," Cernăuți, XX, June 1937, no. 5096, p. 1. Royal prerogatives – according to the Constitution of 1923 – were taken over, after the departure of King Carol to Poland, by the Council of Ministers.

¹³ Lucian Blaga, *op. cit.*, doc. no. 320, p. 282. Other Swiss newspapers, such as "St. Galler Tagblatt" (10 June 1937), presented in detail the visit of Carol II, analyzing the alliance and relations between Romania and Poland, reminding the economic projects between the two countries, among which the building of a canal from

hosts with "super-pomp and enthusiasm,"¹⁴ according to the appreciations of Constantin Argetoianu.

In a country with deeply rooted monarchic feelings, the Romanian sovereigns had been received in the traditional way, with bread and salt, a custom to be also found in Romania. Thus, King Carol II and Mihai were not only made to feel at home, but they were practically overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and warmth of the Poles. At the railway stations of Przemyśl and Radom, the two had felt the need to step down and shake hands with the citizens gathered on the platform.

Once in Warsaw, King Carol II and Mihai were welcomed by President Ignacy Mościcki, Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składowski, Marshal Edward Rydz Śmigły, Józef Beck, Lady Maria Mościcka, the Polish President's wife, and so on.¹⁵

The journey to the Royal Palace was made in convertible automobiles, decorated with the coats of arms of Romania and Poland: Carol II and Ignacy Mościcki in the first automobile, Mihai and Edward Rydz Śmigły in the second, and Victor Antonescu and Józef Beck in the third.¹⁶ The procession also included Ernest Urdăreanu, Marshal of the Palace, General Alexandru Glatz, Alexandru Duiliu Zamfirescu, Minister of Romania in Warsaw.¹⁷

The Romanian monarch was hosted, together with his son Mihai, at the Łazienki Palace in Warsaw,¹⁸ built by August II of Saxony, where the royal couple Ferdinand I and Queen Maria had been hosted 15 years before,¹⁹ a fact which emphasized the continuity and importance of relations between Romania and Poland.

At the reception organized at the place, the President of the Polish Republic Ignacy Mościcki declared: "Your Majesty's visit is a new link in the series of events that have united our two countries for years. I am happy that, during your stay in Poland, Your Majesty will have the opportunity to see the sincere expression of the feelings that the Polish have for Your Majesty and for your glorious country."²⁰ The agenda of the visit was very busy and marked by meetings and visits especially to military objectives.

The event was under press attention in both countries. Thus, "Glasul Bucovinei" was writing, on the first page, about the sovereign's visit to Warsaw, describing it as "a guarantee for the indestructible alliance and friendship between Romania and Poland."²¹ Another issue of the newspaper spoke of the enthusiasm of the 200,000 people gathered together on the streets of Warsaw to welcome the Romanian sovereigns warmly, with flowers.

Constanța to Gdynia named the "Baltic Pearl." Details about the visit of Carol II to Poland also appeared in other newspapers, such as "Journal Français" (26 June), "Basler Nachrichten" (28 June), "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," "Berner Tageblatt," "National Zeitung" (Basel), "Bund" (Berna), "La Tribune" (Lausanne). In "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (28 June 1937), the royal welcome was especially appreciated: "Warsaw has never seen such stately demonstrations in the honor of a foreign guest"; *ibidem*, p. 283.

¹⁴ Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

¹⁵ "Glasul Bucovinei," XX, June 1937, no. 5096, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ AMAE, fund 71/Poland, vol. 58, ff. 265-266.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ "Glasul Bucovinei," XX, June 1937, no. 5098, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibidem*, June 1937, no. 5096, p. 1.

The visit of the Romanian monarchs was covered generously both by the governmental and the opposition press: "Gazeta Polska" (governmental newspaper), "Polska Zbrojna" (military daily paper), "Dziennik Warszawski Narodowy" (opposition), "Kurier Poranny"²² (governmental), and "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny."²³ This last newspaper also published an interview with King Carol II taken on 14 June 1937, before the visit to Poland. The article presented the Romanian monarch's opinions related to the role of Romania and Poland in defending the European peace. "Chwila"²⁴ published a portrait of Carol II on its first page, whilst "Wieczór Nowicki" published on 25 June 1937 the article *The Educated King of the Youth – King Carol II*.²⁵ "Gazeta Lwowska" wrote on 25 June 1937 about the two friendly countries, the reinforcement of relations between Romania and Poland, and the "enlightened monarch"²⁶ of Romania. The newspaper "Dziennik Narodowy" printed on its first page, in capital letters, *Long Live United Romania!*²⁷

On Sunday, 27 June 1937, a pompous military parade was organized by the hosts on the airport near Warsaw (Mokotów), in honor of their important guests from Romania. It included the participation of 250 planes and enabled the Romanian monarch to review a series of units belonging to various specializations: infantry, cavalry, engineers, special troops, and artillery.²⁸ The flags of Romania and Poland were presented – according to the custom – three times. The crowd cheered "Long Live Romania! Long live the Romanian-Polish alliance, fundament of peace!" Before the beginning of the military parade, Carol II visited with his staff the Aviation and Engineering Plants of Okęcie (Polskie Zakłady Lotnicze – PZL).²⁹

Lunch at the City Hall of Warsaw followed, with Starszyński, President of the Local Council of Warsaw,³⁰ as a host. The central square of the Polish capital was decorated with the Romanian royal coat of arms, in honor of the important guests. In an atmosphere of deep consideration for the heroism of the Polish soldiers, the Romanian monarch laid down a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Józef Piłsudski Square – the significant moment being followed by a visit to the Polish Orthodox Church, where they met with Bishop Dionisie. The architecture of the church (Russian style) and its entire aspect made a strong impression on Carol II.³¹

²² AMAE, fund 71/Polonia, vol. 58, f. 235.

²³ Ibidem, f. 243.

²⁴ Ibidem, f. 259.

²⁵ Ibidem, f. 260.

²⁶ Ibidem, f. 263.

²⁷ Ibidem, f. 265.

²⁸ *România-Polonia. Relații diplomatice, 1918-1939*, coord. by Dumitru Preda, vol. I, București, 2003, doc. no. 94, p. 192.

²⁹ AAN, fund ARPB, Report of the military representative of Poland in Bucharest signed by Lt. colonel Tadeusz Kowalewski, ff. 116-119. King Carol II's opinion of Marshal Edward Rydz Śmigły – Chief of the Polish Great General Staff and a friend of Józef Piłsudski –, whom he considered "a proud and phony person" (recorded as such in his personal diary), shows he had little sympathy for the Polish marshal.

³⁰ "Glasul Bucovinei," XX, July 1937, no. 5099, p. 1.

³¹ Ibidem.

Further on, during a reception at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian monarch had a meeting with Józef Beck, as well as the Minister of War Tadeusz Kasprzycki, and Waclaw Stachiewicz, Chief of the Great General Staff of the Polish Army.³² A number of personalities took part in the event: the President of the Association of the Romanian-Polish Friendship, the President of the Romanian-Polish Commerce Department, etc.³³

During the official reception organized for the Romanian guests, when the toasts were made, the President of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, suddenly announced the change of the Polish Legation in Bucharest into an Embassy; as a reply, the Romanian Legation in Warsaw was also transformed into an Embassy, by the royal document signed by King Carol II, Richard Franasovici thus becoming the Romanian ambassador in Poland.³⁴ The speeches and the toasts made on the occasion showed the friendship between the two states.

On Monday (28 June 1937) the Romanian sovereign left by train for Poznań, where he attended, at Bolechow (the training field Biedursko, near Poznań), the impressive maneuvers of the Polish army, organized with real gun shots. Carol was saluted by Matuszewski, the Voivode of Poznań, and by General Knoll, who opened the troops' march. On the occasion, the Romanian sovereign addressed the Polish soldiers as follows: "Czołem Żołnierze." Wearing a shiny uniform of colonel in the Polish Army, Carol II was proclaimed Honorary Chief of the Polish 57th Infantry Regiment of Poznań by Marshal Edward Rydz Śmigły. This regiment was famous owing to its heroic contribution during the Polish-Soviet war in 1920. As a token of special consideration for the victory against the Soviet Marshal Mihail Tuhacewski, the 57th Infantry Regiment of Poznań was decorated by the Romanian monarch with the Order of Michael the Brave, which made great impression on the hosts. In fact, ever since 1932, the 16th Infantry Regiment of Fălticeni had been named after Józef Piłsudski, the founder of the Polish State.

On his train journey back to Warsaw, Carol II took the opportunity to have a conversation with Józef Beck, a clever man unwilling to give direct answers, which made Carol note: "as an eel, he is slipping through your fingers."³⁵ The meeting with the Polish Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składowski (Tuesday, 29 June 1937)³⁶ made a better impression on the Romanian chief of state.

On Wednesday (30 June 1937) Carol II visited Wawel Castle in Kraków, which houses the tombs of the kings of Poland. A delicate episode ensued, as Bishop Sapieha was reluctant to allow Carol II to enter the castle, as the king was divorced and not a Catholic. The moment was overcome with delicacy and discretion by the (temporary) replacement of Sapieha with the Cardinal of Kraków, with the preliminary agreement of the Vatican.³⁷

³² He would take refuge in Romania in 1939 and would remain here until 1940, when he would leave.

³³ "Glasul Bucovinei," XX, July 1937, no. 5099, p. 1.

³⁴ *România-Polonia. Relații diplomatice*, coord. by Dumitru Preda, doc. no. 94, p. 192.

³⁵ Carol al II-lea, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ In his diary Carol II wrote: "During this second part of the visit some incidents happened, because of the visit I was going to pay at the tomb of the Polish kings. The archbishop of Kraków, Cardinal Prince Sapieha, had certain religious scruples and said he couldn't allow me in the saint place as I was not a catholic, I was divorced and because of the Mrs. (Elena Lupescu – n. by D.H.). The problem was communicated at Vatican, were everything was arranged, with the tact specific in such occasions; the Cardinal was replaced for a few hours with the nuncio"; *ibidem*.

On this occasion, Carol II laid down a wreath at the tomb of Józef Piłsudski, in an atmosphere of consideration and respect for the father of independent Poland, a great friend of Romania and of the royal family. The visit ended in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect, the Poles being “flattered” and thrilled by the gesture of the Romanian sovereign.³⁸

In the autumn of 1937 (25 October), Marshal Edward Rydz Śmigły visited Romania, on the 16th anniversary of Mihai, Great Voivode of Alba Iulia. According to Carol II's memoirs, there was an unpleasant incident involving Marshal Edward Rydz Śmigły, partially clarified by Alecu Constantinescu, the Romanian minister at Warsaw. Treated with less consideration than he would have expected given his official position, the guest departed unexpectedly, the following day; in fact, Carol II seems to have had little sympathy for him,³⁹ according to the notes of the contemporaries and of the monarch himself.

The year 1937 remained a very important landmark in the interwar relationships between Romania and Poland, due to the visits at a high level paid by the chiefs of state of Poland and Romania.⁴⁰ The following period showed a degradation of the international climate, and several discordant moments could be seen in the evolution of Romania and Poland. However, the relations between Bucharest and Warsaw were governed by the common interest of the two countries towards the Soviet Union, on the political, diplomatic and military levels inaugurated at the beginning of the interwar period, an important episode of European geopolitics. However, the complex and sinuous developments on the international background cancelled the chances for further collaboration on the military and political levels.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *România-Polonia. Relații diplomatice*, coord. by Dumitru Preda, doc. no. 121, p. 235. On 22 May 1939, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Polish 57th Infantry Regiment “King Carol II” of Poznań ample military manifestations were organized at Poznań, and on this occasion Richard Franasovici, the Romanian ambassador at Warsaw, sat down next to the Polish General Knoll, commander of the 7th Army Regiment. The population of Poznań manifested warmly for Romania, cheering several times “Long Live Romania,” “Long Live the Romanian Army,” “Long Live the Romanian King!”

⁴⁰ In his diary (*op. cit.*, p. 193), Carol II wrote on Thursday, 1 July 1937, when he returned: “The Polish retinue accompanies us to the border, although the political results of this visit are not extraordinary, still there is a lot to gain from these direct connections and this knowledge, however superficial, of the allied countries.”