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ROMANIA AND THE SUEZ CRISIS: AREAS OF DIPLOMATIC INTEREST AND POLITICAL POSITIONS

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Naturally, the attention of the Romanian diplomacy has focused towards the main actors of the crisis: Egypt, Israel, UK and France. As a consequence, I studied in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the documents from Bucharest to the Romanian diplomatic missions in the capitals of these states in order to identify the main areas of diplomatic interest and the way the stances of these countries took shape during the crisis.

The documents which have been studied allowed the assessment of the situation of the research within this field.

Thus, obviously, the research is only at its beginning¹. Consequently, the research we done is fragmental, there are blanks which have to be filled in the future and they may complete or correct our conclusions.

We also noticed that the Romanian embassies/legations from the above-mentioned capitals were left, during the „Suez crisis”, without the necessary instructions they used to receive from the “centrala” (head office), so they had to function on the „automatic pilot”. Only on November 16, 1956, Bucharest sent instructions to the embassy in Paris, which were probably sent also to the other capitals but which are not yet identified². Certainly, the sent telegrams, through their content proves which were the areas of interest for the mentioned countries, but it is obvious that the “centrala” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – probably without the „guiding” of the Political Bureau of the Romanian Communist Party’s

Central Committee which was deeply „concerned” by the Hungarian Crisis – hesitated/avoided to regularly send detailed instructions.

Thirdly, the historian’s work with that era’s documents is difficult because of the high ideological content in the case of the above-mentioned issue. The world is seen in a „Manichean” way – „us” – the socialist states and „they”, the imperialists – the different behavior of USA, compared with France and UK’s attitudes during the crisis, generated confusion because it could not be seen through the ideological lens, „the third world” did not have the expected anti-imperialist attitude and the Egyptian anti-colonial leadership was undermined by incredible contradictions³. We can assert using the available documentation that the Romanian communist diplomacy was at its beginning and showed some lack of professionalism during an important international crisis.

Last but not least, the studied documents show that the setting of Romania’s stances/behaviors was determined by the alignment with USSR’s own political direction. The frequent talks of the Romanian diplomats working in the foreign capitals with the Soviet ones had become the norm, the Romanian initiatives were usually agreed with the Soviet embassy, therefore the information and analyses sent to Bucharest were passed through the Muscovite diplomacy’s „filter”. Therefore, it is really difficult to clearly discern between Romanian stances and initiatives and those suggested (ordered) by Moscow. The researcher often has to ask himself how was reached the agreement between Bucharest’s and Moscow’ stances, who did that, using what channels (phone lines between the two capitals and between the diplomatic personnel in charge, communiqués of the ambassador or other Soviet officials in Bucharest to the Romanian MFA?). The lack of instructions from the “centrala” in Bucharest to the Romanian diplomatic missions abroad may be seen as a sign of hesitation in the attitude of Romanian officials, also as a result of imperfect communication with Moscow, as the two political leaderships were highly concerned with the Hungarian revolution. But what has eventually prevailed?

My presentation is structured into three sections. The first – the most substantial – will try to identify, using the analyzed documents, which were the main zones of interest of the Romanian diplomacy in all the phases of the „Suez crisis”: before the military clashes, during the military operations and then the post-crisis moments. The second section will detail Bucharest’s official stances and attitudes. Finally, the last section will express some conclusions regarding the Romanian diplomacy’s activity during this international crisis.

I. The areas of interest of the Romanian diplomacy during the “Suez Crisis”

As a preliminary remark, it should be reminded that one should not overlook, but constantly keep in mind a generally well-known fact, namely that the attention of the Romanian diplomacy during the second half of year 1956, especially during October/November, was mainly – if not exclusively – focused on the crisis from the Eastern European communist countries, especially from Hungary. In this latter case, the revolution from the end of October had a sedating effect on Bucharest authorities in what concerned other international issues, the sole preoccupation of the Romanian communist regime residing in the unfolding and the impact of the events from this neighboring country. The fear of revolutionary contagion paralyzed the Bucharest leadership, preventing it from following other evolutions in the international arena, a situation from which it gradually recovered once the Soviet-type regime was restored in Hungary.

I.1. During the stage prior to the Suez war, the Romanian diplomacy paid attention to the preparations and the unfolding of the London conference, as well as to the political and public opinion orientations from the interested countries regarding a possible military conflict. As it is widely known, after the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt (July 26, 1956), a conference of the representatives of 22 states was convened in London in the hope of finding a way out from this international crisis.

From this perspective, the telegrams from the Romanian diplomatic office in London are the most relevant in what concerns Romania’s areas of interest in the period prior to the start of the military operations. On August 3rd, 1956, the leadership in Bucharest was informed that Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia will not participate in the international conference that was about to begin on August 16, arguing that **“the signatory of the 1988 Convention was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which no longer exists”**⁴. Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and the GDR were also among the uninvited states, although they were interested in the “traffic through the Suez Canal”⁵.

The most comprehensive account on the Conference arrives in Bucharest on August 19, 1956⁶. It actually consisted in a summary of a report presented by Dmitri Shepilov, the representative of USSR to the reunion, to the diplomatic representatives of the communist states (including Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia) in Cairo. According to it, Shepilov stated that **“USA tried to create the impression that it’s not a colonialist**

country and that it has an independent position, France and Britain were very severe, India, Spain and Germany had a position of mediation, Indonesia supported Egypt”⁷. On the “Dulles note” of August 19, 1956, which proposed the administration of the Suez Canal by an international body in which Egypt should be a simple member, it was considered that its adoption would mean **“colonialism forever”** in Egypt. In combating this US proposal, Shepilov argued the establishing of a six-state committee (Egypt, India, USSR, Britain, France and USA) that will prepare a new international conference⁸. During the talks, Shepilov stated that, after the conference, **“the imperialists will try Israel’s door to enter Egypt”**⁹.

It is also worth mentioning that the Romanian diplomats in Cairo, because of their lack of **“instructions on the actions that should be undertaken during the Conference”**¹⁰, confined themselves to distributing the declaration of the Romanian government on this issue¹¹ and to argue for organizing a future enlarged reunion where Romania will this time be invited¹².

The failure of the London conference directed the attention of the Romanian diplomacy to the assessing of the chances of war in the Near East. This area of interest gradually took shape from the second half of September 1956, presenting certain particularities depending on the diplomatic “transmitter”. Therefore, Bucharest was informed, directly from London, on the positions of the main British political parties – be it in power or in opposition – on the possibility of war in the Suez problem. On the other hand, pieces of information were transmitted from Tel Aviv regarding movement of troops, mobilized effectives (without exact figures), attitude of the political forces and public opinion and the situation from the border with Jordan. Meanwhile, Bucharest was informed from Cairo on the solidity of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s position, his stance regarding the pressures and threats from Britain and France and the altercations between the Egyptian leader and his collaborators.

On September 14, 1954, it was transmitted from London that the Suez Canal issue was treated in the House of Commons as **“an internal problem of the imperialist countries”**¹³. The representatives in power, **“comforted by the situation in the parliament”**, were treating the issue **“like it was all about grounding a disobedient school child”**¹⁴. On October 3rd, 1956, London considered that **“although Britain and France deployed military effectives in the Mediterranean, the number of the military personnel is relatively low and the action will not have a role of intimidation”**¹⁵.

The start of the war took the Romanian diplomatic office in London, among others, by surprise. On October 30, 1956, when informing about the

session in the House of Commons where prime-minister A. Eden presented the course of negotiations with the French counterpart in London, it mentioned the objections of the labor opposition towards the presented intervention plan. It consequently recorded that the leader of the opposition protested against learning of the Eden declaration **“with only 15 minutes in advance”** and that the **“war with Egypt does not guarantee the passing through the Canal and endangers the oil flow from the Arab countries”**¹⁶. From discussions with representatives of the Labour Party, the Romanian official had come under the impression that they viewed the war as an **“insanity which divides the country in two”**¹⁷.

Although on the 21st of September 1956, Chitic, the Romanian diplomatic representative to Tel Aviv, had been assigned in Bucharest the mission to act so that the mutual agreement concerning the accreditation of two new ministers, Romanian and Israeli, (dr. Harell and dr. Manu) in the respective capitals should be given the soonest possible¹⁸, on the 10th of October 1956 the information particularly referred to preparations for war. It was mentioned that Golda Meir, minister of Foreign Affairs, had stated that **“Israel will act in a single way: the rigorous safeguard of the right to self-defense”** and that during the previous days, **“there were made new large-scale reserves enlisting”**¹⁹. At the same time, it was mentioned that learning **“from discussions with other persons”**, Ben Gurion **“would intend that, after an armed action potentially resulting into the occupying of certain territories close to Jordan and other Arab countries, discussions with the Arab countries begin from these new positions”**²⁰. A day before, on the 9th of October, Bucharest had been informed on frequent confrontations that took place recently at the Israeli-Jordan frontier initiated by the Jordans. **“It is common knowledge that the attacks on behalf of the Jordan side that did actually exist are largely the result of actions directly or indirectly organized by the English and maybe not only by them”**²¹, it was mentioned in the telegram.

Even since the 18th of September 1956, it had been communicated from Cairo that **“It is obvious that the U.S. wishes to consolidate its political and economic influence in the entire Arab area in England’s and France’s detriment”**²² and that Nasser counted a lot in its actions on the **“contradictions between the U.S. and the English and French imperialism”**²³. Cairo was also surprised by the breaking-out of the war, although a telegram of the 19th of September mentioned the perspective of **“an armed conflict”**²⁴. The fact that it was a surprise also results from the fact that, on the 1st of November 1956, there was a meeting at the USSR Embassy of the **“chiefs of missions, friends of USSR”**²⁵ during which it

was decided the evacuation of their wives and children and... of the diplomatic personnel with a Soviet ship. The same communication consigned, also confirming the surprise, that **“The situation turns serious, besides breaking diplomatic relations with France and England, Nasser, from the discussion with the Soviet Union’s ambassador, pointed out that the Egyptian command made a serious strategic error leaving uncovered the front of the Channel toward the Sinai desert, precisely where the attack begun by parachuting troops. One cannot exclude a betrayal.”**²⁶

Therefore, before the breaking out of the military conflict, the areas that the Romanian diplomacy considered to be priority regarding the issue of the Suez Channel were designed during the London Conference, the evolution of the military situation at Israel’s frontiers, particularly with Jordan, and the possibility of a military conflict, the strength of the Nasser’s regime and the contradiction between U.S. on one side, and England and France, on the other. Lacking precise instructions from Bucharest (or from Moscow via Bucharest), the Romanian diplomats were not able to assess the real situation, and the breaking out of military hostilities constituted a surprise for them.

I.2. The stage of the combat highlighted the main directions/areas of interest for the Romanian diplomacy as being the purposes followed by the belligerents, the attitude of different categories/social classes toward the conflict, the attitude of the governments of the mentioned countries toward the local communist parties, the impact of N. Bulganin’s messages of the 5th of November 1956, in his quality as chief of the Soviet government, passed to his British and French counterparts.

On the 1st of November 1956, the Romanian government made a statement **“on the Anglo-French aggression against Egypt”** that was made public the next day. By incriminating England and France as aggressors, it was consigned that Israel **“played in this aggression the role of a provoking factor”**. The motivation of the war was defined as the establishing of **“the yoke of colonialism on Arab people’s shoulders”**. Bucharest demanded that the UN take urgent measures to put an end to military actions and request the withdrawal of the foreign troops from Egypt’s territory. The issue of the Suez Canal was to be solved through negotiations. Romania was fully sympathetic with Egypt²⁷.

Regarding the above mentioned areas of interest, I will only detail the way Bucharest was informed on the impact of N. Bulganin’s message and the issue of the Romanian minister’s accreditation to Tel Aviv. On the 7th of

November, Cairo communicated that in Port Said **“the troops and the population took up the public square and acclaimed USSR at the news of comrade Bulganin’s message”**²⁸. Several days later, it was informed that **“all the political and diplomatic fora”** of Cairo affirm that **“the crashing of the aggression and imposing the cease-fire”** were determined by the resistance of the Egyptian army, **“USSR’s energetic warning”**, the revolt of the world public opinion, **“the reprobation by the large masses of the English and French peoples”** of the **“criminal policy”** of their governments, **“the contradictions between the Anglo-French imperialism and the U.S., that fought to consolidate its influence in the Arab countries”**²⁹.

As an official recognition of the role of the Bulganin message in stopping the military operations, it was communicated from Cairo that **“for the first time, on the 7th of November** (the day of Bolshevik revolution-n.n.), **Nasser sent the USSR ambassador a big basket with flowers that also contained his card with congratulations”**³⁰. It was also highlighted that the French and English mass-media of Egypt stressed the **“decisive role of the U.S. and Eisenhower for Egypt”**, **“under American influence”**, trying to **“diminish the USSR’s role and position in its fight for helping Egypt for peace and against aggressors”**³¹.

Most probably increasing confusion in Bucharest, Cairo informed on the 13th of November 1956 that **“although the U.S. gained momentum and influence in Egypt and the Arab space in Britain’s detriment, USSR gained a considerable prestige and through its concrete aid given to Egypt, it has currently large possibilities to influence in a progressive way Egypt’s political future through Nasser”**³². Two days after this information that signified what one could call a “drawn” of the two superpowers’ influence in the Arab world, it was highlighted that **“the U.S. undertakes a large political strategy not only of occupation of England’s and France’s economic positions in the Arab states’ space, but also of counteroffensive against the USSR whose prestige and influence is on steady rising in the Arab states and harms the American interests”**³³.

A second interesting message also communicated to Bucharest refers to the moment when the diplomatic representative to Tel Aviv, Chitic, was received by Golda Meir, Israel’s foreign minister. The reason of the audience, that took place a day after the beginning of hostilities, was the new appointment of ambassadors previously agreed, Chitic presenting data about the Romanian minister, dr. Manu. The informative note sent to Bucharest referring to the audience consigned **“I asked her to tell what she could tell me, when the new situation at the frontier with Egypt will come to an**

end, and she answered that following the repeated attacks of the Egyptian fedayeen over years that caused a lot of deaths and casualties to the Israeli people, the Israel's army embarked on this action of destroying the fedayeen's centers in order to stop their actions. I received no answer when the action will come to an end". At the same time, Chitic asked "whether it is true that the Israeli troops are directed toward Suez" and Golda Meir "said that the exact situation was not known, repeating that they intend to destroy the fedayeen's centers"³⁴. The audience lasted 12 minutes.

At this section of our communication, one can conclude that the areas of interest defined by the Romanian diplomacy during the military operations were marked by the ideological factor - USSR's influence in the Arab space, the situation of the communist parties of the "aggressor" states, the attitude of the working classes toward the bourgeoisie and the ruling circles of these states - also following its own interest, namely the participation in an international force (to be detailed in the next section). A very important element, which generated confusion in Bucharest, was the perception in the capitals "questioned" in this study, according to which USSR and the U.S. found themselves in equal positions in the competition for influence in the Arab space following their actions in the "Suez crisis". It is even more difficult to explain this "parity" of the superpowers given that it was constantly mentioned in the briefings sent to Bucharest the huge material and moral support given to Egypt by the "socialist camp" (war materials, combat training etc.).

I.3. Regarding the post-conflict situation, there are two major areas of interest for Bucharest on which I would like to focus. The first one refers to the causes of Egypt's military defeat, the second one to a *sui-generis* Romanian initiative in Egypt.

Concerning the evolution of war, we should mention the report sent to Bucharest, on December 12, 1956³⁵, which was also immediately delivered by the "centrala", to the leading team (the „troika” – Gh. Gheorghiu Dej, Chivu Stoica and Emil Bodnăraș). Referring to a confidential assessment made by Nasser on the evolution of war, minister D. Ionescu drafted his own analysis. Thus, on the first place among the causes of Egypt's serious military situation, it is mentioned „**the lack of military conception coherence of the General Staff's officers, some of them with Soviet education, other with German, or British, American education**". This fact seems to have hindered a right assessment of the pre-war situation

as the Egyptian General Staff prepared an offensive plan in Gaza against Israel, thinking that the Israeli attack will take place against Jordan. At the same time, the Egyptian army did not have a defensive plan. It is probable that the Egyptian intelligence office was inferior to that of its enemies. The inferiority in this field has the consequence that the Egyptian aircraft and infrastructure were destroyed since the beginning, as the anti-aircraft defense was **„insufficiently endowed with radar-devices and special instruments, camouflage etc.”** being quickly disorganized and the reconnaissance aircraft was also **„very weak”**. At the same time, the Egyptian military forces did not sufficiently master the weapons they possessed and the General Staff **„did not listen to the strategic advices given by the Soviet comrades, which were contrary to the Egyptian strategy, acknowledged nowadays by Nasser as wrong”**.

On the other hand, the Israeli army **„was much more mobile, operational and unitarily organized”**. It could by itself – as the document asserted – defeat the Egyptian army, which would mean **„the total loss of Nasser regime’s prestige”**. A conclusion derived from this assessment, and supported by the **„heavy losses in weapons and people”**, is that the Nasser regime would have collapsed and some domestic turbulence would have occurred. **„Even if it seems paradoxical, in the Romanian diplomat’s opinion, the Anglo-French intervention should be considered as a circumstance which saved the Nasser’s regime prestige, as the focus in explaining the very huge losses in weapons and people suffered by the Egyptian army was put on the overwhelming British-French supremacy”**. The paradox is that, this way, **„Nasser was given an image of a hero”**.

Referring to these analyses on the Egyptian army’s capabilities and on its performances in time of war a final assessment is made, from which we quote *in extenso*: **„only the firm attitude of USSR, the reaction of world public opinion, as well as the US interest to win opportunities in the Middle East determined the cease-fire, as the continuation of the fights would have produced the military disaster of Egypt and the fall of the current regime. Taking advantage of some favorable circumstances, Egypt won a political victory”**. But it is clear that **„all our bloc’s efforts should be aimed at protecting this regime from falling under the political and economic US dependency, as the US began to make advantageous offers”**. It was mentioned that Nasser tends to make political compromises to the USA, while some ministers (General Abdel Hakim Amer, chief of the Military, or the Education Minister) were against this giving up.

One should add that, before introducing these opinions on the political-military situation of Egypt during war, D. Ionescu mentioned that the Egyptian army's personnel at the beginning of war „**was about 100 thousand infantry, including border guards and police, 10 thousand aircraft personnel, 5 thousand for the navy, and which certainly has a solid military education in Czechoslovakia /and/ or Poland, with Soviet trainers**”. At the same time, it was also mentioned that Nasser's speech concerning Egyptian army's performance during war did not mention that „**in the Gaza region, the enemy managed to take as prisoners almost all the (Egyptian - m.n.) troops which were defending this region**”.

Given the frequent mentions that D. Ionescu made in his cables to the consultations with ‚our best friends’, it is probably that his analyses and assessments in the military field were greatly influenced by his Soviet partners' ideas.

The next episode enhanced this perception. On December 9, 1956, the Romanian diplomatic legation in Cairo informed Bucharest that, as a consequence of the war, the Egyptian authorities “**have taken retaliation measures against the aggressor countries' citizens, English, French (...) and against some of the Jews living in Egypt, in spite of their citizenship**”. Among these measures, they mentioned the freezing of the assets, the arrest, internment or expulsion. Regarding the Jews, the Egyptian authorities used “**methods of intimidation**”, as they forced them to sign declarations they want to leave Egypt, or they were imprisoned and kept in camps (while the other foreigners had been released) etc.”³⁶. On November 23, 1956, the Romanian legation in Cairo was informed by the Egyptian minister of interior that three Romanian citizens (Hofman Neiman, Eliot Feinstein and Victor Savatovski) had been arrested and they should be expelled, “**being considered dangerous for the state's security**”³⁷.

Because he didn't receive an answer from Bucharest to the telegram in which he had asked for instructions on the issue³⁸, the Romanian minister informed the Soviet ambassador, “**requesting the advice if it would not be better to have it (the issue – m.n.) addressed to an Egyptian personality belonging to the leadership because the case of the future mass-expulsion of the non-Egyptians Jews will be turned into a weapon to be used by imperialists against Egypt**”³⁹. The Soviet ambassador considered that the Romanian minister's intervention was correct and that “**he regrets that he did not knew the problem because he would have unofficially informed Nasser, whom he had been received by, about the international unfavorable consequences generated by the envisaged expulsion**”⁴⁰. More than that, the Soviet ambassador “**advised**” D. Ionescu

to resort to an Egyptian personality, on his behalf, in order to find a solution to the issue. The result was the expected one, namely the cancellation of mass-expulsion of Jews from Egypt.

An interesting detail concerning the three Romanian citizens is, by coincidence or not, contained in the report of minister D. Ionescu's. He mentions that **“from all the discussions with the three Romanian citizens and with their relatives, it resulted that none of them wanted to go in P.R. Romania, mentioning that they did not have relatives in Romania and do not know the Romanian language”**⁴¹.

This episode is therefore relevant for the close “cooperation” of the Romanian legation in Cairo with the Soviet one, during the “Suez crisis”, especially for the obedience to the latter's instructions. The Soviet ambassador is mentioned in D. Ionescu's report to the MFA as **“the best friend”**.

II. Romania's stances during the “Suez crisis” were harmonious with the political orientation of the “best friend”, namely USSR. The “block” discipline, already mentioned above, was seen as really necessary during “Suez crisis” in the light of the events taking place in Hungary and the threats they created for the communist regimes' stability.

On September 17, 1956, the Egyptian legation in Bucharest received the Romanian government's answer to the Egyptian government stance on the Suez issue. The moment is coincident with the spreading of rumors, including through the above-mentioned telegrams, concerning the possibility of the breaking out of a military conflict related to this issue. In the Romanian answer, it was expressed **“the satisfaction and the full support”** for the Egyptian proposals for a peaceful resolution of the Suez issue, and it was mentioned that Romania can't be indifferent to the attempts to limit Egypt's sovereignty, and the threats formulated by English and French governments on using force were seen as **“against the interests of peace and security”**.

Once the war broke out, the Romanian government issued a statement on November 1st, which was published in the press the next day. According to it, **“England and France unleashed an armed aggression against Egypt”**, Israel playing the role of **“agent provocateur”**. The Romanian political leadership considered that the **“British-French-Israeli actions constitute a serious blow for the international peace and security”** and that the UN should urgently demand the withdrawal of foreign troops from Egypt.

In the context of this general attitude towards the war in the Near East, two episodes are particularly relevant. The first one is related to the diplomatic protest of A.A. Dudley, the British representative in Bucharest, regarding a statement of the Egyptian minister in Romania that was broadcasted on the Romanian Radio on November 19, 1956. Dudley stated that **“it is highly unusual for a diplomatic representative to use the governmental facilities of the state where he is accredited in order to attack in such terms another government that maintains diplomatic relations with that state”**⁴². Also **“unusual”** was for **“the mentioned state /Romania/ to facilitate such acts”**. The French diplomatic representative also issued a similar protest demanding explanations.

The response of the Romanian government to the British protest was that the broadcasted declaration on the Bucharest radio station corresponded to **“the feelings of the Romanian people towards the Egyptian one, as well as to the position of the Romanian government in condemning the aggression”**. It was also emphasized that **“the Egyptian minister presented the facts in an objective manner and did not personally attack any member of the British government or the minister of United Kingdom in Romanian People’s Republic”**⁴³.

At the same time, the Romanian part expressed its astonishment towards this kind of reaction, protesting, in its turn, against the **“slanders”** of the BBC (catalogued as **“a British governmental society”**), **“directed against the Romanian People’s Republic and the members of the Romanian government, inciting to <<resistance>> or revolt against the popular-democratic regime”**. The British diplomat was told that this campaign of the BBC represents **“a meddling in the internal affairs of a state with which the United Kingdom maintains normal diplomatic relations”**.

We still do not know, in this stage of the research, whether this episode was intentionally **“fabricated”** by the communist authorities in Bucharest in order to create the opportunity of condemning the **“meddling in the internal affairs”** exerted by the two capitalistic states, or whether it happened naturally as a result of the position adopted towards the war in the Near East. A comparative research on the methods of other communist countries in this situation could reveal whether it was indeed a directive transmitted from Moscow or just Bucharest’s private initiative.

Anyhow, the aforementioned episode is compatible with the general picture of the Cold War, the **“Suez Crisis”** representing a multilateral (and propagandistic) competition between the two superpowers (and their satellites).

The second episode is revealing not only because of the firm pro-Egyptian stance of Romania (with no nuances, whatsoever), but also because of Bucharest's subordination to the international policy promoted by Moscow. Actually, it is symptomatic that nearly all the resolutions issued by the head of the Romanian government, Chivu Stoica, concerning various international problems of that time demanded **“to take actions in accordance with the other countries from the socialist bloc”**⁴⁴.

On November 12, 1956, the Romanian legation in Cairo was informed that the Romanian government had asked the UN Secretary General to take part in **“the setting up of the UN international forces for Egypt”**⁴⁵. In this respect, an urgent report concerning the official and unofficial positions to be expressed in Cairo was asked for, without undertaking any special demarches. After just one day, however, minister D. Ionescu in Cairo received instructions from Bucharest to ask for an audience **“at the highest level, even directly at Nasser, if possible”** for an urgent communication on behalf of the Romanian government. The urgency of such an audience was determined by the fact that the UN Secretary General had left for Cairo in order to **“discuss with Nasser the issue of setting up the UN forces for Egypt”**⁴⁶.

In the communication of the Romanian government, the Egyptian officials were asked to support the Romanian request of providing the UN forces for Egypt a Romanian military detachment, which would act according to the interests of the Egyptian government.

The audience to Nasser of diplomat D. Ionescu took place on November 17, 1956, when the UN Secretary General was also in the Egyptian capital. Nasser expressed his gratitude for the message of the Romanian government and stated that he encountered difficulties in setting up the peace force, suggesting that, besides Danish and Norwegians (the proposal of the UN Secretary General), Indonesian and Yugoslav peacekeepers should be admitted. The head of the Egyptian government promised he will raise the issue of Romanian peacekeeping forces during the talks with Dag Hammarskjold, the UN Secretary General⁴⁷.

As it is known, Romania did not send peacekeeping forces in the Middle East during the Cold War in the UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force). Military contingents were accepted from ten states: Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia. Assistance was also provided by United States, Italy, and Switzerland. The aforementioned episode highlights, beyond the “intimacy” of the relation between Bucharest and Moscow, an unusual fact: the commitment of acting pro-Egypt, meaning against the UN mandate, in case

the Romanian request would have been accepted. The fate of a satellite state from the Soviet bloc during the Cold War was extremely harsh.

The Romanian demarche should also be directly connected to the effort of the USSR to ensure a physical presence in the extremely volatile area of the Middle East. The purpose of Moscow's efforts: to attract the Arab states in its sphere of influence. The competitor of USSR: USA.

III. Some conclusions

1. The Romanian diplomacy has succeeded to constantly inform the "central office" on the evolution of the "Suez Crisis". Surprised by the beginning of the military operations, subjecting the information to a severe ideological filter, subordinated to "the best friend", the Romanian communist diplomacy succeeded to distinguish two characteristics of the international situation that started to take shape during these events. The first one refers to the competition between the two superpowers of the Cold War in gaining influence in the Arab space, which will therefore define the evolutions in the Middle East during the following years. The second refers to the growing awareness in Western Europe that, in the future, it will have to represent a single "voice" listened by superpowers. On December 1st, 1956, Bălănescu transmitted from Paris the following: **"The leading circles, in order to put an end to the political and diplomatic isolation, are involved in a cunning and strong propaganda move in order to show that France, condemned by the UN, unable to deal with the Soviet bloc and faced with lack of support from the US, must act together with Britain, Federal Republic of Germany and other countries in order to create a bloc of Western Europe that will restore its force and prestige"**⁴⁸. Therefore, the Treaty of Rome became a point of interest of the French diplomacy as a consequence of the "Suez Crisis".

2. "The package" of deficiencies of the Romanian diplomacy in that period consisted of: the strict ideology, total obedience toward the "bigger brother", the lack of instructions that should have been received in a steady way from the "center" to the diplomatic missions, in a large-scale international crisis. However, one can affirm that **it was for the first time in the post-war period when the Romanian diplomacy faced an international situation of such dimensions.**

3. Although the responses to the challenges raised by the crisis were marked by the mentioned obedience toward Moscow, there were also taken national initiatives, such as regarding the expulsion of the Romanian citizens

of Jewish origin from Egypt. At the same time, the episode of troops offer for the post war international peace-keeping force of Egypt reveals, besides Moscow's suggestion, a national Romanian interest in the Middle East, which was to become in the next years more and more manifest.

4. Given the quality of reports/briefings and more possibilities of taking initiatives, the Cairo mission (and the person appointed in office, D. Ionescu) can be assessed as being superior to the previous ones, while Paris (Bălănescu) stood out through the analysis of sociological type undertaken on public opinion orientations, as well as regarding detaching the essential of the French political elite's positions.

5. Delving deeper into the Romanian diplomacy's activity in the "Suez crisis" could amend some of our conclusions. However, it could not give any other major surprises, since the analyzed diplomatic missions allow the identification of the main courses of Romania's actions during these events.

¹ By our knowledge, only one article that makes use of archive documents referring to the "Suez crisis" was published. See Cezar Stanciu, *In the Shadow of Moscow. Romania and the Suez Crisis*, in "Valachian Journal of Historical Studies", no. 1/2004, Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, pp.84-89). The volume of documents of Dumitru Preda, *România-Israel. Documente diplomatice, 1949-1969 (Romania-Israel. Diplomatic documents, 1949-1969)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Direction of Diplomatic Archives, Ed. Sylvy, Bucharest, 2000, does not contain any remarks on this international episode. At the same time, the published transcripts of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party does not contain any direct reference to the "Suez crisis" when addressing the issue of the events that took place in Hungary or the one related to the Warsaw Pact. See Dennis Deletant, Mihail E. Ionescu, *Romania and the Warsaw Pact (1955-1989)*, Selected Documents, Politeia-SNSPA, Bucharest, 2004. Regarding the same issue, see also Mihai Corneliu Lungu, Mihai Retegan, *1956. Explozia. Percepții românești, iugoslave și sovietice asupra evenimentelor din Polonia și Ungaria, (1956. The explosion. Romanian, Yugoslav and Soviet perceptions of the events of Poland and Hungary)* Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1996.

² See the diplomatic documents quoted below.

³ The Romanian representative in Cairo was even admonished for having sent to his Soviet counterpart a piece of information on the rift between Nasser and the Interior minister of the Egyptian government.

⁴ *Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe*, (the Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (thereafter *A.M.F.A.*), fund Telegrams/Britain, file 13, August 1956, f. 25. (Ciphred telegram no. 3377, 3 July 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in London, signed Korcinski).

⁵ *A.M.F.A.* Romania passed through the Suez Canal, by NAVROM, almost half a million tons of merchandise per year, see also Cezar Stanciu, *op.cit.*

⁶ *A.M.A.E.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 13, August 1956, f. 105-107, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3450, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 19 August 1956, signed Korcinski).

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 13, August 1956, f. 111, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3450, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 19 August 1956, signed Korcinski).

¹¹ „Scântea”, 12 August 1956.

¹² *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 13, August 1956, f. 111, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3450, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 19 August 1956, signed Korcinski).

¹³ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 10, September-October 1956, f. 61-62, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3522, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 14 September 1956, signed Korcinski).

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 10, September-October 1956, f. 140, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3564, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 3 October 1956, signed Korcinski).

¹⁶ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Britain, file 10, September-October 1956, f. 225-226, (Ciphred Telegram no. 3645, sent by the Romanian legation in London, 30 October 1956, signed Korcinski).

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Israel, file 10, July-December 1956, f. 161, (Ciphred Telegram F.N, registration no 21475, 8 December 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Tel-Aviv, 7 December 1956, signed Chitic).

¹⁹ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Israel, file 10, July-December 1956, f. 77, (Ciphred Telegram F.N, registration no. 1428, 9 October 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Tel-Aviv, 7 December 1956, signed Chitic).

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Israel, file 10, July-December 1956, f. 78, (Ciphred Telegram F.N, registration no 1428, 9 October 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Tel-Aviv, 7 December 1956, signed Chitic).

²² *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-November 1956, f. 119, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1346, 18 September 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-November 1956, f. 120, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1346, 18 September 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

²⁵ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-November 1956, f. 164, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1386, 1 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

²⁶ *Ibidem.*

²⁷ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-December 1956, f. 90, (Ciphred Telegram no. 28738, 2 November 1956, sent by M.F.A.-D.R.II, to the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Rudenco).

²⁸ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July - November 1956, f. 171, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1391, 7 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

²⁹ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July - November 1956, f. 179, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1397, 11 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³⁰ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July - November 1956, f. 180, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1397, 11 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³¹ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July - November 1956, f. 181, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1397, 11 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³² *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July - November 1956, f. 183, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1397, 12 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³³ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-November 1956, f. 189, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1403, 15 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³⁴ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Israel, file 10, July-December 1956, f. 100, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1463, 31 October 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Chitic).

³⁵ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Israel, file 11, July-December 1956, f.19, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1427, 12 December 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed D.Ionescu).

³⁶ *A.M.F.A.*, fund 220/Egypt, 1956, file with unmarked and unnumbered pages, (Report of the Romanian minister in Cairo no. 3245, 9 December 1956, f. 1-3)

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

³⁸ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-December 1956, f. 22-23, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1428, 13 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

³⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁴¹ *A.M.F.A.*, fund 220/Egipt, 1956, file with unmarked and unnumbered pages, (Report of the Romanian minister in Cairo no. 3245, 9 December 1956, f. 1-3). The same document mentions the intervention of the Romanian minister in Egypt to the Egyptian authorities for freeing lawyer Jassy Sami, a Romanian citizen, and prolonging his residence in Egypt.

⁴² *A.M.F.A.*, fund 224/Egypt, 1956, file 1, f. 81, (Letter of A.A. Dudley to A. Lăzăreanu, deputy minister of foreign affairs of Romanian People's Republic).

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, October-December 1957, f.12, (Ciphred Telegram no. 1780/A, 5 October 1957, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

⁴⁵ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, July-December 1956, f. 96, (Ciphred Telegram no. 27910, 12 November 1956, sent by D.O.I. to the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Șerban).

⁴⁶ *A.M.F.A.*, f. 97, (Ciphred Telegram no. 29009, 13 November 1956, sender: A. Lăzăreanu Office). The communication of the Romanian government was the following: *“The Romanian government asked the UN Secretary General for Romanian People’s Republic to participate in the UN military forces for Egypt. This request was based on the sincere friendship between the two countries, the sympathy of the Romanian people for the right cause of the Egyptian people and government, for defending the territorial integrity and the national independence of Egypt. Until now, the UN Secretary General did not answer our request. We ask the Egyptian government to support the request of the Romanian government during the talks with the Secretary General, keeping in mind that the contribution of a Romanian detachment to the UN forces would contribute to these forces in the framework desired by the Egyptian government and by all the peace loving countries”*.

⁴⁷ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/Egypt, file 11, Julie-November 1956, f. 191, (Ciphred Telegram no. 19979, 17 November 1956, sent by the Romanian legation in Cairo, signed Ionescu).

⁴⁸ *A.M.F.A.*, fund Telegrams/France, file 15, October-December 1956, f. 136., (Ciphred Telegram no. 1827, 1 December 1956, sender: the Romanian legation in Paris, signed Bălănescu).