

Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, Chargé d'Affaires of Romania in Riga During the Years Fateful for the Baltic States, 1939–1940

Grigore Nikulesku-Buzești – Rumānijas pilnvarotais lietvedis Rīgā Baltijas valstīm liktenīgajos gados, 1939–1940

Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor, PhD

Romanian Academy, Jassy Branch, A. D. Xenopol History Institute, Romania

E-mail: bogdan.schipor@gmail.com

In the case of the mandate that Grigore Niculescu-Buzești (1908–1949) fulfilled in the Latvian capital, attention is captivated, from the very beginning, by his numerous reports and analysis carried out by the Romanian diplomat. A careful and detailed study of the telegrams he sent to Bucharest from the Baltic capital can reveal to anyone, on the one hand, the concerns, fears, tensions and hopes of the authorities in Riga, as well as of Latvian society, in the context of the Soviet-German pact of 23 August 1939, of the outbreak of the war and the relationship with the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, – the mechanisms of Moscow's aggression that led to the annexation of the Baltic countries in June 1940. Until the summer of 1940, the Romanian diplomat sent numerous telegrams to Bucharest, in which the stages of the annexation can be captured clearly and precisely. The number of documents and the amount of information reveal Bucharest's high interest regarding the events in the Baltic states at that time. Thus, the author can trace the impact and relevance of his information and analysis in a tragic context, marked by tensions and convulsions throughout Europe. Moreover, Niculescu-Buzești's experience as Romania's chargé d'affaires in Riga deeply marked the future Romanian minister of foreign affairs.

Keywords: Diplomacy, the Second World War, Romania, Baltic states, Soviet Union.

Laikā, kad Grigore Nikulesku-Buzești (*Niculescu-Buzești*) pildīja mandātu Latvijas galvaspilsētā, jau no paša sākuma bija redzams, ka viņš pievērsis lielu uzmanību savu ziņojumu precizitātei un politiski diplomātiskajai analīzei. Rūpīga un detalizēta viņa no Baltijas galvaspilsētas uz Bukaresti sūtīto telegrammu izpēte ikvienam var atklāt, no vienas puses, Rīgas varas iestāžu, kā arī Latvijas sabiedrības bažas, bailes, spriedzi un cerības 1939. gada 23. augusta padomju–Vācijas pakta, kara sākuma un attiecību ar Padomju Savienību kontekstā, no otras puses, Maskavas agresijas mehānismus, kas noveda pie Baltijas valstu aneksijas 1940. gada jūnijā. Līdz 1940. gada vasarai Rumānijas diplomāts uz

Bukaresti nosūtīja daudzas telegrammas, kurās skaidri un precīzi fiksēti aneksijas posmi. Dokumentu skaits, informācijas un analīzes kvalitāte liecina par Bukarestes lielo interesi par to, kas tajā laikā notika Baltijas valstīs. Tādējādi varam izsekot Nikulesku-Buzești informācijas un analīzes ietekmei un aktualitātei traģiskajā kontekstā, ko visā Eiropā raksturoja spriedze un satricinājumi. Turklāt Nikulesku-Buzești pieredze, ko viņš guva kā Rumānijas pilnvarotais lietvedis Rīgā, dziļi ietekmēja nākamo Rumānijas ārlietu ministru.

Atslēgvārdi: Otrais pasaules karš, Rumānija, Baltijas valstis, Padomju Savienība.

Introduction and a short biography

In 1940, as Romanian chargé d'affaires in Riga, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești became an eyewitness to the Soviet annexation of Latvia, a process that took place under the co-ordination of Andrey Yanuaryevich Vyshinsky.¹ In 1944–1945, as a minister of foreign affairs, he witnessed Romania's subjugation to Communism, conducted under the careful "guidance" of the same Soviet diplomat.² The current research, based mainly on the study of funds and dossiers from the diplomatic archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reveal an almost unexpectedly rich source of information that the Romanian diplomat sent to Bucharest throughout the time when he was the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission in Riga, as chargé d'affaires, from September 1939 to August 1940. Only a small part of his reports is known to historians both in Romania and Latvia.

Grigore Niculescu-Buzești was born on 1/14 August 1908, in the town of Sărata, Buzău county. His father, Constantin, was born in Buzești commune, Olt County in 1878, and was a winegrower by profession, while his mother, Valeria, was born

in Buzău in 1882, a housewife.³ He also had a brother, Radu, born on 23 February 1911 in Buzău, who would become an engineer and a well-known member of the National Peasant Party. He did his compulsory military service in the 7th Engineering Regiment, being transferred to the reserve with the rank of second lieutenant. He attended the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest, obtaining his bachelor's degree in October 1929.⁴

The following year, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești took the entrance exam in the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, subsequently admitted there with the rank of "legation attaché", entering his office on 1 May 1930, at a time when Gheorghe G. Mironescu was the minister of foreign affairs.⁵ Two years later, on 1 May 1933, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești was promoted to third-class legation secretary. Also in May 1933, by the decision of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolae Titulescu, Grigore Niculescu Buzești was to be appointed for the first time to a post in a Romanian diplomatic representation abroad, namely, begin working at the Romanian Legation in Geneva.⁶ He would hold this position until the fall of 1935, when he would be recalled to the Central Administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷ Two years later, in May 1937, Grigore Niculescu Buzești would be appointed again to a position abroad. He was transferred, as of 1 June 1937, to the Legation of Romania in Stockholm, led at that time by Barbu Constantinescu. After another two years spent in Stockholm, Grigore Niculescu Buzești was promoted, by high royal decree, to second-class legation secretary starting on 1 April 1939.⁸ On 28 August 1939, by means of a coded telegram sent to Stockholm, Grigore Gafencu, the minister of foreign affairs from Bucharest, sent clear instructions that Grigore Niculescu Buzești was to be posted in Riga, to fulfil

the position of chargé d'affaires of Romania, as Marcel Romanescu, the current holder of the position, was immediately recalled to the country.⁹ The royal decree for the posting of Buzești in the Latvian capital and the recall of Marcel Romanescu was issued on 30 August 1939, and the Romanian minister in Stockholm was officially informed about this document the next day, on 31 August 1939.¹⁰ Buzești's mission in Riga began on 1 September 1939,¹¹ coincidentally or not, with the outbreak of war in Europe. The Romanian diplomat left for Riga by ship from Stockholm in the morning of 3 September 1939, the Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary in the Swedish capital Barbu Constantinescu, reporting this immediately to the ministry's headquarters in Bucharest.¹²

Chargé d' affaires in Riga

Grigore Niculescu-Buzești's reports, telegrams and analyses from Riga are characterized by keen observations and detailed accounts. On the one hand, the documents reveal the concerns, fears, tensions and hopes of the Latvian authorities and society in the complicated context of that moment – the Soviet-German Pact of 23 August 1939, the outbreak of the war, the complex relationship with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, these sources display the mechanisms and vessels of Moscow's aggression, the steps that led to the annexation of the Baltic states in June 1940 and the impact of annexation upon Latvia's society, political circles or diplomatic corps. Niculescu-Buzești's diplomatic correspondence from Riga expose a "technology of aggression", – the term coined by some authors. Until June 1940, the Romanian diplomat sent to Bucharest numerous telegrams, accurately presenting the annexation stages. The sheer number of

documents and the quality of information¹³ transmitted from Riga to Bucharest also reveal the high interest of the Romanian authorities towards the events that took place in the Baltic states. Romania and the three Baltic states (as well as Finland) shared the vicinity of the Soviet Union; hence, the careful consideration by the Romanians of the events in northeast Europe.¹⁴ Later, Niculescu-Buzești's returned to Bucharest deeply affected by the Soviet annexation of Latvia, which he witnessed firsthand as a chargé d'affaires in Riga.¹⁵

As previously mentioned, Niculescu-Buzești's mission in Riga began simultaneously with the outbreak of the war. Latvia – like the other Baltic states – declared its neutrality. In late August – early September, however, the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact produced more concerns in the region than the German-Polish conflict or the war declarations by France and Great Britain. No significant military action was taken in Latvia, though. Initially, the Latvians regarded the Soviet-German Pact with fear and consternation, but later they exhibited optimism. Grigore Niculescu-Buzești explained this attitude through several elements. First, there was a substantial amount of confidence in the functioning of the non-aggression pact that Germany signed in the summer of 1939 with the Baltic states. Secondly, the Romanian diplomat identified certain scepticism with regard to Germany's future military success in Europe. Moreover, Latvians believed that it was not in the Soviet Union's interests to allow the consolidation of a German hegemony over Europe, because that would have affected Moscow's interests, as well. According to the perceptions in Riga, the Soviet Union, as a powerful state, would choose a policy of neutrality, waiting for the end of the war to pursue its own interests in the new European post-war order. According to a report by Niculescu-Buzești

from 8 September 1939, seen from this perspective, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact came to be regarded in Riga even as a beneficial event; it was expected that Germany's defeat and Moscow's neutrality would create a favourable international context to allow the preservation of the independence of the three Baltic states.¹⁶

This optimism, however, came to an end rather abruptly in Latvia. The Soviet aggression against Poland, from 17 September 1939, aroused great concerns in the Baltic states. The fear that the Germans and the Soviets might have agreed, in August, upon dividing the territory of the Baltic states grew to an unprecedented level. Despite that, in Latvia some still hoped for the best, as Grigore Niculescu-Buzești reported. These opinions expected a limited Soviet action, meant, on the one hand, to establish an "ethnographic" border along the former Polish territory, and, on the other hand, to prevent the prolongation of the war at its Western border. At the same time, there was also a pessimistic scenario in the Baltic capital, which evoked the possibility that the Western powers could consent and accept the defeat of Poland and the hegemony of Germany in the East, which would then cause Moscow to consider the occupation of the Baltic states in order to prevent them from falling under German control.¹⁷

In a telegram sent from Riga to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest on 8 October 1939, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești noted that Latvian public had resignedly accepted the German agreement with the Soviet Union, hoping that a period of calm would follow. In this context, the accredited Romanian diplomat in Riga considered that, from his point of view, the Latvian-Soviet relations had entered a new phase, one of relative stability, and that no significant change would follow, as long as the outcome of the conflict between Germany and Western powers could not be

foreseen. However, the Romanian diplomat feared what he considered to be not only *possible*, yet, most likely, *probable* changes in Latvia's domestic politics.¹⁸ Everyone realized that such agreements were only temporary compromises, and that their value would be ultimately dictated by the future evolution of the war in Europe.¹⁹

An exceptional report

Eight days later, on 16 October 1939, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești sent a particularly comprehensive document to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, a detailed analysis of "*the new situation created in the Baltic region following the Mutual Assistance Treaties with the Soviets*". From the notes made by hand on this document, it appears that copies were disseminated to the relevant minister, at that time – Grigore Gafencu, to the Political Directorate in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the General Staff of the Romanian Army, and another one was attached to the Russian-Baltic Agreements file.²⁰ The report was also brought to the attention of the Romanian Legation in Moscow.²¹ It is a testimony of the importance of this document, still unknown to historians.

The Romanian diplomat's analysis starts with several significant premises. Firstly, it is emphasized that the recent treaties concluded by the Baltic states with the Soviet Union represented the beginning of a difficult and dangerous period for their existence, as they gave Moscow virtually absolute control over the Baltic region. Were they in a transitional stage towards actual annexation, as long as an extended control of the area represented a permanent interest and an historical objective of Tsarist Russia, and later of the Soviet Union? The Romanian diplomat did not provide an answer, but in his opinion, there were indications that

Moscow had not yet set its definitive objectives regarding not only the Baltic area, but even Eastern Europe in general, as long as the outcome of the war between Germany and the Western powers was still undecided. At the moment, however, the goal of Soviet policy seemed to be to regain lost positions in the Baltic Sea and to act to counter a potential future eastward German expansion. Niculescu-Buzești emphasized the fact that this is the perspective to understand not only the Soviet-Baltic assistance treaties, but also other such “arrangements”: in Poland, where the Soviet invasion had prevented the realization of a common border between the territory occupied by the Reich and Romania, but also in the Balkans, or even in Turkey. The Romanian diplomat mentioned, however, that this policy of Moscow was not carried out without an element of prudence: Moscow constantly showed a concern to maintain good relations with the Western powers, relations which, in Buzești’s opinion, represented a guarantee for the Soviet Union’s own security in the event of a German defeat. In such a scenario, the restoration/reconstitution of Poland could create the risk of a conflict with Warsaw, which would have wanted to regain the territories occupied by the Red Army in September 1939, and this could trigger a new conflict with Poland that would enjoy Western support. In such a case, maintaining good relations with Great Britain and France could significantly influence the evolution of the situation in Eastern Europe and the Baltic area. On the other hand, in Europe with a defeated Germany, there would no longer be any real, concrete counterweight to Russia that would have resumed its aggressive expansionist policy towards its neighbours to the west, with a perspective of strong projections of Communist influence in Central and Eastern Europe. In that case, the Western powers might have found

that they had freed Europe from German aggression and influence only to give it to the Soviet Union, effectively replacing the German problem with the Russian one. The solution, from the perspective of the Romanian diplomat, could be consistent Western support to the European states in the vicinity of the Soviet Union, and perhaps even through the detachment of Ukraine (considered to have always been a latent political possibility), which would lead to the construction of a barrier against Moscow’s expansion.

At that moment, however, Niculescu-Buzești considered the fact that the Soviet Union engaged in a military action against Poland as somehow encouraging. The Romanian diplomat considered the Soviet aggression as a risk-free endeavour, because the Polish troops were fighting hard to limit or stop the German offensive, and only this particular context favoured the Soviet direct military action against Poland. For the Romanian diplomat, it was a sign that the Soviets wanted to avoid a full-scale conflict in Europe. This was the reason why Buzești mentioned that in Riga the Latvian authorities were counting on a subsequent period of relative moderation of Soviet policy, not only in the Baltic area, but also in Eastern Europe, since an eventual Allied victory could force Moscow to back down, in order to avoid the possibility of a conflict with Poland, France and Great Britain.

In the opinion of the Romanian diplomat, a test of this last hypothesis was to be the “Finnish affair”, more precisely, the way in which the negotiations between the Soviet Union and Finland, which had just begun at the time when Buzești wrote his report, would be completed. It was emphasized, however, that in Riga it was believed that Moscow in this matter would consider the position and interest shown by the United States in favour of Finland,

because Washington could become an important element in shaping the post-war world and the future peace in Europe.

In any case, as long as the outcome of the European conflict was uncertain, it was to be expected that a certain stability would be maintained in both Eastern Europe and the Baltic area. It was not foreseeable, in the view of the diplomat, that during this period new Soviet demands would be formulated, which would affect the independence of the Baltic states or produce notable changes in the relations between Moscow and its western neighbours. Russia, he believed, would adopt a wait-and-see policy until an outcome of the European conflict was predictable.

However, in the case of a German victory or a premature peace, the Romanian diplomat argued, there were few chances for the Baltic states to retain their independence or survive. In this scenario, Eastern Europe and the Baltic area would become, in the opinion of the Romanian diplomat, an arena of a "speed race" between German and Soviet expansion, with prospects among the bleakest for this part of the continent. Only the victory of the Western Allies could give the Baltic countries a chance to preserve their independence and the prospect of removing, sometime in the future, the clauses and obligations imposed by the Soviets through the assistance treaties. In this case, Niculescu-Buzești considered that the old formula of common front from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, conceived as an independent political grouping, could become a political reality that would ensure both its own security and the European balance.²²

A relentless diplomat

At the same time, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești was promptly sending to Bucharest any information related to the mentions

of Romania by Soviet officials or military. On 4 November 1939, for example, during the negotiations of the Soviet-Latvian military treaty, the head of Soviet delegation, Deputy Red Fleet Commander Ivan Stepanovici Isakov, was informing Latvians that, following negotiations with Finland, a military action was to begin for the re-occupation of Bessarabia and that, in this respect, significant contingents had already been deployed by Moscow in the military regions of Kharkov and Odessa. In his report to Bucharest, Niculescu-Buzești emphasized that he could not evaluate the importance of this officer within the military Soviet hierarchy or the relevance of his statement; however, the Romanian diplomat was convinced that such affirmations expressed the state of mind of the Soviet armed forces at that time.²³

Later, the outbreak of the Winter War generated new fears in Riga over what could have followed in Northern Europe and the Baltic region. There were some hopes which conceived of putting an end to the conflict and accepting a compromise with the aim of avoiding the uncontrolled escalation of the war. In a telegram of 10 January 1940, Niculescu-Buzești reported to Bucharest about the local fear aroused by the possibility of an allied intervention in conflict in Finland's favour, a scenario that was believed to push Moscow towards a firm alliance with Germany, – or such an outcome would have posed the greatest threat to the existence of the Baltic states as independent entities, wrote Niculescu-Buzești.²⁴

The end of the Soviet-Finnish conflict in March 1940 and the imminence of an allied intervention in Finland generated contradictory attitudes in Riga, which were presented and analysed by Grigore Niculescu-Buzești in his correspondence to Bucharest. An Anglo-French intervention, coupled with Sweden's involvement, was considered a threat to

the entire Baltic and Scandinavian region. The consequence of such actions would have been the increase of Soviet contingents in the area and possibly even occupation of the three Baltic states, the Romanian diplomat reported. The end of the war between the Soviet Union and Finland would have produced a different outcome, the Latvians believed. Moreover, the Baltic states would have wanted a Western intervention against Moscow in the Caucasus, to strike both the Soviet Union and its raw materials deliveries to the Reich.²⁵

The end of the Winter War was followed by a period of relative calm in the area. The German invasion of Denmark and Norway did not particularly affect the attitude of the Baltic countries, due to the fact that the hostilities did not extend to the rest of the Scandinavian Peninsula. According to Niculescu-Buzești's reports from Riga, the explanation for such attitudes resided in the firm belief of the Baltic officials in the Soviet policy of neutrality and in the fact that Moscow wanted to avoid a confrontation with the Western allies, not only in the Scandinavian and Baltic regions, but also in the Balkans, where the Soviet Union – it was believed – would not risk a conflict with Turkey, which was Romania's ally and had closed ties with the United Kingdom and France.²⁶

Diplomatic representation in neighbouring Lithuania

Furthermore, on 19 March 1940, Niculescu-Buzești reported a problem to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, namely, the matter of representing Romanian interests in Kaunas, to the Lithuanian government. In a telegram addressed to his superiors in Bucharest, the Romanian diplomat requested a letter of accreditation from the Romanian

government, necessary to be able to function as chargé d'affaires also with the government in Kaunas.²⁷ Buzești telegram was registered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Headquarters in Bucharest only on 26 March, and a reply was sent to Riga only on 15 April 1940. According to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Grigore Niculescu Buzești had not been appointed as a chargé d'affaires to the government in Kaunas, so that a possible letter of accreditation to this effect had not and should not have been issued. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, the issue of Romania's diplomatic representation in Kaunas was to be resolved "*at the appropriate time*".²⁸ However, in a new telegram sent to Bucharest on 3 May 1940, Niculescu-Buzești specified the fact that Marcel Romanescu, who had served as Romania's chargé d'affaires in Riga before him, had also served in the same position with the government in Kaunas, keeping residence in Riga. He therefore considered it natural that he would take over (or had taken over) this mandates alongside the Lithuanian government and even travelled to Kaunas on the occasion of the celebration of Lithuania's National Day. Moreover, the Romanian diplomat considered a cessation of the representation of Romanian interests in Lithuania in such a complicated and difficult period, as neglecting an opportunity.²⁹ However, the issue would no longer be regulated for reasons that are easy to understand.

Soviet annexation and the end of the Romanian diplomatic mission

At the beginning of June 1940, the Latvian Army General Staff informed Niculescu-Buzești about a significant concentration of Soviet troops near the Dniester line and in the region of Romania's former

border with Poland. The Romanian diplomat reported to Bucharest, emphasizing the lack of predictability with regard to the Soviet actions. Grigore Niculescu-Buzești argued that such concentration of Soviet forces at Romania's border would not have been possible had Moscow not been certain that Turkey would not support Romania in the event of a Soviet aggression. However, the concentration of Red Army forces was not seen as indicating an imminent threat to Romania's interest, but as a precaution designed to prevent the eastward spread of hostilities in the event of an Italian or German attack on Romania. In this case, the worst scenario seemed to be splitting Romania, as it had happened with Poland in 1939. Niculescu-Buzești believed, however, that the Soviets would refrain from contributing to the outbreak of such a major conflict in the region.³⁰ Subsequently, on 14 June 1940, Niculescu-Buzești was sending a very detailed report to Bucharest, obtained from the Latvian military officials, which had received the information from the Soviets. According to such reports, there were at the time 33 Red Army divisions at the border with Romania, 22 of which were deployed on the Dniester line.³¹

The Soviet ultimatums addressed to the Baltic countries in mid-June 1940 had been a surprise in a period dominated by relative calm in this part of Europe. In this context, Niculescu-Buzești advised his superiors in Bucharest to regard as dubious the Soviet claims that the Baltic population received the Red Army's invading troops with enthusiasm; such reactions belonged almost exclusively to some small groups of agitators, while the general population met them with resignation and curiosity, the Romanian diplomat noted.³²

On 21 July 1940, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești was drawing the conclusion that *"the Baltic States have passed away"*. In Riga,

Tallinn and Kaunas, the events were taking place that the Romanian diplomat called *"the last act of comedy called the liberation by the Red Army of the Baltic peoples from the tyranny of their plutocratic regimes and the free and spontaneous adhesion of these grateful peoples to Soviet Russia"*.³³ Five days later, on 26 July, Romania's chargé d'affaires in Riga reported to his superiors in Bucharest that the foreign diplomats in Riga would be given two weeks to leave the country. He was under the impression that the Soviets wanted the departure of the foreigners from the Baltic region as quickly as possible, – a region that seemed to present an ever-increasing military and strategic interest to Moscow.³⁴

Bucharest's response was sent to Niculescu-Buzești on 12 August 1940. Vasile Grigorcea, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, informed the diplomat in Riga that he would be recalled to the Central Administration of the Ministry on 20 August. In the same telegram, Niculescu-Buzești was asked to take measures to burn the cipher, as well as the political and secret archive in Riga. Niculescu-Buzești was to take to Bucharest only the administrative and accounting archive, the registers and the inventory of the Legation.³⁵ The next day, on 13 August, King Carol II issued the official decree recalling Grigore Niculescu-Buzești from Riga.³⁶ At the request of Niculescu-Buzești,³⁷ the transfer of goods from the Legation's inventory in Riga was made by ship, through Stockholm, the Romanian Minister in the Swedish capital, Gheorghe Lecca, receiving notices and instructions in this regard on 15 August 1940.³⁸ On 21 August 1940, Niculescu-Buzești was sending a final telegram to Bucharest, indicating that a large number of well-known Latvian political figures were deported to the Soviet Union, arrests and deportations being carried out on an extensive scale. The Romanian diplomat

thus expressed his opinion that the Soviets sought to liquidate from the Baltic states any possible nucleus that would uphold national hopes and aspirations.³⁹

A controversial diplomatic career

On 20 May 1941, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești would be appointed a director of the Minister's Cabinet and of the cipher within the ministry, a position he would hold until 23 August 1944,⁴⁰ during the mandates of Ion and Mihai Antonescu at the head of Romanian diplomacy.

Grigore Niculescu-Buzești's activity in this position subsequently generated numerous criticisms, controversies, and accusations,⁴¹ from members of the diplomatic corps, later – from the Romanian exile, and from the repressive organs of the Communist regime established in Romania after WWII. In August 1945, Corneliu Coposu stated⁴² the fact that from the position of director of the cipher in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești supported the initiatives of Iuliu Maniu to detach Romania from the alliance with Germany and to reach an agreement with the Allies, since 1942, the two meeting in Barbu Știrbey's house.⁴³ There was certainly a close relationship between Iuliu Maniu and Grigore Niculescu-Buzești,⁴⁴ the latter being able to provide the Peasant's Party leader with detailed information from the diplomatic correspondence of the ministry regarding the evolution of the war, the atmosphere in neutral and allied countries, or about the relations between the government led by Ion Antonescu and the Third Reich. Also, it was Niculescu-Buzești who brokered, as of June 1942, the meetings between Iuliu Maniu and King Michael or those between the Romanian sovereign and Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, the director of the cipher department from the being

present at all the meetings, discussions, negotiations with the historical parties, with the Social Democrats, the Communists⁴⁵ or the military. According to Corneliu Coposu, even the decision to arrest Ion Antonescu and his collaborators in the afternoon of 23 August, 1944⁴⁶ was taken only after Niculescu-Buzești obtained the agreement of Iuliu Maniu in this regard.⁴⁷ In fact, even the Peasant Party leader recognized the central role that Grigore Niculescu-Buzești played on 23 August, 1944, not only in his position as the director of the cipher in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also as the main political advisor to King Mihai.⁴⁸ Moreover, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești testified, in a letter published by the newspaper *Universul*, on 15 September 1944, that, having the task of maintaining contacts with the Allies, through the means of communication that he had at hand in the ministry and which, for a certain period, were the only ones available for this purpose, he had the privilege of occupying a central position and knowing all the aspects that prepared the act of 23 August 1944.⁴⁹

Grigore Niculescu-Buzești did not continue his activities for much longer after his short term as the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, – the post he held between 23 August and 4 November 1944, – neither in the country nor in exile. He died on 12 October 1949, in New York, of leukaemia he had been suffering from since the early 1940s. His wife also died of cancer in Bern in 1946.⁵⁰ In any case, his departure abroad did not exempt him from a trial organized *in absentia* by the Communist authorities in Romania. By sentence No. 1980 of 11 November 1947, the Military Court of the Second Military Region of Bucharest sentenced Grigore Niculescu-Buzești to hard labour for life, five years of civic degradation, confiscation of property and payment of 50 000 lei in court costs.⁵¹

Conclusion

As a conclusion of the current study, it can be asserted that the presence and efforts of Grigore Niculescu-Buzești as chargé d'affaires in Riga in 1939–1940 provided Romanian diplomacy with detailed information about the events in the Baltic states during this period, the steps that the Soviets followed to attain their main goal of annexing the three countries and fulfilling the objectives agreed with the Germans on 23 August 1939. Although young, the Romanian diplomat proved his vision, capacity for work and analysis in “textbook” reports and analyses, appreciated as such in Bucharest. On the other hand, the study of the diplomatic correspondence that arrived in Bucharest in 1939–1940 reveals the tension and expectations of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs hungry for information and which, in the context of the ongoing war in Europe and Romania’s position of neutrality, tried to capitalize on any source and information to be able to strengthen its status and ensure its security. In this context, Niculescu-Buzești proved to be a precious

source of information for his superiors, but also for other Romanian diplomatic missions, such as the one in Moscow. It is difficult to quantify, how much Romania used its information, and such estimates go beyond the objectives proposed in the present study. It is certain that the annexation of the Baltic states was followed almost immediately by a Soviet ultimatum addressed to Romania, which gave up Bessarabia, the northern part of Bucovina and Hertza county in June 1940, in a context of political, diplomatic and military isolation, amplified by the collapse of France, Italy’s entry into the war and the victory of Axis in the west. Moreover, Niculescu-Buzești would become the head the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs four years later, when Romania left the Axis and joined the United Nations war effort at the end of August 1944. The events since then would mark the beginning of a transition of Romania towards the status of a satellite country of Moscow in the socialist camp. Niculescu-Buzești’s reports from Riga anticipated, to a large extent, these developments at the end of the World War II.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- ¹ Vyshinsky was not only the General Prosecutor of the Soviet Union during the Great Terror of the 1930s, but also the one who coordinated the political changes in Latvia after this Baltic state concluded a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union on 5 October 1939, being responsible for the gradual elimination of the democratic, constitutional political forces of the country and preparing for the annexation of June 1940. Both in 1940 and in 1944, Vyshinsky was the vice-president of the Council of People’s Commissars and First Deputy of the People’s Commissar of the Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, in both positions second to Molotov. IRÈNE ŠNEIDERE. The Occupation of Latvia in June 1940: A Few Aspects of the Technology of Soviet Aggression. In: *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*. Latvijas Vēsturnieku Komisijas Raksti, 14. sējums. Rīga 2005. We can therefore say that Andrey Vyshinsky had experience in this kind of actions.
- ² SILVIU MILOIU. Preface. In: SILVIU MILOIU, ĒRIKS JĒKABSONS, LAIMA JĒKABSONE, ALEXANDRU GHIȘA (Ed.). *The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958)*. Târgoviște 2012, p. 15.
- ³ Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității/Archive of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives, Bucharest, (henceforth – ACNSAS), Dossier P 000213, Vol. 70, Niculescu Grigore-Buzești [sic!], f. 42. See also Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe/Archives

- of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, (henceforth – AMAE), Fund 77, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, f. 13
- ⁴ AMAE, Bucharest, Fund 77, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, f. 8.
- ⁵ In the Grigore Niculescu-Buzești dossier from ACNSAS, already cited, it is mentioned, erroneously, that he became legation attaché in 1930 “*under the government of G. G. Mironescu*”. ACNSAS, București, Dosier P 000213, Vol. 70, Niculescu Grigore-Buzești, f. 14.
- ⁶ AMAE, Fund 77, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, f. 14.
- ⁷ Ibidem, f. 2.
- ⁸ Ibidem, f. 52. Later, in 1940, by decree-law no. 3052 of September 5, 1940, the entire period that Niculescu Buzești served as second-class legation secretary was to be granted starting from January 1, 1937. Ibidem, f. 64.
- ⁹ Ibidem, f. 53.
- ¹⁰ Ibidem, f. 58.
- ¹¹ Ibidem, f. 57.
- ¹² Ibidem, f. 66.
- ¹³ Camil Demetrescu, the future collaborator of Grigore Niculescu-Buzești at the Cipher Bureau of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Bucharest, in turn repeatedly appreciated the quality of the information and reports sent from Riga by him, considering them “classic” in the matter. See: CAMIL DEMETRESCU. *Note și relatări*. Edited by: NICOLAE C. NICOLESCU. Bucharest 2001, p. 153.; or of “diplomatic anthology” [ibidem, p. 289].
- ¹⁴ The telegrams we refer to can be found in AMAE, Fund No.71, Latvia, Vol. 1, 2, 7, 9. A large part of them were published in the volume “The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958)” already quoted. In his Memoirs, Mihail Manoilescu highly appreciated the information sent to Bucharest by Niculescu-Buzești until July 1940. MIHAIL MANOILESCU. *Dictatul de la Viena. Memorii, iulie-august 1049*. Edited with notes, afterword and index by VALERIU DINU. Bucharest 1991, p. 98.
- ¹⁵ FLORIN ANGHEL. O încercare românească de politică baltică. România și Letonia în perioada interbelică. In: *Național și universal. Studii oferite prof. dr. Șerban Papacostea cu ocazia împlinirii a 70 de ani*. Bucharest 1998, pp. 447–448.
- ¹⁶ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), p. 361.
- ¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 363.
- ¹⁸ Ibidem.
- ¹⁹ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), p. 366; see also p. 367–368.
- ²⁰ AMAE, Fund 71, E9, Al Doilea Război Mondial/The Second World War, Vol. 93, f.1 (1-7).
- ²¹ AMAE, Fund 71 URSS, Vol. 6, f. 237–243.
- ²² AMAE, Fund 71, E9, The Second World War, Vol. 93, f. 1–7.
- ²³ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), pp. 374–375.
- ²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 394–395.
- ²⁵ Ibidem, p. 413.
- ²⁶ Ibidem, p. 433.
- ²⁷ AMAE, Fund 77, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, f. 69.
- ²⁸ Ibidem, f. 71.
- ²⁹ Ibidem, f. 75–77.
- ³⁰ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), p. 440.
- ³¹ Ibidem, p. 442.
- ³² Ibidem, p. 443.

- ³³ Ibidem, p. 454.
- ³⁴ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), p. 455.
- ³⁵ Ibidem.
- ³⁶ Ibidem, p. 456.
- ³⁷ AMAE, Fund 77, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, f. 81.
- ³⁸ Ibidem, f. 84.
- ³⁹ The Romanian-Latvian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1918–1958), p. 457.
- ⁴⁰ ACNSAS, Dossier P 000213, Vol. 70, Niculescu Grigore-Buzești, f. 27.
- ⁴¹ An example in this sense are the statements of Nicolae Baciu, who talks about the evil role played on 23 August 1944 by “a clique of Foreign Office officials, under the leadership of Niculescu-Buzești, director of the cipher, son-in-law of Prince Știrbey and brother-in-law of Cretzeanu from Ankara. This one, full of ambition and cancer, tried to play his personal card”. NICOLAE BACIU. *Agonia României 1944–1948*. Cluj-Napoca 1990, p. 48. We also encounter the expression “*Buzești, the impostor*”. Ibidem, p. 49. [In reality, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești did not suffer from cancer, but from leukemia. This disease would cause his premature death. DEMETRESCU, *Note și relatări*, p. 289]. Pamfil Șeicară a famous journalist of that time would be equally critical and accusatory of Niculescu-Buzești, who compared him to “*Dinu Păturică (a well-known character in the Romanian literature, a perfect exponent of an upstart, a man without scruples) nested abroad*”. See: PAMFIL ȘEICARU. “Cazul” George Tătărescu. In: “The Literary and Artistic Truth”, *Culture Weekly* and attitude, Bucharest, Year V, No. 335, 8 September 1996, p. 6. Or called him “*the sinister harbinger of capitulation*” [Ibidem, No. 336, 15 September 1996, p. 7].
- ⁴² On 20 August 1945, Corneliu Coposu granted an extensive interview to the journalist Margaret Tayer, correspondent of the Associated Press agency, in which he detailed the behind-the-scenes events of 23 August 1944. The interview should have been published in the 23 August 1945 issue of the official National Peasant Party newspaper *Dreptatea*, but Iuliu Maniu banned its publication at the last moment, considering that it was not the right time to make public the phases and details of the coup d'état of the previous year. However, the document is in ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file No. D2, Vol. 9, f. 307–326, being published by the historian Marin Pop. It can also be found online, published in the newspaper *Adevărul*, at https://adevarul.ro/locale/zalau/adevarul-ascuns-71-ani-despre-lovitura-stat-23-august-1944-oprit-iuliu-maniu-publicare-interviu-istoric-acordat-corneliu-coposu-1_57bae25e5ab6550cb8fe2233/index.html, last viewed on 22 June 2018.
- ⁴³ Grigore Niculescu-Buzești was married to Ecaterina Știrbey, the youngest daughter of Prince Barbu Știrbey. DEMETRESCU, *Note și relatări*, p. 152.
- ⁴⁴ Camil Demetrescu talks about a real “spell” that Niculescu-Buzești exercised over Maniu. Ibidem, p. 147.
- ⁴⁵ Nicolae Baciu specifies the fact that Grigore Niculescu-Buzești even took part in the meeting between King Mihai and the communist leaders Emil Bodnăraș and Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, held at the Royal Palace on 13 June 1944, and in which no representative of any historical, traditional political party took part. BACIU, *Agonia României*, p. 33.
- ⁴⁶ On 23 August 1944, Ion Antonescu went to the king for an audience, accompanied by Mihai Antonescu, the foreign minister. He was received at 4:00 p.m., at the New House in the Royal Palace, and at the beginning he presented the sovereign with the dramatic situation on the Moldova's front, at the same time emphasizing the need to conclude an armistice, but under the conditions that Germany would have been informed and would have approved Romania's intention. In the opinion of Ion Antonescu, the German troops would thus have an opportunity to withdraw in order, retaining the chances for negotiations related to Transylvania and even Bessarabia. The king did not accept Antonescu's proposal and, after a short secret conversation with his trusted men, declared that he was dismissing the government and ordered the immediate arrest of those two dignitaries. The king's trusted people who were there at that time were General Constantin Sănătescu, Marshal of the Palace, General Aurel Aldea, Baron Ion Mocsony-Stârcea,

the hunting master of the Court, and Grigore Niculescu-Buzești. The participation of Grigore Niculescu-Buzești in the arrest of Ion and Mihai Antonescu is confirmed by several sources. Camil Demetrescu, one of his collaborators in the Cyphering Department of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs stated that he met him immediately after Ion and Mihai Antonescu were detained. Ion and Mihai Antonescu were soon handed over to the representatives of the Communist Party. Along with Ion and Mihai Antonescu, the Minister of War, General Constantin Pantazi, General Constantin (Piki) Vasiliu, at that time the commander of the Gendarmerie and Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior, as well as Colonel Mircea Elefterescu, the prefect of the Bucharest's Police, were also arrested. The latter were summoned to the Palace under the pretext of attending a Crown Council, and taken into custody. Immediately after the arrest of Ion and Mihai Antonescu, King Michael, by virtue of his constitutional prerogatives, appointed General Constantin Sănătescu to form a new cabinet. In the evening of 23 August 1944, King Michael issued a Proclamation to the country, announcing Romania's exit from the alliance with the Axis powers and the immediate end of the war with the United Nations. At the same time, the Romanian sovereign also emphasized the fact that Romania accepted the conditions of the armistice offered by the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States, noting that the three powers recognized, in return, the *"injustice of the Vienna dictate"*, through which Romania had lost the northwestern part of Transylvania. In this context, Michael I declared that Romania, together with the Allied armies, would liberate Transylvania from foreign occupation.

⁴⁷ CORNELIU COPOSU. Interview given to the journalist Margaret Tayer, correspondent of the Associated Press agency on 20 August 1945. In: ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, dos. D2, Vol. 9, f. 307–326, at https://adevarul.ro/locale/zalau/adevarul-ascuns-71-ani-despre-lovitura-stat-23-august-1944-oprit-iuliu-maniu-publicare-interviu-istoric-acordat-corneliu-coposu-1_57bae25e5ab6550cb8fe2233/index.html, last viewed on 22 June 2018.

⁴⁸ It seems that the one who warmly recommended Grigore Niculescu-Buzești to King Mihai was his good friend Ioan Mocsony-Stârcea, the hunting master of the Romanian sovereign. In this context, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești constantly insisted that the King should change Ion Antonescu's regime and prompted Romania's exit from the war, in a scenario where Michael I would act as a constitutional factor, above the parties, but with a political government that would assume this action. Cf. DEMETRESCU, Note și relatări, p. 287.

⁴⁹ The letter can be found at ACNSAS, Dosar P 000213, Vol. 70, Niculescu Grigore-Buzești, f. 48–49.

⁵⁰ ACNSAS, Dossier P 000213, Vol. 70, Niculescu Grigore-Buzești, f. 33.

⁵¹ Ibidem, f. 34.

KOPSAVILKUMS

1940. gadā, būdams Rumānijas pilnvarotais lietvedis Rīgā, Grigore Nikulesku-Buzești bija liecinieks Latvijas aneksijai, kas notika Andreja Višinska vadībā. Kā ārlietu ministrs 1944.–1945. gadā viņš bija liecinieks Rumānijas komunizācijai, kas notika tā paša padomju diplomāta vadībā. Grigore Nikulesku-Buzești ziņojumiem, telegrammām un analizēm no Rīgas raksturīgi rūpīgi novērojumi un detalizēti apraksti. No vienas puses, šie dokumenti atklāj Latvijas varas iestāžu un sabiedrības bažas, bailes, spriedzi un cerības sarežģītajā tā brīža kontekstā – 1939. gada 23. augusta padomju un Vācijas pakta noslēgšana, kara sākums, sarežģītās attiecības ar Padomju Savienību. No otras puses, tie parāda Maskavas agresijas mehānismus un paņēmienus, soļus, kas noveda pie Baltijas valstu aneksijas 1940. gada jūnijā, kā arī aneksijas ietekmi uz Latvijas sabiedrību, politiskajām aprindām un diplomātisko korpusu.

Grigores Nikulesku-Buzești kā pilnvarotā lietveža Rīgā klātbūtnes un darbības 1939.–1940. gadā rezultātā Rumānijas diplomātiskās aprindas ieguva detalizētu informāciju

par to, kas šajā laikā notika Baltijas valstīs, par soļiem, ko padomju vara veica, lai anektētu šīs trīs valstis un īstenotu 1939. gada 23. augustā ar vāciešiem saskaņotos mērķus. Lai arī gados jauns, rumāņu diplomāts savu redzējumu, darba un analīzes spējas pierādīja ar kvalitatīviem ziņojumiem un notikumu analīzi, kas tika novērtēti arī Bukarestē. No otras puses, Bukarestē 1939.–1940. gadā ienākušās diplomātiskās sarakstes izpēte atklāj spriedzi un cerības, kādas valdīja pēc informācijas alkstošajā Rumānijas Ārlietu ministrijā, kas vēl joprojām notiekošā Eiropas kara un Rumānijas neitralitātes pozīcijas kontekstā centās izmantot jebkuru avotu un informāciju, lai spētu nostiprināt savu statusu un veicināt savu drošību.

Šajā kontekstā Nikulesku-Buzešti izrādījās vērtīgs informācijas avots ne tikai saviem priekšniekiem, bet arī citām Rumānijas diplomātiskajām misijām, piemēram, Maskavā. Cik lielā mērā Rumānija izmantoja šo informāciju, ir grūti kvantitatīvi noteikt, un tas pārsniedz šajā pētījumā izvirzītos mērķus. Ir skaidrs, ka Baltijas valstu aneksijai gandrīz nekavējoties sekoja padomju ultimāts, kas tika adresēts Rumānijai, kura 1940. gada jūnijā atteicās no Besarābijas, Bukovinas ziemeļu daļas un Hercas apriņķa politiskās, diplomātiskās un militārās izolācijas apstākļos, ko pastiprināja Francijas sabrukums, Itālijas iesaistīšanās karā un Ass valstu uzvara rietumos. Turklāt četrus gadus vēlāk, kad Rumānija 1944. gada augusta beigās pameta Ass valstis un pievienojās Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas kara centieniem, Nikulesku-Buzešti kļuva par Rumānijas Ārlietu ministrijas vadītāju. Notikumi kopš tā laika iezīmēja Rumānijas pāreju uz Maskavas satelītvalsts statusu sociālistiskajā nometnē. Nikulesku-Buzešti ziņojumi no Rīgas lielā mērā jau paredzēja šos notikumus Otrā pasaules kara beigās.



© 2024, Latvijas Universitāte

Raksts publicēts brīvpieejā saskaņā ar *Creative Commons* Attiecinājuma-Nekomerciāls 4.0 starptautisko licenci (CC BY-NC 4.0).

This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)