

TOWARDS THE END OF HIS CAREER — DIMITRIE C. PENESCU, ROMANIAN MINISTER TO THE NORDIC COUNTRIES (1928-1929). SOME CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *The article examines Dimitrie C. Penescu's final diplomatic posting as Romania's Minister Plenipotentiary to the Nordic countries (1928-1929), accredited in Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Helsinki. Building on Romania's evolving diplomatic network in the region established during WWI, Penescu's mission aimed to cultivate a favorable image of Romania, intensify trade, and counteract Hungarian propaganda. Despite his short one-year tenure due to financial reasons, Penescu engaged with local officials and press, and notably facilitated the establishment of the Swedish-Romanian Society to foster bilateral understanding. His tenure highlights the challenges and priorities of Romanian diplomacy in the Nordic region during the interwar period.*

KEYWORDS: *Romanian diplomacy; Nordic countries; Dimitrie Penescu; interwar period*

INTRODUCTION

In Romanian historiography, the name of Dimitrie C. Penescu is rather known due to his activity as Minister of Romania to the Holy See, a position he held for eight years, between 1920 and 1928. In fact, it was also his most important position, although he worked in Romania's Diplomatic Corps for over three decades. Continuing our recent analyses of his activity¹ in Romanian diplomacy, we will focus here on several aspects related to the last years of his diplomatic career, in particular on his position as Minister Plenipotentiary in Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Helsinki (Helsingfors).

The beginning of Romania's diplomatic network in the Nordic countries

Toward the beginning of 1914, Romania's diplomatic presence abroad comprised 15 legations and one diplomatic agency in Cairo. When Romania entered the First World War in August 1916, diplomatic relations with Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, and Germany were suspended. During the hostilities, the decision was to

¹ See, in this regard, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, "Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical aspects of the first Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)", in *Romanian Diplomacy in the 20th Century. Biographies, Institutional Pathways, International Challenges*, Adrian Vițalaru, Ionuț Nistor, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (eds.), Peter Lang, Berlin, 2021, p. 17-64; Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, "De la Monastir la Salonic. Aspecte din activitatea consulului Dimitrie C. Penescu", in *Artă, școală și politică națională. Prinos închinat profesorului Ion I. Solcanu la împlinirea a 80 de ani*, Petronel Zahariuc, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (eds.), Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2023, p. 351-371.

establish two new Legations in Northern Europe: Sweden (Stockholm, November 1916) and Norway (Christiania, May 1917).²

Given that Romania's connection with the West was practically interrupted through Central Europe, relations with the Nordic countries became of major importance: both in terms of transporting equipment and fighting against propaganda. Nicolae Mișu, the Romanian minister in London, was also aware of the stakes, and in a telegram addressed to the minister of foreign affairs Emanoil Porumbaru, in October 1916, he noted the importance of appointing a diplomatic representative in Stockholm. The legation in the capital of Sweden was established by decree on November 3, 1916, and Grigore Bilciurescu was appointed *chargé d'affaires*. Bilciurescu had entered the ministry in 1895, and in 1913, although consul in Budapest, he had received the title of Minister Plenipotentiary, class II; he was also appointed temporarily a counselor at the Berlin legation, and thus given the opportunity to familiarize himself with Nordic realities. He did not stay in Stockholm for long, as in April 1917 he was replaced by Gheorghe Derussi, as extraordinary envoy.³ The latter was appointed envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the Royal Court of Denmark, presenting his letters of accreditation in Copenhagen at the end of August 1917. However, given that Derussi lived in Stockholm more often, Constantin Langa Rășcanu was appointed *chargé d'affaires*, remaining in this capacity until July 1919.⁴

Also, in January 1917, the importance of opening new services to support propaganda and defend the country's interests was noted again: "in the current situation caused by the European war, Romania needs two services to protect its superior interests, one for political information, the other for propaganda; both closely linked, placed under one and the same direction. These two services must be organized in neutral countries: Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, but especially in Switzerland and Sweden where the propaganda of foreign agents against our country is very widespread and from where precise and detailed information can be obtained both on the plans of our enemies, as well as on what is happening in that part of our country, occupied by enemy armies. All states, large and small, have such services, organized since the outbreak of the European war".⁵

Gheorghe Bilciurescu was transferred to Norway, and on May 1, 1917, he was appointed, by royal decree no. 408 of May 3/16, 1917, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of Romania to Christiania. The legations in Northern Europe played an

² Also, new diplomatic missions were established in Japan (Tokyo, August 1917) and in the USA (Washington, August 1917). On the contrary, in January 1918 diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia were interrupted [see also Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, "Ultimele zile de libertate, primele zile de închisoare: diplomați și consuli români în Rusia (1917-1918)", in *Analele Științifice ale Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași* (Serie Nouă). Istorie, Număr special/Special issue Marea Unire a Românilor (1918) - Istorie și actualitate/The Great Union of the Romanians (1918) - History and Actuality, tome LIX/2018, vol. edited by Petronel Zahariuc, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Adrian Vițalaru, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, p. 149-170].

³ P. Oprescu, "Înființarea reprezentanțelor diplomatice ale României la Stockholm și Oslo (Christiania)", in vol. *Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României*, vol. II, 1911-1939, Editura Politică, București, 1971, p. 100-102.

⁴ Nicolae-Alexandru Nicolescu, "Înființarea reprezentanțelor diplomatice ale României la Copenhaga", in vol. *Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României*, p. 85.

⁵ Biblioteca Națională a României [Romanian National Library, hereinafter BNR], Fund Saint Georges, file 938, p. 22.

even more important role after the takeover of leadership in Russia, first in February 1917, by the Provisional Government, and then by the Bolsheviks in October 1917: many Romanians left Russia and, on their way to Western Europe, the connecting bridge were the Scandinavian countries.

We can note that, at the end of World War I, Romania had diplomatic missions in Stockholm and Christiania, and there was a *chargé d'affaires* in Copenhagen. In May 1919, Grigore Bilciurescu, who was in Oslo, believed that the mission had become a “useless luxury”. He suggested to his colleague from the central administration in Bucharest, Nicolae Docan, that one legation was enough for the three northern states. He argued that – besides the Great Powers – only Cuba and Romania had legations in Norway: the first because of economic interests, while the Romanian state, due to the war unfolding.⁶

After 1920, owing to a new legislation that reorganized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some new diplomatic missions were created, while others were closed.⁷ Regarding the missions in the Nordic countries, we can observe a certain instability. In the aftermath of Finland’s recognition as an independent state, Romania established a diplomatic legation in Helsinki in 1921. The mission, however, was short-lived: it was closed a year later, with diplomatic functions reassigned to the Minister Plenipotentiary based in Stockholm.

The Romanian legation in Oslo was also closed in 1922. Consequently, from that point onward and for several years, “the legation in Stockholm served as Romania’s sole diplomatic mission in the Nordic region, managing bilateral relations with all four states”.⁸

DIMITRIE C. PENESCU, MINISTER OF ROMANIA TO STOCKHOLM, OSLO, COPENHAGEN AND HELSINKI

Dimitrie Penescu was appointed – after eight years at the Holy See (1920-1928) – by the royal decree of January 2, 1928, as Envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Royal Courts of Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen. However, he did not leave until five months later, presenting his recall letters from the Holy See on May 23, 1928⁹. He replaced Mihail Pâclianu, who had been in the Nordic countries for almost ten years.¹⁰

At the time of his appointment¹¹ to the three Nordic courts – the residence of the legation being in Stockholm – Penescu did not have the necessary knowledge to occupy such a position, as he was not familiar with the realities of the Nordic countries. Instead,

⁶ Biblioteca Academiei Române [Library of the Romanian Academy hereinafter BAR], Secția Manuscrise [Manuscripts Section], S 20 (27)/CDXXXIV, Grigore Bilciurescu to N. Docan, May 9th, 1919.

⁷ In 1921, Romania had 25 permanent diplomatic missions.

⁸ Adrian Vițalaru, “Romanian Diplomats in the Scandinavian Countries” (1916-1947), in *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice/The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, vol. 6, Issue 2 (2014), p. 151.

⁹ Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, “Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical Aspects of the First Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)”, p. 61.

¹⁰ About his activity, see Adrian Vițalaru, “Mihail Pâclianu – a Romanian Diplomat in the Nordic Countries (1919-1928)”, in *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice*, vol. 11, Issue 2, 2019, p. 49-62.

¹¹ For details about his biography, see Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, “Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical Aspects of the First Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)”, p. 17-64; Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, “De la Monastir la Salonic. Aspecte din activitatea consulului Dimitrie C. Penescu”, p. 351-371.

he could benefit from his three-decade long experience as a career diplomat. At the beginning of his career, he alternated positions in the central administration with those within legations and consulates in the Balkan Peninsula, and from 1911 until his appointment to the Holy See in 1920, he worked within the diplomatic mission in Rome.

The Romanian legation in Sweden did not have a large staff, on the contrary. At the time of Penescu's arrival, Constantin I. Karadja had been in Stockholm since March 1, 1928¹², the two of them working together very well. The diplomatic mission also included Constantin Uhrinovschi, as *press attaché*, and N. Dianu, who was also *chargé d'affaires* to the Finnish government. By the time of Penescu's departure, in the summer of the following year, Constantin Flondor had also joined the diplomatic mission.

On June 11, 1928, Penescu took up his new position, taking over the direction of the legation from Nicolae Dianu, who had led the legation as *chargé d'affaires*. The new head of mission presented his credentials to King Gustav of Sweden on June 13, 1928, who wore the uniform of a cavalry general and who, among other decorations, also had the Grand Cross of the Order of the "Star of Romania". Penescu had noticed that at the Swedish Court there was no custom of delivering speeches on the occasion of presenting letters of accreditation, and the two had a pleasant conversation for approximately 40 minutes. The discussions focused on the political situation in Romania and Sweden¹³. The two already knew each other, having met during the months that King of Sweden had spent incognito in Rome at the beginning of 1928.¹⁴

In the first days after his arrival, the new head of mission also met the Prime Minister Carl G. Ekman, who confessed to him that there were no difficult issues in the bilateral relations at that time. Moreover, both countries also had a common interest: to observe the actions of Soviet Russia. One aspect that could be improved was the commercial one, given that the Romanian market had become attractive for Swedish products. The Swedish official raised the possibility of concluding a treaty of friendship and arbitration with Romania, if there was interest from the decision-makers in Bucharest. The discussion with Carl Ekman allowed Penescu to draw some conclusions: the Swedes had little information about Romania, there was no hostility coming from government circles, and the negative articles about Romania appearing in the Swedish press were the product of the Hungarian propaganda that was quite active in the Nordic countries.¹⁵

A month later, through a report dated July 8 sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Penescu announced his departure for Oslo and Copenhagen to present his letters of accreditation to the two Royal Courts. On this trip he was accompanied only by Constantin I. Karadja, the legation's secretary for economic affairs, the latter's presence facilitating

¹² In September 1928, he was appointed, by Royal Decree, Consul General of Romania at the legation in Stockholm. About his activity, see Stelian Obiziuc, "Constantin I. Karadja (1889-1950) – o pagină de aur în istoria diplomației românești", in *Revista Română de Drept Internațional*, nr. 14 (ian.-iun. 2012) / 15 (iul.-dec. 2012), p. 179-200; Constantin I. Karadja, *Manual diplomatic și consular*, Ottmar Trașcă, Stelian Obiziuc (eds.), Editura Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2013.

¹³ Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereinafter AMAE], Fund Problema 77, Letter P51, p. 24-32.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 20.

¹⁵ AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 25, p. 48-49.

his discussions with the ministers of the two countries, as well as the discussions with press representatives from Oslo and Copenhagen. In fact, Dimitrie C. Penescu went to Oslo only twice: when he presented his letters of accreditation, on July 14, 1928, to King Haakon VII of Norway, and at the beginning of August 1929, when he presented his letters of recall¹⁶. Under these conditions, the person who ensured the relationship with the Norwegian authorities was Constantin Flondor, legation counselor and *chargé d'affaires*.¹⁷ Similarly, Penescu went to Copenhagen only on the occasion of presenting his letters of accreditation to the King of Denmark, Christian X. The person who ensured the relations with the Danish authorities was again Constantin Flondor.

As soon as he arrived in Stockholm, Dimitrie Penescu proposed – and the decision-makers in Bucharest agreed – that N. Dianu temporarily managed “our affairs” in Finland as well. Through such a solution, according to Penescu, “a harmful interruption of our diplomatic relations with the latter country was avoided”.¹⁸ At the end of 1928, it was decided to accredit Penescu¹⁹ in the Republic of Finland as well. On January 18, 1929, his letters of accreditation were sent. He presented them a few days later. The next day he returned to Stockholm, which discontended the Minister of Foreign Affairs, G. Mironescu, who scolded him for not staying longer in Finland’s capital.²⁰

The first instructions received by Penescu in the summer of 1928 were very clear: to make every effort to cultivate a favorable image of Romania in the countries to which he was accredited. In fact, both when presenting the letters of accreditation in Copenhagen²¹, and in Oslo²², he was interviewed by the local press of the two states and his message emphasized the importance of political and economic relations with Denmark, but also with Norway. As already highlighted in literature, Penescu’s mission to Sweden had several clear objectives: intensifying trade relations and attracting the Swedish political class to the Romanian cause in the “Transylvania issue”, given that the Hungarian propaganda against Romania was very active in the Scandinavian countries.²³ Moreover, the Scandinavian countries were, in the first years of the interwar period, on the “periphery” of Romania’s external propaganda, our country’s actions being influenced even by the instability of diplomatic posts. Since the spring of 1928, N. Dianu and C. Karadja had acted in favour of a more energetic propaganda defending Romania’s interests through the Swedish press; and in June 1928 a set of 50 ethnographic, color maps of Transylvania was sent from Bucharest.²⁴

¹⁶ Ana-Maria Florea (Despa), *România și Norvegia în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea*, doctoral thesis, Târgoviște, p. 74.

¹⁷ AMAE, Fund Problema 77, Letter P51, p. 46.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ For an analysis of Romanian-Finnish relations in the interwar period, see Silviu-Marian Miloiu, “An untold story: The Romanian-Finnish Diplomatic Bonds (1923- 1939)”, in *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies*, 7-8/2007, p. 93-110.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 52-53.

²¹ Oana Popescu, *România și Danemarca în prima jumătate a secolului XX*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, p. 52.

²² Ana-Maria Florea (Despa), *op. cit.*, p. 74-75.

²³ Andreea Dahlquist, *România și Suedia în perioada Celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial*, Editura Eikon, București, 2023, p. 56-59.

²⁴ Nicolae Ureche, *Propaganda externă a României Mari 1918-1940*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2015, p. 305-307.

Penescu's reports sent from Stockholm capture aspects related to Sweden's domestic politics, bilateral relations and international political life. In one of his first reports, the new head of mission captured the state of "tranquillity" in Swedish domestic political life, but also the fact that "in the minds of the Swedish people the old fear of Russia has not yet disappeared, so that the well-known Swedish Germanophilia was and still is rather a point of support and defense against Russia".²⁵ In his reports from autumn 1928 and in the first months of the following year, Penescu analyzed the results of the September elections for the second Chamber of the "Riksdag", the resignation of the Ekman government and the formation of a new cabinet under the presidency of Admiral Lindman, the debates in the Swedish Parliament, but also the possibility of a ministerial crisis in May–June 1929.²⁶

At the end of the summer of 1928, the capital of Norway hosted the International History Congress. The Romanian delegation was formed by N. Iorga, Gh. Brătianu, I. Andrieșescu, G. Fotino, C. Marinescu, V. Gomoiu, P.P. Panaitescu, Gen. Radu Rosetti, G.G. Mateescu, A. Oțetea, Emil Panaitescu and C. Karadja, each giving talks within different sessions. At the end of the congress, N. Iorga was invited to give a radio conference in the capital of Sweden, the subject being *Carol XII and Romania*.²⁷ In Stockholm, the great historian visited the Nordisk Museum, where he saw a sword by Constantin Brâncoveanu, held a conference in German at a women's society, visited the royal tombs, and met with various Swedish personalities. On August 23, Minister Penescu hosted a luncheon attended by teachers, journalists, and directors of cultural institutions, and N. Iorga spoke about the ties between Romanians and Swedes.²⁸ Upon returning to Romania, Iorga published, in 1929, his impressions about his travels and the four conferences he held in Sweden and Norway.²⁹ Moreover, in a report sent by Karadja to Penescu, immediately after the end of the congress, he noted that "N. Iorga had managed to make us useful propaganda in Oslo, granting several interviews to the Norwegian press".³⁰

During the months spent as head of mission in the Nordic countries, Penescu gave several interviews to newspapers in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, and his collaborators within the legation published articles in which they presented the history of Romania and the evolution of Romanian–Danish relations.³¹ Such actions were necessary given that Penescu's predecessor, Mihail Pâcleanu, pointed out in 1926 that the Swedish press had an "unfriendly" attitude towards Romania.³²

²⁵ AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 1 (1923–1935), p. 376.

²⁶ AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 19 (1920–1929), p. 373–418.

²⁷ AMAE, Fund Congrese și conferințe, vol. 240, Congrese internaționale de istorie, nepaginat; see also, Raluca Tomi, "Nicolae Iorga în elita istoriografiei internaționale. Activitatea sa în cadrul Comitetului Internațional de științe istorice (1926–1940)", in *Revista Istorică*, tom XXXII, 2021, nr. 1–3, p. 27–28, 36–37.

²⁸ N. Iorga, *Memorii (Agonia regală și regența)*, vol. V, Editura Națională „S. Ciornei”, p. 301.

²⁹ N. Iorga, "Țeri Scandinave: Suedia și Norvegia. Note de drum și conferințe", Ed. Casei Școalelor, București, 1929. An edition of this work appeared in 2008 under the care of historian Silviu Miloiu.

³⁰ BAR, Corespondența Iorga, vol. 343/2, p. 531.

³¹ Nicolae Ureche, *op. cit.*, p. 305–307.

³² Idem, *Nici pace, nici război. România–Ungaria, 1919–1940*, Editura Universității București, București, 2004, p. 313.

Penescu was also active in the cultural domain, and his efforts materialized in the establishment of the Swedish-Romanian Society in May 1929. As emphasized in the Romanian press, its purpose was to “bring the two friendly countries closer together” and to inform the Swedish public about Romania.³³ An important role in the establishment of the society was played by the Romanian diplomats, Dimitrie C. Penescu and Constantin Karadja, along with several Swedish journalists, such as E. Fahlbeck, director of „Svensk Tidskrift”, Dr. Brillioth, head of the Swedish Press Agency and president of the international press office in Stockholm, F. Henrikson, legation counselor, and Annie Quensel, a well-known writer in Sweden in the 1920s.³⁴ General Baron Sparre, Chief of Artillery of Sweden, was elected President of the Society, and I. Collijin, Chief Librarian of the Kingdom, was elected Vice-President. At the same time, the Minister of Sweden in Bucharest, the Minister of Romania in Stockholm, and the Archbishop of Uppsala, Natan Söderblom, were elected honorary members.³⁵

In February 1929, Penescu was questioned by the Swedish Foreign Minister, Trygger, about the consequences of Romania’s signing of the Litvinov Protocol. The Swedish official considered that “our signing of the Moscow Protocol, even after the ratification of the Kellogg Pact, constitutes an undoubted success for our country, as it ensures against any possible Russian aggression and at the same time proves the definitive character of the Polish-Romanian alliance, as well as the deeply pacifist tendencies pursued by our foreign policy, tendencies that are entirely in line with those of Sweden”.³⁶ The Romanian diplomat replied, arguing that the signing of the Litvinov Protocol signified a strengthening of peace in Eastern Europe and of peace in general.³⁷

Penescu held this position in the Nordic countries only for a year, this being his last diplomatic mission abroad. In June 1929, it was announced that, for financial reasons, Several Romanian diplomatic missions were to be left without ambassadors and he was recalled to the central administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from August 1 of the same year³⁸. The diplomat was convinced that he had successfully fulfilled his mission in Stockholm, “an important center of the Hungarian propaganda against Romania”, but had expected to spend more time in the Nordic countries. He understood, on the other hand, the difficult financial situation of Romania and that the measure taken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs was not directed against him personally³⁹. Moreover, a new plenipotentiary minister was not immediately sent from Bucharest, so that until February 1930 the diplomatic representation was carried out at the level of *chargé d'affaires*.

³³ Andreea Dahlquist, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁴ *Dreptatea*, anul III, nr. 495, 8 iunie 1929, p. 2 (article written by Madeleine Hamilton).

³⁵ AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 25, p. 62-64.

³⁶ AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 1 (1923-1935), p. 58.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 59-60.

³⁸ In the same situation were H. Catargi (Brussels), Filip Lahovary (Cairo), Ion P. Carp (The Hague), Anton Bibescu (Madrid) and I. Trandafirescu (Tirana). (AMAE, Fund Problem 77, Letter P51, vol. II, p. 54)

³⁹ AMAE, Fund Problem 77, Letter P51, vol. I, p. 153-156, vol. II, p. 54-62.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When Romania's first diplomatic missions were established in the Nordic countries, during the first years of their activity, the decision-makers in Bucharest preferred to send diplomats who were heading a legation for the first time. However, as in the case of his predecessor, Mihail Păclianu, but also of his successor, Carol M. Mitileneu, the post in the Nordic countries was for Penescu his last as head of mission. This may suggest that, in the first decade of the interwar period, mainly those who were towards the end of their diplomatic careers were sent to the Nordic countries. Overall, Penescu successfully carried out his mission during the time he spent in the Nordic countries, although he didn't have much time at his disposal. Having his residence in Stockholm, he traveled very few times to Oslo, Copenhagen and Helsinki. He had discussions with Swedish officials, gave interviews to the press from the four countries, thus trying to contribute to a better image of Romania in the Nordic countries, and had some important cultural initiatives, perhaps the most important being the establishment of the Romanian-Swedish Society. However, we cannot see any particular interest of the decision-makers in Bucharest for the four states, a fact to which we can also add financial problems that were already threatening Romania at the end of the first interwar decade.