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**The Briand Plan of European Union Commented by the Interwar
Romanian Press**

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Abstract: With each passing day, the construction called the European Union presents increasingly clear signs of disease. Something is not working and it is likely not to work anymore. For this reason, more and more resounding voices announce the decline of Europe. The Greek crisis, the Ukrainian crisis, the refugee crisis are just some of the issues that shows that countries that make up the European family (28 countries) find it difficult to act as a whole. After the completion of the Second World War, Romania did not matter in any way in achieving the European family plans, entering in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Things were not always this way. The plans for a federal state comprising the European countries have existed before the interwar period, as we shall see below. The years between the two world wars were marked by political debates on this theme, which have not been seen before.

Keywords: federalization; speech; press; crisis; European Union

1. Introduction

In Romania, the interest for this topic was as high as in any other European country that emerged from war with some territorial gains and unwilling outbreak of a new world cataclysm. It is understood that the Romanian state people have addressed the issue of uniting the European states into speeches both at home and abroad. What interests us, however, is how the theme “federalization of Europe” was analyzed in the interwar media.

European Union as it stands today has as its starting point year 1951, when it was created the European Community of Coal and Steel (ECSC). Until reaching to this point, the European political leaders had to go through a long and arduous path. Among those who supported the idea of a united Europe was the French statesman Aristide Briand. His plan was, however, considered by some authors as being inaccurate. (Judt, 2000, pp. 136-139)

Despite this “defect” of the thought plan of Aristide Briand, the Romanian journalists, more or less skilled in such matters, reacted promptly to the idea of the emergence of a political construction that is able to guarantee peace in Europe. Many claimed the idea of building a European federal state, showing that this is the only way it can be achieved an economic balance between the European countries. There were, of course, and challengers of the idea that, at that time, that the federalization of

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Europe could be achieved. The theme of federalization Europe was not debated only in the Bucharest press. Provincial newspapers, more or less important, reserved generous space for this issue.

2. Economic and Moral “Federalization”

In June 1930 in the pages of the Sibiu publication *Revista economică/The Economic Review* it was published, signed by Dem. I. Georgescu, a consistent article about the need to reorganize Europe. According to the mentioned author in order to achieve a federal state encompassing all European countries it was necessary to act in two directions: one economic and the other moral. Creating the Federal European Union would have solved two major issues: strengthening worldwide the economic position held by Europeans and eliminating the fears regarding the possibility of an outbreak of a new World War:

“The key word in the current political and economic state Europe is Union in order to live and prosper in the common interest. The dictum “unity is strength” has never been more proper than now. The “Federalization of the European States” will bring to the whole Europe the much needed peace and a real improvement in the international economic life.” (Georgescu, 1930, pp. 219-221)

Regarding the *political union*, it *“will be achieved only if needed and only after the people will be convinced of the benefits it will have the economic, moral, social, intellectual, etc. union.”* The outcome of Aristide Briand's action was everything but what the author hoped in the above text. The European states have failed to find the way of fulfillment of the federalization plan of Europe, and the biggest fear of the European political leaders of good faith was the outbreak of a new World War, which later would have become reality.

3. The Need to Achieve an Economic Balance between the European States

In November 1930, the *Revue Economique Internationale/The International Economic Journal* published a study of Mihail Manoilescu, the Minister of Industry and Commerce at the time. The text will be duplicated, a month later, in the newspaper *Adevarul/The Truth*. From the mentioned study, we will highlight only two fragments, the most conclusive ones, in our opinion. In the first passage, Manoilescu talks about the need to achieve economic balance between the European states. Without this economic balance, the same author stated, the European civilization itself was in danger of extinction:

“It was discussed a lot before the war, the European balance, but in a strictly political sense. It was then a continental interior balance between the various political powers of Europe.

Quite to the contrary of what the European balance means today. It is about an economic balance and not an interior balance, but also the equilibrium determining the Europe's position towards other continents and which keep Europe in its current situation.

What is, in truth, the current situation of Europe?

Today, Europe is a high placed and the major problem for it is to keep its position, of not to going down and, if I may use a more serious expression, not to collapse.

Facing this hypothesis, the question arises: is there truly a danger for Europe?

Is Europe threatened? The civilization which we represent is on the verge of a true catastrophe? (as in the day that Europe's economic superiority would not be able to maintain, its political supremacy would be in danger)." (Manoilescu, 1930, p. 3)

In support of his statements, Manoilescu comes with the following arguments:

"In China, for example, the productivity of today is only about 250 Swiss francs per worker, per year.

If so, if it would start today to introduce new industries in China, those industries, even working with the lowest output possible, it would achieve a much higher productivity, therefore the purchasing power of part of the Chinese population would increase.

What force could prevent this irrepressible trend? Even if the coercion could no longer continue its course. And on behalf of what principle could such a development be prevented?

Our conclusion is that the danger which Europe is going through is not transient. Deep causes lead to a sustainable economic development.

A new adaptation will be necessary for Europe to retain still a predominant position in mankind." (Manoilescu, 1930, p. 4)

Details of the difficult situation, in which the strong economies of Europe were in, were presented by Costin Stoicescu at a conference organized on 14 February 1932 by the Romanian Social Institute (ISR). The text of the lecture was then published in the *Arhiva pentru știință și reformă socială/ The Archive for science and social reform*, ISR publication. We will mention only a short excerpt of which it can be detected, despite the optimism displayed by the author, the bleak atmosphere that reigned over Europe:

"The sinister predictions of some philosophers and others who, if they are not philosophers, are bad croakers, predictions that the organization of today's world is about to end, we expect a new state of things, where people will not never want to live better, they will not want to make progress, they will not want to feel the satisfaction of their work, these predictions prove to be unfounded. The mankind's response to these predictions was at a time when the issue was put forward, the answer of the wholesome reason: we continue to work, we continue to produce, we continue to progress." (Stoicescu, 1932, p. 53)

Another very interesting text on the need to complete the Aristide Briand's project can be read in the publication *Chemarea Tinerimii Române/The Call of the Romanian Youth*. In this article, however, the author states that the plan of the French state man has never had a real chance of success:

"There are many arguments advocating for the European Federation. However the project of Mr. Briand - commented live - has little chance to succeed. Predicting results on the matter is risky. However, having a general opinion of the world press, you reach involuntary to pessimistic results." (Vasiu, 1930, p. 3)

A categorical position of the chances of success of the plan for federalization of Europe we find on another interwar journalist.

4. The Federalization of Europe - a Great Deception

Pamfil Șeicaru analyzed in several articles in *Cuvântul/The Word* and *Curentul/The Current* the plan of Europe's federalization launched by Aristide Briand, statesman, that some journalists claimed that

he was the opposite of Benito Mussolini, the one who with his speeches feed the fears of the outbreak of a new World War. The Press influential man did not believe possible the Briand's project. In his opinion, Eastern Europe has always been ignored by the Western Europe, Westerners seeing the Eastern Europeans just good to be "*cannon fodder*". In the article titled "*Patria europeană/European Homeland*", the text of which was published in the period that interests us, Șeicaru argued that the failure of European statesmen to create a genuine relationship of equality between big states and small states make it impossible to achieve a *European federal state*. (Șeicaru 1929, p. 1)

In another article, "*The federalization of Europe?*", in May 1930, Pamfil Șeicaru showed that the project of Aristide Briand, who was only a new *comforting deception*", was intended to replace *the lost illusion of the League of Nations*. Șeicaru believed that the federalization of the old continent was possible only if it was previously achieved a *rationalization of Europe's economy*. This reorganization of Europe's economy implied that the *industrial countries* would fund the *agricultural countries* and would impose high customs duties on agricultural products from the two Americas and Australia.

In December 1930 Șeicaru showed his support for the project by Iuliu Maniu for setting up a Central - European Confederation. The Romanian statesman had made known his project in the newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* from Vienna. Maniu considered at that time, that *the integration process towards a major economic unification* could be achieved only by creating a *Central - European Confederation*. This union of states was to include the following countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.

The idea of this confederation is the source of unfulfilled expectations of Romania to receive attention from France, which was admired and it was considered a friendly country.

The failure of Briand's approach to achieve a state building in which the European countries would stop fighting each other is announced by Șeicaru in the article "*Himera egalității popoarelor/the illusion of equal nations*." The text refers to the failure of the League of Nations and it is interesting to follow as the author brings solid arguments against those who believed that a principle as that of equal peoples could underlie a political, economic or moral construction, involving all European states. (Șeicaru, 1932, p. 1)

5. The Danger of Extinction of the European Culture

On 1st June 1930 in order to mark the end of the cycle of the conference entitled "*The Contemporary social and political experience*", which was organized by the Romanian Social Institute in the period 1929-1930, Dimitrie Gusti had a lecture based on the issue of European states federation. From the text of the lecture, which we will render only a fragment, would appear in the newspaper *Arhiva pentru știință și reformă socială/The archive for social science and reform*. In his lecture, Dimitrie Gusti seeks to answer to some questions that disturbed both ordinary citizens and Romanian statesmen¹:

"Europe is a rational and activist idea, culminating in the scientific creations and technical applications, which dominate and absorb other human cultures.

¹ *Is there a crisis of the European culture? From an economic perspective, can Europe compete with other continents? Is it possible the union of European states? How real is the danger of an outbreak of another world war?*

Some talk persistently about a crisis of the European culture. [...] Let's not exaggerate! When there is a science and a European Technique, which are nor the leaders of all mankind's destiny, one cannot speak of a crisis of the European culture.

But the phenomenon of Europe is interested from another point of view. Europe begins to doubt of itself; its worldwide hegemony is discussed and questioned; for the first time, the other continents are put before it as rivals.

American expansion, the awakening of the yellow race peoples, the evolution of Islamic nations towards a more active conception of the public life are reasons that impose severely in the European conscience. For Europe it is not only in danger of losing its supremacy in the world, but something more precious, its very independence!

[...] Europe is to buy! This is the economic situation.

But to the economic considerations it is added to the political situation, worse yet! Let us not delude ourselves. In Europe, as it is established today, a new war appears as something possible, nay, sometimes even as inevitable.

[...] So here it is the great peril: Europe impoverished, the vassal Europe, the barbaric Europe.

What is to be the salvation from this awkward situation that designs painful perspectives? In order to answer, we should see once again what may be causing this situation?

All European states are ill. The disease consists of their isolation. Saving them would necessarily and logically imply their union.

The union of European states is therefore necessary; but is it really possible?" (Gusti, 1930, pp. 2-7)

6. Conclusion

As soon as the European Union (EU) emerged, many would say that this last question of Gusti has found its answer. Today, however, things do not seem as certain. In the recent years, some states, through their representatives, have spoken increasingly about their intention to leave the *European family*. Also, the pressure waves of refugees from countries in conflict weaken more visibly the already fragile cohesion of the Member States of the European Union.

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