

NICOLAE TITULESCU AND THE BRIAND PROJECT OF EUROPEAN UNION

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The Romanian diplomat Nicolae Titulescu was elected twice consecutively in 1930 and 1931 the president of the General Assembly of the Society of Nations, a unique event in the history of the Geneva institution whose major mission was to preserve world peace.

Nicolae Titulescu's most important initiative in his position as a president of the General Assembly of Society of Nations was the support given to the European Union Project initiated by the French foreign affairs minister Aristide Briand in 1930. The French diplomat considered that 1930 was the right moment for the beginning of the European construction. He said that in Europe the main problems caused by the First World War had been settled by then.

According to him, European Union had to be an organisation for political and economic cooperation among the European states who would preserve their sovereignty¹.

Their ruling organisms would copy the model of the League of Nations. They were the following: the European Conference, the decisional body whose members were the representatives of national governments (its presidency was assigned in turn, every year, by each member); the European Committee, the executive body, was a great power directorate meant to dominate the European Union (the principle of equality between sovereign states was, thus, breached, excluding the small and medium states from taking certain decision). The great powers (France, Germany, Italy, England) were to dominate the European Union. The secretary of this organization had administrative charges: the administrative implementation of the instructions of the president of the European Conference and of the president of the European Committee; the summoning for the European Conference and Committee; the preparation of debates; the record of resolutions; the assurance of communication between the signatory governments of the European Union Pact. As a result, the secretary had no decisional but only technical and administrative assignments².

As it did not include all the member states, the European Committee cannot be compared with any of the present institutions of European Union where all the member states are represented. But the European Committee anticipated for example the Security Council of the United Nations Organization³.

Dimitrie Gusti, expressing his attitude in favour of this idea, made the following statement: "If Europe is not economically made up and organized, it will get poorer and poorer up to the level of a colonized country; if Europe is not politically made up and organized, it will soon become subjugated to one of the three white unified blocks: the American Union, the British Union or the Russian Union; once overruled and subordinated, Europe will surely lose the primacy of civilization"⁴. In his turn, George Sofronie, a professor at the Law Faculty in Oradea, presented his arguments in favour of this proposal: "the stringency of the economic crisis, the internal

¹ Vasile Vese, Adrian Ivan, *The History of European Integration*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Media Printing House, 2001, p. 35.

² Simion Costea, *Romania and Briand Project of European Union*, Târgu Mureș, "Petru Maior" Publishing House, 2004, p. 52-54.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 54-55.

⁴ George Sofronie, *The International Security. From the Pact of the Society of Nations in June 1919 to Briand Memorandum over the organization of a Federal European Union from May 1, 1930*, Bucharest, "Curierul Judiciar ("The Juridical Gazette") Publishing House, 1933, p. 102-103 .

political turmoils, the increasing difficulties in the application of treaties, the disadvantages and threats of the European status”⁵.

On September 7, 1929, on the occasion of the presentation of his project of European Union in front of the General Assembly of the Society of Nations, Briand stated: “I have involved myself in the last few years in an active propaganda in favour of an idea that benevolent people called generous, maybe to avoid calling it reckless. This idea was born a long time ago, stirred the poets’ and philosophers’ fantasy that brought them what is called reputation. This idea made progress in spirit by its own value. The propagandists joined their efforts to spread the idea, to make it part of the national spirit and I confess that I was one of these propagandists. Nevertheless, I became aware of the difficulties of such an attempt and I understood there could be an inconvenient for a statesman to launch himself in what he calls adventure. But I believe that, in all human deeds, the most important and wisest, there is always a bit of madness or boldness. Then I finished and I made a step forward”⁶.

The European Union initiated by the French foreign affairs minister proposed the European cooperation in several domains: in the field of general economy it was followed by the unification of European economic policy (especially the low customs taxes); in finance the credits given to the less economically developed regions; the European market, monetary matters; as regards labour force, the solving of certain work problems was viewed, such as the solving of the social effects of European migration (application of the laws regarding labour injuries from a country to another, social insurances, retirement etc.); in the field of international cooperation, the cooperation between universities and academies was envisaged, literary and artistic relationships, the improvement of media access, interparliamentary cooperation; in the field of administration, the creation of European sections in certain world international offices⁷.

It was also desired that, at any European conference, the states outside Europe would be invited to participate as observers and any agreement that would be established at a conference called at the request of the European states should remain open to the joining of the states outside Europe⁸.

The capital of European Union and of all the institutions was planned for Geneva, as well as the residence of the Society of Nations. Apart from the present European concept, the Briand project did not impose the condition of joining a set of European values, not also a high standard of civilization, did not even determine the limits of meddling into the internal affairs of the states. Briand invited into the European Union developed countries and poor democratic and totalitarian countries, including Central and Eastern Europe⁹.

Briand chose the priority political integration approach followed by the economic integration¹⁰. Briand’s project designed European Union as a confederation of sovereign states following at the beginning the model of Society of Nations, gradually turning into a political and economic union¹¹.

Briand had in mind an intergovernmental European Union, which had to develop inside the Society of Nations. In this respect, on May 17, 1930, the French politician declared: “It is not now about making up a European group outside the Society of Nations; but, on the contrary, to

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 103-104.

⁷ Charles Zorgbibe, *The European Construction. Past, Present, Future*, Bucharest, Three Printing House, 1998, p. 16-17.

⁸ V. I. Feraru, *The Union Project of the European States*, Bucharest, The Institute of Graphical Arts “Olympus”, 1935, p. 34.

⁹ D. V. Barnoschi, *The European Nation, U.S.E. and Mr. Titulescu’s Contribution to Reach this Ideal*, Bucharest, “Adevărul”(“The Truth”) Publishing House S.A., 1935, p. 13-14.

¹⁰ Vasile Vese, Adrian Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹¹ V.I. Feraru, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

harmonize the European interests under the control and spirit of the Society of Nations, completing in its universal system a limited system, the more efficient. Making up a federative organization of Europe will always be reported to the Society of Nations, as an element of progress of which the extra-Europeans themselves will benefit from. Far from creating a new organism for the juridical regulation of conflicts among the European associations, to offer its service only with a purely consultative character, it would not be able to deal seriously with private matters whose solving was entrusted through the Pact or by treaties in a special proceeding of the Society of Nations or any other specially defined proceeding”¹².

Briand used here the phrase „a European federal organisation” incorrectly as the European Union that he proposed was not a federation but a confederation based on an intergovernmental not an overnational structure and the member states kept their national sovereignty.

The European Union proposed was not against any other ethnical and political group¹³.

The General Assembly of the Society of Nations from September 1930 debated Briand’s European Union project. Nicolae Titulescu as its president received and spread the European Conference resolution which he registered on the daily schedule, then he presided the debates of the Genevese organisation regarding European Union project.

One of the reasons for Titulescu’s election as a leader of Society of Nations was exactly the debate of the European Union project as it was shown by the international public opinion of the time. The president of the Society of Nations had to be a strong personality who had to identify and support the ideals actions of the Society of Nations.

As Briand could not candidate due to his “delicate” position as the initiator of the project, the right solution proved to be Nicolae Titulescu. We can say this as Titulescu had the greatest majority of votes ever obtained in the history of the institution in Geneva at the election of the president: 46 votes of 51 voters.

The vicepresidents of the assembly were: Briand (France), Henderson (England), Curtius (Germany), Quinones de Leon (Spain), Matsidura (Japan).

On September 11th 1930, Brian presented in front of the Assembly the resolution of the European Conference and defended his European Union Project. He demonstrated that the concept of European Union was accepted by everybody; that European Union was compatible with the Society of Nations, that the project was not a threat to the other continents.

On September 12th 1930, the British foreign affairs minister Henderson pronounced himself against Briand Project. There followed a dispute between France and England on this matter. The English viewpoint asserted the necessity for Briand Project to be sent to the VIth political commission of the Society of Nations, without founding a special commission for the European Union. The French foreign affairs minister asserted the necessity of creating a special commission of the Society of Nations to discuss the European Union plan¹⁴.

Romania joined the French viewpoint, showing its option for the creation of European Union Study Commission but pleaded for the acceptance of Briand Project as a whole. In this respect, Nicolae Titulescu as a president of the Society of Nations declared: ”Mr.Briand’s ideas were so much distorted, attacked, being either misunderstood or treated with bad intention that a feeling of justice obliges me to set them under their real light, although they are only in the study phase. It was said first that Mr.Briand’s problem involves for certain states by the subordination of the economic to the political aspect, the abandonment of certain rights stipulated by treaties.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Eliza Campus, *The Federal Concept in Europe between the Two World Wars*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Printing House, 1993, p. 71-82.

Mr. Briand's proposal is based on the observation of treaties; how could treaties have been observed for some people and ignored for others?"¹⁵.

Titulescu stated further on: "It was asserted that the new organisation proposed is directed against Great Britain and U.S.A. But Great Britain and U.S.A. are invited to cooperate at work and will have thus the possibility to realize every moment what is being done"¹⁶.

The commission was effectively created in Geneva on September 23rd 1930 where its founding meeting took place, before the close of the General Assembly of the Society of Nations.

The Romanian foreign affairs minister who had been a member of the committee for the European Union Briand Project Study named by the International Diplomatic Academy in Paris in June 1930 declared that this European construction could become a reality on condition of observing the peace treaties that settled the borders in Europe.

Titulescu pointed out an important point of Briand Project that nobody had insisted upon: "European Union had no power of decision on the matters that were linked to the Society of Nations. And wasn't this matter on the competence of the Society of Nations when it had the right to know everything that affects world peace?"¹⁷, the president of the Genevese organisation wondered rhetorically.

The European Union Study Commission decided to found an elaboration committee made up of: Briand (France), Curtius (Germany), Henderson (Great Britain), Grandi (Italy), Hymans (Belgium), Mowinkel (Norway), Bouroff (Bulgaria), Zaleski (Poland) and Titulescu (Romania).

Titulescu as a president of the General Assembly of Society of Nations pleaded for the observation of human rights and more important for the "frontier spiritualisation". The idea of "frontier spiritualisation" meant, according to Nicolae Titulescu, the removal of customs barriers from the free circulation of persons and economic fluxes and the achievement, on this basis, of the European Union initiated by the French foreign affairs minister Aristide Briand. Titulescu expressed the idea of "frontier spiritualisation" in a memorable form: "the borders, as they were settled in the past, are a hard burden, no matter where you might place it, as it separates people. So, not moving the frontier a few kilometres more to the east or west, peace is better served. What had to be done in order to ensure peace is that peoples could work to spiritualise the frontier by all types of agreements, especially by economic agreements for the common interest.

What humanity needs is not the change of treaties but the change of its own judgement. And when international life starts to become what has to be when it assures the humans, no matter where they are, the sacred rights which simply derive from the human being, when new generations who know nothing of our hatred and prejudices take our place, the frontiers will not be so excessively important as they are nowadays. An endeavour full of signification was made in this way by Mr. Briand with his European Union Project"¹⁸.

On September 8th 1931, Nicolae Titulescu was elected president of the General Assembly of Society of Nations for the second time. The idea of Titulescu's reelection had come up since the previous mandate when Henderson, England's foreign affairs minister had pronounced himself in this respect. The British proposal had joined other numerous delegations. His opponent was count Appony, held by the delegations of the revisionist countries who tried to use the misunderstandings created as a result of breaching the principle of the presidential annual election.

Finally Titulescu obtained 25 votes being reflected and count Appony, also a great diplomat between the two world wars, got only twenty-one votes.

¹⁵ Nicolae Titulescu, *Pleas for Peace*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Printing House, 1996, p. 269.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 270 - 271.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 269.

In the opening speech of the 12th General Assembly of the League of Nations, the Romanian diplomat outlined that the debates started “the impression of anxiety, generated by a serious lack of trust that widespread fast from a corner of the world to another, in all the domains of human endeavour and had managed to establish a certain order”¹⁹.

He envisaged the consequences of the economic crisis, the disagreements between the great powers and reserves of the small states towards them, the fascist threat to world peace.

The Romanian diplomat, as a president of the General Assembly of the League of Nations determined taking some specific measures. Thus, the European Union Study Commission decided the creation, at Nicolae Titulescu’s initiative, of the International Society for Agricultural Mortgage Credit. Thus, Titulescu said that agriculture in Central European countries could be supported. The International Society for Agricultural Mortgage Credit was signed by twenty-four member states of the Society of Nations, but it was never applied.

The twenty-four signatory states were: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Holland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The International Society for Agricultural Mortgage Credit was not created because of the lack of will of some signatory countries (especially great powers), who were not ready to invest money in this.

Titulescu enumerated the four requirements that, in his opinion, were of vital importance in 1931: trust, cautiousness, action, spirit of sacrifice. In the period when he was a president of the General Assembly of Society of Nations, Nicolae Titulescu constantly pronounced himself for the consolidation of this organisation, being “the only one that the world imagined to make the voice of canons silent”²⁰. Titulescu showed his trust in the Society of Nations by means of some words that became historical: “The background is dark, I confess. The more you get into details, the darker it appears. Then I ask you: in the darkness in which the world lays submerged, what is the light, no matter how dim, that keeps alive the flame of hope if not the light from Geneva?”²¹.

But the greatest unsuccess of the Society of Nations during Nicolae Titulescu’s presidency remains the fact that the European Union proposed by the French foreign affairs minister Aristide Briand and ardently supported by Titulescu was not founded.

Nicolae Titulescu considered Briand’s European Union Project as an initiative that had the role of getting the European peoples closer to solve their cooperation problems amiably in order to deal later with the fulfilling of their obligations they had as members of the Society of Nations. Titulescu showed that “from the present viewpoint, European Union, thus created, was the only solution to maintain peace among peoples. From the future point of view, it could represent the germ of a new international and so wonderful, that our present mind, a product of fight and suffering, could not comprise yet”²².

In his vision, the world had to be aware that “the truth that despite confrontations, despite misunderstandings, mankind makes up one body and what links man to man is more important than what can separate it on the ground of national interests”²³.

A series of factors led to the failure of creating the European Union initiated by Briand. First of all the great economic crisis between 1929-1933 must be mentioned.

Between October 1929 and the end of 1930, the price of industrial products had decreased with 30% and of raw materials with 50%. The price of wheat had reached at the end of 1930 the lowest level in the last century. Titulescu asserted a French proposal since the spring of 1931 that required, among other things, “the study of the possibility to solve the problem of the

¹⁹ Idem, *Diplomatic Documents*, Bucharest, Political Printing House, 1967, p. 319.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 380-385.

²¹ Idem, *Pleas for Peace...*, p. 253.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 271.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 272.

lack of capital and credit of the Central European countries, the reaching of international industrial and agricultural agreements, the creation of a mutual commercial institution specialized in buying and selling cereals, the instilment of an international financial support and a preferential regime for the agricultural states²⁴.

The requirement that the cereals should benefit from a preferential regime was supported by Germany at the beginning. But the German availability concealed its desire to get back into the economy of the countries that needed this support and implicitly to weaken or disorganize the antirevisionist side²⁵.

This determined the European States to emphasize the protectionist policy and to reject an international economic cooperation. The economic crisis determined serious social problems that favoured the rise of the nationalist-extremist movements.

Unlike that period, nowadays the states are ready to cooperate economically in order to overpass the difficulties generated by the present world economic crisis.

The revisionist policy promoted by Mussolini aggravated the French - Italian conflict. Mussolini rejected the European Union concept. Hungary declared that will not join European Union if it maintains the existing frontiers at that moment. Soviet Union considered Briand Project as a new capitalist – imperialistic conspiracy against the soviet power. Great Britain was more interested by its world colonial empire and relations with USA than by European Union. Moreover, Great Britain continued to join Germany in order to counteract the French policy²⁶.

The concept of European Union, even in its intergovernmental form, not overnational, could not become an institutional reality in the circumstances of the mentality of the epoch, for which the national sovereignty was a fundamental element that could suffer no significant limitation in the name of European Union.

The European Union proposed by Briand was supported by French allies: Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland. But the support of some small countries could not ensure the success of the project that was rejected by the great European powers of the time.

Nicolae Titulescu, the man about whom Savel Rădulescu, a close professional partner, used to say that he had the power “to anticipate future”²⁷, made efforts to turn into account the European Union Project.

The European Union concept in the proposed form of that time proved the lack of cooperation and mutual trust especially in the case of the great powers of that period of time.

Titulescu’s thinking was the result of the combination of two elements: “the instinct-prophet of the future” and “the reason-a guide for present”²⁸.

Thus we can explain the prestige that Nicolae Titulescu enjoyed in the internal and international political life.

²⁴ J. Benditer, I. Ciupercă, Romanian and German Relationships between 1928-1932 in *The Yearly Publication of „A.D.Xenopol” Institute of History and Archaeology*, VIII, Iași, The Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971, p. 326.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

²⁶ Eliza Campus, *Briand European Union Project (1929-1930)*, in “History Review” no. 8, August 1982, p. 944 - 947.

²⁷ Savel Rădulescu, *Nicolae Titulescu*, in *Famous Diplomats*, vol. I, Bucharest, Political Printing House, 1969, p. 385.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 410.

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