

POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

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THE USSR'S FOREIGN POLICY AND "THE CONFLICT WITH FINLAND" IN DOCUMENTS (1939–1940)

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Abstract: The fate of East-European countries was decided on 23 August 1939, in the wake of the Soviet-German agreement, on 1st September 1939 Germany triggering its assault on Poland. The documents presented here refer to 'the international situation which worsened in Eastern Europe after the fall of Poland.' The Soviet Union invades Finland and, following difficult and exhausting battle, on 5 March 1940, the Finnish government sent a delegation to negotiate peace.

Keywords: The USSR, Finland, Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov.

Between March and August 1939 there was a series of actions, options, but also delays, both for the democratic European powers and also for the USSR. England and France did not want to fight, but at most forestall the war through a demonstration of force.¹ That did not seem convincing either for Hitler or, from the same perspective, for Stalin, whose negotiators were unsuccessfully demanding successful strategic operations in the Baltic.

On the European level, events were speeding and the aims of the Reich's aggressive policy were formulating: on 21 March, Germany was reaffirming its claims on the area and the city of Danzig; simultaneously, the German government issued an ultimatum that Lithuania cede the port of Memel (Klaipeda), which the German troops were to occupy the next day; on 26th and 27th March there were talks between Ribbentrop and the Polish ambassador to Berlin – Poland was summoned to regulate the problem posed by Danzig². Faced with the Nazi Reich,

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¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *O istorie a secolului XX. Era extremelor. 1914–1991*, Chişinău, Cartier Publishing, 1999, pp. 16–167.

² Constantin Vlad, *Diplomația secolului XX*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2014, p. 136; Alesandru Duțu, *Evoluții diplomatice și teritoriale în Europa secolele XIX–XX*, Bucharest, Fundația România de Măine Publishing, 2008, pp. 192–194.

Poland was not left alone³. At the end of March 1939, France and Great Britain expressed their unambiguous decision to fight if Poland was attacked. As the shadow of war took shape, the Soviet Union's attitude became increasingly important. In May, V.M. Molotov – who had replaced M.M. Litvinov as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – established a new direction for their affairs with Berlin, with a view to making new territorial “acquisitions” as a result of the agreement with Germany.

At this time, at the 18th Party Congress, Stalin emphasised in his analysis of the international state of affairs: “The crisis has abruptly worsened relations between imperialist countries. The commercial, customs and exchange struggle turned into military operations. The second imperialist war was born in blood and fire. Italy's attack on Abyssinia, the Italian-German intervention in Spain, the Japanese invasion of Northern and Central China, Germany's annexation of Austria, the occupation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland by Germany, the advance of the Japanese aggression into Southern China – these are the stages of this war. Every month sees the swelling of the second World War arena. The aggressive powers form alliances and blocks. They try to hide their true purposes through ingenious ‘geometric formulas’, through a deceitful demagoguery ‘against the Comintern’ ”⁴.

The countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans lived under the looming threat of the two empires ruled by Hitler and Stalin. Following the conclusion, on 23 August 1939, of the non-aggression pact and the secret additional Protocol between Germany and the USSR, the two states defined their spheres of interest in Eastern Europe: Finland, Estonia and Latvia came under Soviet influence⁵, while Lithuania under German influence;⁶ the border of the control areas was established in Poland; Soviet interest in Bessarabia was punctuated⁷. A short time after the signing of the treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany, Molotov said, referring to his government's foreign policy: “The international situation has worsened in Europe and the Far East, where the Japanese pursue their acts of hostility against the USSR. Starting with April, the Soviet Union conducted negotiations with France and England, followed by military parleys and Poland

³ Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial*, vol. II, Bucharest, Științifică și Enciclopedică Publishing, 1988, pp. 28–44.

⁴ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României, București (The Archives of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, Bucharest, hereinafter: AMAE), 71 URSS Fund, vol. 5, ff. 178–179.

⁵ Silviu Miloiu, *O istorie a Europei Nordice și Baltice*, vol. I, *De la epoca naționalismului la Războiul Rece*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2004, p. 261; Elena Dragomir, Silviu Miloiu, *Istoria Finlandei*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2010, pp. 275–282.

⁶ Silviu Miloiu, Florin Anghel, Veniamin Ciobanu, Zigmantas Kiaupa, *Istoria Lituaniei*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2011, p. 190.

⁷ Zorin Zamfir, Jean Banciu, *1939. Ultimul an de pace, întâiul an de război*, Bucharest, Oscar Print Publishing, 2000, pp. 265–269.

rejected the USSR's help, playing to the insincere song of England and France, who were afraid the USSR might become too strong. [...] Afterwards, when the German government wished to improve political relations as well, the USSR could not reject the proposal. We do not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and do not accept foreign interference in our country. This is the USSR's principle of peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries. The concluded pact, although only a non-aggression one, is nevertheless very important and its conclusion marks a turning point in world history. [...] The enemies of the pact are also the enemies of the USSR and Germany, and their desire is to compromise the beginning of their good-neighbourliness. The pact proves that important international crises, especially those regarding Eastern Europe, cannot be solved without the USSR, whose influence is growing in international politics"⁸.

On 28 September 1939, Ribbentrop paid a new visit to Moscow and suggested to Molotov that Central Poland, which, according to the previous agreement, came under the Soviet sphere of influence, should come under the German one, Berlin relinquishing in turn Lithuania which is be part of the Soviet sphere of influence. At the end of September and the beginning of October, the Baltic States (Estonia on 28 September, Latvia on 5 October, and Lithuania on 10 October) had to sign non-aggression pacts with the USSR. Estonia and Latvia ceded naval and air bases to the USSR and granted the right to station armed forces on their territory. Referring to all the political and territorial changes that took place in 1939, Marshal Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov emphasised the following: "The world is undergoing a period of extremely serious international conflict. The Soviet Union's foreign policy has sheltered Russia from the war raging in Europe and Asia. The non-aggression pact with Germany concluded at the right time, has eliminated the possibility of war between the USSR and Germany. Our country observes neutrality and continues its policy of peace"⁹. The speaker went on to describe the "entry of red troops in Poland in order to place under their protection the lives and property of the populations in Ukraine and White Russia. After illustrating the value proven by the red armies, Marshal Voroshilov added that they covered their flags in new glory and that currently they are at peace"¹⁰. Then, examining the mutual assistance pacts with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, he insisted on the fact that they "improved the strategic situation of all the signatories. Soviet troops will never interfere in the internal life of the sovereign republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania"¹¹.

⁸ AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 9, f. 94.

⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 6, f. 365.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

After gaining the military bases in the Baltic States, the Soviet Union commenced similar negotiations with Finland; on 29 September, the USSR severed diplomatic ties with Finland and invaded its territory. On 30 November 1939, “the huge Soviet Union, Great Russia, attacked Finland, with only 3 million inhabitants. The unexpected attack was perpetrated without any warning or declaration of war. In the entire world, an outcry was heard in the international printed press and on the wireless, like a storm risen against the Soviet Union. With a sinister and brutal strike, a cynical dictator kicked away the principles of the revolution he led and cruelly struck a small nation whose only desire was to live completely sovereign in their fate and home.”¹² In speaking about this conflict, Radu Florescu, the diplomat, emphasized as a result of talks he had with high functionaries in the Foreign Office, that they considered “the Soviet attack in Finland started from fear of Germany and any possible development of the war and that it was meant to secure a strategic position for the Russian government against Germany and Europe in general”¹³.

Moreover, Commandor Dumitrescu St. Gheorghe, military and naval attaché in England, underlined in his report on the evolution of the Soviet-Finnish war: “The reduced number of Finnish units on the front forced the Finnish Commandment to use the same units always and in almost all battles, thus any possibility of manoeuvre being excluded from the beginning. This, added to the daily marches and countermarches of these units, frequently in minus 50 degrees, led to an almost complete exhaustion of the human element and thus, despite the quantitative and qualitative importance of the material assistance sent by the Allies, the endurance of the Finnish troops was progressively diminishing. The immediate results of this decreased physical endurance were the continual Finnish retreat at the beginning of March 1940 [...] According to the information we possess at this time, the Soviet army employed the following battle tactics in the terrestrial attacks in Karelia: a) the attacks were preceded by sturdy artillery preparations which caused great damage to the Finnish fortifications, if not through the quality of their shots, then certainly through sheer quantity; b) infiltrations were used every time it was possible and in some cases this method was successful – due to the exhaustion of the Finnish troops – obtaining encirclements and ambushes which resulted in the occupation of small fortified positions; c) the attacks were executed with the strong support of armoured vehicles. Heavy armoured 70-ton vehicles were the main instruments that surprised the Finns and helped secure victories; d) the attacks were

¹² Apud *Generalul Titus Gârbea. Memorial și însemnări zilnice*, vol. I, edition supervised and annotated by Silviu Miloiu, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2011, p. 129.

¹³ Marusia Cîrstea, 1939. *Relațiile româno-britanice în cadrul noilor raporturi de putere din Europa. Documente*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2017, p. 212, doc. 126.

continuous (even at night) and this continuity intensified Finnish fatigue and consequently caused the decrease of their capacity to resist attacks; e) the attacks were performed in successive waves; f) frontal assaults (in the Karelian Isthmus they were combined with flank and rear attacks, using the icy waters of the Aland Gulf as a starting point; g) in performing the attacks a line of effort was chosen which concentrated most resources (the section of fortified front between Aeyraepaeae and Viborg) thus obtaining a superiority of forces; h) the occupied objectives were immediately organized defensively”¹⁴.

After heavy exhausting battles, on 5 March 1940 the Finnish government sent a delegation for peace negotiations; through the Treaty of Moscow (12 March 1940), Finland was ceding the Karelian Isthmus to the USSR definitively, including the city-port of Vüपुरi (Viborg) and the entire Lake Ladoga and was also putting the Hanko Peninsula under a trusteeship¹⁵. Referring to this conflict, the Romanian diplomat Gh. Niculescu Buzeşti stated the following: “Soviet politics manifested an undeniable reluctance to engage in the conflict with Finland. It is the reason why during the negotiations the USSR made important concessions due to which the situation in Finland would be sensibly better than that of the Baltic States. These concessions could go up to the point where they would have become an obvious diplomatic defeat. And that is because such a failure would have compromised irredeemably the entire future Russian policy on other levels. Therefore, resorting to arms, Soviet policy was also determined to soften the effect of this aggression through a gesture meant to demonstrate that the Soviets intend to respect the independence of the Finnish people and limit themselves to legitimate demands justified by the necessities of their own security. This gesture, a kind of alibi of the Soviet aggression in Finland, was the treaty of 3 September with enormous concessions promised to Finland – 60.000 square kilometres of territory – which constitutes the price of this aggression and a clue to the great interest that Soviet policy places on not repudiating its ideological positions. In its different manifestations, the Russian-Finnish crisis would therefore confirm Soviet policy so far. It is the reason why the Baltic States are regarding this conflict with less concern than at the beginning. Obviously, the Russian-Finnish conflict may still have important consequences for the Baltic region, as well as for the entire Eastern Europe”¹⁶.

¹⁴ Alesandru Duşu, Lenuţa Nicolescu, Alexandru Oşca, Andrei Nicolescu, *Ataşaii militari transmit...*, vol. II (1938–1940), Bucharest, Europa Nova Publishing, 2002, pp. 158–159, doc. 34.

¹⁵ Liddell Hart, *Istoria celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. I, Bucharest, Orizonturi Publishing, 2006, pp. 65–72; Elena Dragomir, Silviu Miloiu, *op. cit.*, p. 288; Silviu Miloiu, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹⁶ AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 6, ff. 409–410.

Following Finland's collapse, the Soviet Union moved to reorganise the conquered territories; on 29 March 1940, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union voted for "the transformation of the Autonomous Karelian Republic into a Federative Karelian-Finnish Republic"¹⁷. Thus, "The Karelian-Finnish Republic shall be the 12th Federative Republic of the Soviet Union. However, part of the territory of the Karelian Isthmus shall go to the Leningrad region. Newspapers publish reports on popular gatherings in Karelia, where the speakers approved 'enthusiastically' this decision by the Soviet government. A telegram to Messrs Stalin and Molotov coming from 'the Karelian-Finnish people (adopted during a workers' assembly in Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia) claims again, with the usual perfidy of the Soviets, that the establishment of the Karelian-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic expresses 'the will, the hopes and the dreams of the Karelian-Finnish people'¹⁸.

In the summer of 1940, the Soviet government took a series of measures with a view to strengthening discipline among the Red Army and so that "all manoeuvring operations executed this year in the USSR, with even the smallest units, were always performed in cooperation with armoured units and frequently with the help of the air force"¹⁹. In the autumn of 1940, the Soviet Marshal Timoshenko – in an order of the day addressed to the army – emphasised the following: "The USSR settled firmly on the shores of the Baltic Sea and the banks of the Danube" and "the capitalist world was forced to retreat and cede" because "the Red Army is ready to strike a fatal blow at those who will dare touch the sacred borders of the USSR"²⁰.

In an analysis of the international situation at the beginning of 1940, Gh. Davidescu – extraordinary envoy and Romania's minister plenipotentiary in Moscow – underlined: "Of all the world governments, the Soviet government is the least prone to reason and so much the less open to foreign suggestions. The observation that the Russian thinks only vaguely about tomorrow is valid even under the current regime. Resting itself on an awfully indolent people – amorphous and primeval substance – the Soviet government shall not for a long time face another correction than the fear of being challenged stubbornly, of clashing against some inflexible resistance"²¹.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, vol. 7, f. 177.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 178.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 35, f. f. 266.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 9, f. 465.

²¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 23, f. 194.

Appendices

- 1 -

Registered under no 28664, of 5 May 1939

The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Direction of Cabinet and Cipher

Deciphered telegram

From the Moscow Legation, no. 1210, date: 5 May, hour 2.26, 1939
Foreign Office, Bucharest

Litvinov's unexpected arrival is commented and interpreted differently within the diplomatic corps and among foreign correspondents. Yesterday afternoon he received the English ambassador with whom he continued talks, as usual, and to whom he also provided explanations regarding a certain incident, a question of interpretation of instructions more than anything, that seems to have taken place between Maiski and Lord Halifax on 14 April. Nothing in his attitude indicated any change and it is believed not even he was aware of the decision regarding him.

With Soviet circles we cannot have any contact, as in Potemkin's absence there is nobody else to provide explanations.

As regards the causes for his removal, there is no doubt that they are political in nature. A policy of neutrality is entertained and some go so far as to suspect the Soviets will seek an agreement with Germany in the meantime.

Most believe that the Polish and we have caused this reanimation in Soviet politics through our intransigent attitude.

The French business envoy told me the Soviets felt hurt and added that during Your Excellency's visit to Paris he telegraphed to Quai d'Orsay, showing the need to make concrete proposals to the Soviets. In his previous conversation with Potemkin, he seems to have characterised as paradoxical the fact that they are asked to guarantee and pledge for countries that do not ask for such actions and do not want it.

The English ambassador's phrasing, cited in my telegram no. 1033 of 20 April this year, seems to reproduce Litvinov's words perfectly.

I remind you that when I last saw Litvinov, on 13 April this year, he asked me significantly: "Is that all?"

The English ambassador seems to share the above mentioned point of view held by the French business envoy.

On this occasion we found that during the talks, the Soviets refused to give us a unilateral spontaneous guarantee (the same as England and France).

Instead of this explanation, which lacks a firm basis, I propose another one more verisimilar for those familiar with the situation here: the Bolshevik leaders know that this country does not possess the material training and the moral force to stand against Germany. They have two options to choose from: either to risk the fate of the government and consequently their personal situations, or to take shelter behind the wall of our bodies. In choosing this alternative they were aided by the irresoluteness and delays of the Franco-English politics. Thus, I am told that as far as two week ago the Danish minister to London reported to his government he did not believe there would be a solution in the Anglo-Russian talks, because Chamberlain himself is opposed to reaching this agreement. Until foreign representatives are received by Molotov, we will not be able to have any explanation for the ongoing events, but for the moment Soviet agencies abroad must receive instructions on the basis of which they will disseminate the official version.

In another train of thoughts, the French representative tells me he received news from the Quai d'Orsay that Potemkin was received very cordially in Bulgaria, was welcomed at the border and travelled in a special train carriage. Kiosseivanov, who expressed a desire to see him, did not talk to him about Thrace, but told him that, on account of certain territorial concessions in Dobrudja, Bulgaria would be willing to enter the Balkan Entente.

ss. Dianu

AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 5, ff. 411–414.

- 2 -

Deciphered telegram

From the Moscow Legation, no. 2176, date: 1 September, hour 1.20, 1939
Foreign Office, Bucharest

Tonight, at 9 o'clock, after Molotov's speech in the Supreme Soviet within the joint meeting with the Soviet of Nationalities, a vote of confidence was given for the government's foreign policy and in favour of the treaty with Germany.

A summary of Molotov's speech: "The international situation has worsened in Europe and the Far East, where the Japanese pursue their acts of hostility against the USSR. Starting with April, the Soviet Union conducted negotiations with France and England, followed by military parlays and Poland rejected the USSR's help, playing to the insincere song of England and France, who were afraid the USSR might become too strong. At the negotiations, they sent second hand people, who were not invested with full powers. It is difficult to differentiate between the pact under negotiation and trickery. The USSR only raised the question of securing

peace by eliminating the threat of war with Germany. When we found the German government also wanted to change their attitude towards the USSR, we decided to make the agreement. Stalin was the first to raise the problem of good-neighbourliness when Germany was being pitted against Ukraine. But Germany offered commercial talk that led to a favourable pact, the kind of which we do not have with England and France. Afterwards, when the German government wished to improve political relations as well, the USSR could not reject the proposal. We do not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and do not accept foreign interference in our country. This is the USSR's principle of peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries. The concluded pact, although only a non-aggression one, is nevertheless very important and its conclusion marks a turning point in world history. It reduces the risk of war and even in the event war is unavoidable, its proportions will be greatly limited. The pact does not include a denunciation clause in case one party becomes the aggressor. But neither did the pacts with Poland and England which Germany has recently denounced contain such a clause. We are in favour of the development and the prosperity of our friendship with Germany. The enemies of the pact are also the enemies of the USSR and Germany, and their desire is to compromise the beginning of their good-neighbourliness. The pact proves that important international crises, especially those regarding Eastern Europe, cannot be solved without the USSR, whose influence is growing in international politics. The speaker's cynicism, expressed either on a joking, or a sarcastic tone, produced an uncomfortable impression in these grave current circumstances. It is believed that the ratification planned for tomorrow evening was brought forward at Germany's request.

ss. Dianu

AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 9, ff. 92–94.

- 3 -

Moscow, 25 January 1940

The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
No. 07354

Your Excellency,

The circumstances in which foreign diplomatic mission to Moscow are forced to carry out their activity differs so much from anything that might be imagined from a distance, that various questions that seem to encapsulate justified concerns, can only receive a satisfactory answer after personal practice and prolonged research.

In the following lines I shall try to sketch some of the more characteristic aspects of the situation in which foreign diplomats find themselves here, in the hope that these observations will not remain fruitless.

The constant difficulty faced by foreign missions – with the exception of the German embassy, which enjoys a privileged position – is lack of contact with the people here. For two years, more precisely since Tukhachevsky's trial, the terror instituted by the G.P.U. makes contact with the population completely impossible, and contact with the officials extremely difficult. Even heads of mission can only see the President of the Council, who also holds the Foreign Office portfolio, one of the Deputy People's Commissars who conducts the respective group of countries' business (Potemkin for countries in Western Russia, Dekanozov for the Eastern, and Lozovski for countries on foreign continents), the Political Director of the respective group of countries and also the Director of Protocol. All the other Soviet personalities can only be seen from a distance during various festivities and any further contact is excluded, even the illusory one of an exchange of business cards. There are G.P.U. agents posted in front of all the entrances to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, who are not satisfied that the visitor – whoever they may be – should simply name the person they wish to see, but ask for identity papers. In case the visitor does not present the requested ID, they have to wait until the Soviet guest, who is notified by telephone, confirms the meeting. The visitor is then accompanied to the office of the functionary in question. Caution is paramount, civility being but a bourgeois prejudice. For one should never forget: for the Soviets there are two types of spies: professional spies and foreign diplomats. The latter are the more dangerous.

Consequently, it is accepted that no foreign representative – except the German ambassador – can claim they are familiar with the political views of the Soviet governing body and I am convinced that even Count Schulemburg has his own gnawing doubts.

Of all the Soviet leaders, only two are able to make a decision; one, officially, Mr. Molotov, while the other, Mr Stalin, enjoys all the advantages of his situation from the shadow of his unofficial position.

The other functionaries that we frequent, that is, the respective Deputy Commissar and the Political Director, have no possibility of initiative, do not dare express any definite political views and – if they are ambitious – limit themselves to using a certain ability to swerve conversation towards inoffensive targets. If such behaviour is able to mislead the visitor, that has no importance for the officials in the Commissariat. All functionaries' fear of losing their head – unfortunately for them, literally – is so ingrained, that they prefer to be considered imbeciles than risk censure in a political matter. And we must not forget that in the offices where meetings with Soviet dignitaries are held a door always remains open.

The Soviet officials' most frequent refuge from a meeting with a political side is: "Read *Izvestia*, there you will find the answer you are looking for."

They have other resources as well: unwilling to unmask their helplessness, they prefer to appear ill-disposed.

A recent scene is characteristic: At the beginning of January, Colonel Firebrace, military attaché of Great Britain, wanted to introduce his successor to General Shaposhnikov, the Soviet Chief of Staff. After the two British officers were introduced to the general's office, and the visit ensues in the following way:

Colonel Firebrace: 'Mon General, allow me to introduce my successor, Colonel Greer.'

General Sh.: 'Sit down. Please.'

Silence for a few seconds.

Colonel F.: 'It is cold today.'

Silence.

Colonel F.: 'According to the newspapers, it is cold in France and England as well.'

Silence.

Colonel F.: 'It must be terribly cold in Finland...'

The general rose: 'Au revoir, Messieurs.'

Then, the visitors find themselves forced to leave. The visit lasted but two minutes.

Under such circumstances, believing that an exchange of ideas with the people here may be of any practical use is an overestimation of the value of any effort. Therefore, it would not be in the least surprising if the Italian, the British or the French ambassadors postpone the return to their posts until further notice... This situation can bring joy only to the German representative, whose supremacy can not be contested either by the United States or the Japanese ambassador, the only representatives of Great Powers who persevere in their posts. As for the United States ambassador, the adventure of the American vessel *City of Flint*, brought by the Germans to Murmansk, as well as the Soviet aggression against Finland gave birth to relentless rumours that the American government have examined the usefulness of keeping it here.

We can raise the question of whether the Soviet officials' political views might be usefully influenced in an indirect manner: through conversations with members of the Communist Party and chiefly members of the Political Bureau of the Party.

If, as it was frequently proven, the officials who are willing to discuss political matters risk their heads, the mere contact a local might have with a foreign representative does not expose the former to a smaller peril: at the slightest suspicion, the man is invited at the GPU office and a trip to Siberia is intimated. If the suspicion is based on solid information, the warning is futile...

Therefore it is easy to understand why no local would accept an invitation to a Legation.

Indeed, the Communist Party considers its mission to ensure people's happiness such an exclusive duty, that other parties, such as the social-democrat and the labour parties are labelled as heretic and threatened by Muscovite lightning bolts. Among the foreign personalities whose activity is criticised in the most violent terms are Messrs. Leon Blum, Jouhaux, Mjr. Atlee, etc.

We have to acknowledge one thing: Soviet exclusivism continues to be a primordial, absolute necessity for the preservation of the regime. The removal of any possibility of comparison between the Communist regime's achievements with the standard of living abroad represents one of the Soviets' main rules. They realise perfectly that only an airtight isolation from the world beyond their borders can preserve the merits of 'incommensurable' achievements in the eyes of their people. That explains the trouble taken by the Soviet government to surround the red troops in the Baltic States with countless precautions against any contact with the local population. It also explains the Soviets' unabated destruction of anything that, being too close to their borders, would provide evidence for the monstrous lie in which 180 million people are kept.

While the people here will continue to believe that in the other countries there are no trams, no schools, no hospitals, there isn't enough food or clothing, the internal risks for the Communist regime are almost none.

To explain the Bolshevik expansion pursued by the Soviet government through 'imperialistic tendencies' is to content oneself with merely part of the truth. Of course, in practice for the neighbouring countries, this expansion is equally threatening, regardless its causes.

However, in certain circumstances it would be important to remember that the Soviets' belligerence is equally their method of self-preservation. Paradoxical as it may sound, the Soviet attack against Finland represents first and foremost a defensive action. Except the hitherto result of the hostilities, the Soviets' decision in itself to unleash this wrath proves their substantial internal weakness.

Of course, the Soviet government is quite evil-minded about the situation abroad.

Their policy is not founded on information received from the USSR diplomatic representatives, whose incapacity is notorious. The Soviet government only takes note of reports from communist agents spread far and wide. But these people see only the negative side of things in foreign countries and only report to Moscow what they know will cause delight. Any other report is ill-advised and hazardous.

If negotiations held in Moscow last summer had not been edifying, in only one day the Soviet press would illuminate us completely as regards the expectations of the Soviet government and their propensity to involve themselves in European affairs. Allow me to quote a few random titles in *Izvestia*, the issue of 22 this month: "Swedish workers' demonstrations against warmongers;" "United States movement against helping white Finns;" "Exploitation of the indigenous

population in British colonies;" "Discontent among English conservatives;" "Belgium's military expenditure;" "Unemployment and misery in Italy;" "Canada's unpreparedness for war," etc. In this context, Boris Stefanov's famous article against us seems to correspond entirely to certain internal desires of the party which cannot be altered through argument, but only through experiences similar to those in Finland. Of course, the article was twice disavowed and branded as a mistake. However, I am inclined to think that here it was considered more of a ...tactical mistake.

In conclusion, I would say that of all the world governments, the Soviet government is the least prone to reason and so much the less open to foreign suggestions.

The observation that the Russian thinks only vaguely about tomorrow is valid even under the current regime. Resting itself on an awfully indolent people – amorphous and primeval substance – the Soviet government shall not for a long time face another correction than the fear of being challenged stubbornly, of clashing against some inflexible resistance.

Please, accept, Minister, assurances of my highest consideration.

To His Excellency, Mr Gr. Gafencu, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Ss Davidescu

AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 23, ff. 188–194.

- 4 -

Moscow, 5 April 1940

Royal Legation of Romania, Moscow
The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
No. 890

Your Excellency,

The sixth session of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union opened on 29 March with the usual solemnity. Separate meetings of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities validated the deputies elected in the Western regions of Ukraine and Belarus (the former Polish regions occupied by the Soviet army) and established the order of the day, which included four points:

1. The report on the foreign policy of the government.
2. The transformation of the Autonomous Republic of Karelia in a Federative Karelian-Finnish Republic.
3. The vote for the 1940 Soviet Union budget and the sanctioning of the report on the 1938 budget execution

4. The authentication of the Supreme Soviet Presidium decisions adopted in between sessions, which need the vote of the Supreme Soviet.

Both the matter of the validations and the order of the day were voted without any arguments, following the proposal of a deputy or the president.

Mr Molotov then made an ample exposition of the foreign policy of the USSR in the joint meeting of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities on 29 March, an exposition on which I have the honour to report to Your Excellency in a separate statement.

The vote for the law on the transformation of the Autonomous Republic of Karelia into a Federative Karelian-Finnish Republic (through the incorporation of the territories ceded to the Soviet Union in the Soviet-Finnish Treaty with the following cities: Viipuri, Antrea, Kexholm, Sortavala, Kulojarvi) was also given in a joint meeting – on 31 March.

The proponent of this law, Mr. Jdanov, was received with standing ovation by the deputies.

The Karelian-Finnish Republic shall be the 12th Federative Republic of the Soviet Union. However, part of the territory of the Karelian Isthmus shall be included in the Leningrad region. Newspapers publish reports on popular gatherings in Karelia, where the speakers approved ‘enthusiastically’ this decision by the Soviet government. A telegram to Messrs Stalin and Molotov coming from ‘the Karelian-Finnish people (adopted during a workers’ assembly in Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia) claims again, with the usual perfidy of the Soviets, that the establishment of the Karelian-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic expresses ‘the will, the hopes and the dreams of the Karelian-Finnish people.

The budget report was presented by the Commissar of Finance, Zverev. The 1940 Soviet budget includes 182 billion 585 million 900 thousand roubles in revenue and 179 billion 700 million in expenditure. It surpasses last year’s budget by 26 billion 700 million. Defence expenditure stipulated in this budget rises to 57 million roubles.

At the end of the session, the Supreme Soviet authenticated, in accordance with the day’s agenda, a few decisions by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet through which new administrative divisions are established and new people’s commissars are named: Ghinzburg for Constructions, Miterev for Public Health, L.M. Kaganovici for Oil Industry, Vabrushev for Coal Industry, Sahurin for Aviation Industry (replacing M.M. Kaganovici) etc.

It is typical that M Kaganovici’s replacement comes at the same time as the replacement of Soviet Military Aviation Commander Loktionov with Army Commander second rank Smushkevici.

The session ended its proceedings on 4 April.

During this session what stood out was that the deputies’ enthusiasm was significantly lower, compared to the Supreme Soviets’ past sessions. All meetings occurred in an atmosphere of apathy and boredom; discussions lacked a

contentious nature because the speeches contained only praises for the regime and the leaders. As in past sessions, all the laws introduced now were voted "unanimously" by a show of hands.

I am enclosing with the present report a series of photographs published in Soviet newspapers, illustrating various aspects of the session of the Supreme Soviet. I consider the represented types show eloquently enough the intellectual level of this meeting. I believe it useful to mention that the deputies' gesture of putting their hand to their ear explains the need to use microphones, given the 100-metre length of the conference hall. The voting system is also conclusive.

Please, accept, Minister, assurances of my highest consideration.
ss. Davidescu

AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 7, ff. 177-179.

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Registered under no 27520, of 13 May 1940

The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Direction of Cabinet and Cipher

Deciphered telegram

From the Moscow Legation, no. 1232, date: 13 May, hour 0.23, 1940
Foreign Office, Bucharest

The German ambassador told me yesterday that during the last days there were all sorts of false rumours about the Soviets' intentions. His Excellency shows that even one official within the German Embassy was tempted to jump to conclusions when he was denied a railway ticket for Kiev. However, the refuse is attributable to a simple error.

It is certain that the Soviet government took a series of precautions, but nothing more.

The evacuation of the population in the border area belongs to the series of measures which have been in application for two years and which are currently extended to the new frontiers of the USSR. The evacuations start in Leningrad and end in Vladivostok. The entire population is being removed on a 10-kilometre radius and also all the elements of the same nationality as the population of the neighbouring state, on an additional 40 kilometres radius. In the Vladivostok region 300.000 Koreans suffered as a result of these dispositions.

As regards the Soviet notes concerning the alleged border incidents, it would be wrong to attribute them too great an importance. Numerous such notes are

received by the German embassy. Their role is rather to prevent possible incriminations against Soviet border officers. Indeed, while German border officers receive serious instructions to refrain from using weapons, the ripple of gunshots never stops on the Soviet side.

Von der Schulenburg illustrates the situation on the border through the following example: ten days ago, he communicated to the Soviet authorities that a German plane would fly over the German side of the city of Przemysl, without crossing the border and only to take a few photos for military cartography purposes. He sent the information about this flight so that any incident might be avoided. However, the plane was followed by the Soviets with intense fire, and even anti-aircraft artillery.

Nevertheless, he hopes the Soviets border officers' nervousness will subside.

In relation to the recent changes in high commanding positions of the Red Army, they only possess an internal meaning. Through his appointment as Vice-President of the Council of People's Commissars and his responsibilities within the Superior Council of National Defence, Marshal Voroshilov has virtually lost his sword and replaced it with a pen. The Embassy's military experts were in agreement when they foresaw this removal, since the campaign in Finland uncovered grave incompetence: the intelligence agency of the Defence Commissariat was far from realising the importance of Finnish fortifications and was fostering hopes of a campaign of only a few days; the soldiers' equipment was completely deficient; army supplies suffered delays in the last days of the war.

But the gravest deficiency resulted from the way in which the political commissars in the army fulfilled their obligations, paralysing any combative spirit. The system of political commissars was maintained to absurd lengths by Voroshilov.

Von der Schulenburg told me then that he saw Molotov on 10 May, when he handed in his government's communication regarding actions in Belgium and the Netherlands. Von Ribbentrop had tasked him to hand in this communication at 5.30 in the morning, but the plane which brought the document had a 4-hour delay.

On this occasion, the German ambassador made inquiries about the progress of the negotiations with the Yugoslavian delegation with whom, according to Soviet press, Molotov had talked on Tuesday for three hours.

Molotov confirmed the duration of the conversation, specifying that he "insisted on asking the Yugoslavians what was going on with the white guard men." This specification proves that the conversation was not limited to economic matters. Before we parted, Von der Schulenburg told me he was informed by the *Auswärtiges Amt* about Your Excellency's conversation with Fabricius. The ambassador is contentedly appreciative of the content of this conversation. His

Excellency believes that in the South-East it is only the coming into action of General Weygand's army that may cause complications. However, it is being kept in place by the fear of a local revolt.

As regards the appointment of the USSR's minister to Bucharest, Molotov has communicated to him recently in a completely spontaneous manner that he was looking for a suitable person. The German Ambassador thinks this is a mere pretext and the appointment will not be delayed any longer.

ss. Davidescu

AMAE, 71 URSS Fund, vol. 9, ff. 371–374.

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