

BOOK REVIEW

Aurelian Dănilă (2022). *Retrospectivă diplomatică. Amintiri, interviuri, documente* [Diplomatic Retrospective. Memories, interviews, documents], Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală

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Researchers interested in studying the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova have so far at their disposal various sources: press articles, interviews, books and articles already published in specialized literature or the volumes of interviews and memoirs of some public figures from Chisinau, such as, for instance, Mircea Snegur (*Labirintul destinului. Independența între euforie și zbucium*, vol. II, Chișinău, 2008), Petru Lucinschi (*Moldova și moldovenii*, Chișinău, 2007) or Mircea Druc (Patrichi, Viorel, *Mircea Druc sau lupta cu ultimul imperiu*, București, 1998). However, such literature lacks the perspective of those who worked in the diplomatic missions (namely, of the diplomatic personnel), whose task is to implement the instructions arriving from Chisinau.

Aurelian Dănilă's book, which includes memoirs, interviews and documents, aims at filling this gap. Dănilă had a rich career: former cultural attaché in the Soviet embassy in Bucharest between 1988-1990, consul general in Iași starting from July 1991, first ambassador of the Republic of Moldova in Bucharest (1992-1993), ambassador in Vienna (1994-1995), then first deputy minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1995-1997), ambassador to Germany, as well as to Sweden and Denmark, from July 1997 to 2001. He withdrew from diplomacy after the election of President Voronin as President of the Republic of Moldova and due to the disagreements he had with Foreign Minister Nicolae Cernomaz. After holding several positions, such as Rector of the University of Arts, he returned to diplomacy after almost 15 years, being appointed in August 2015 first secretary at the Kyiv Embassy. After eight months spent in Ukraine, he permanently retired from diplomacy, and in 2022 published this volume.

The volume unpacks some interesting novel facts and images which have not been published so far which capture the activity carried out, at first within the diplomatic service of the USSR, and then in that of the Republic of Moldova. This

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information is important, because Dănilă belongs to the category of those who already had experience in diplomacy, in the Soviet diplomatic service, thus at the time of the proclamation and recognition of the independence of the Republic of Moldova his experience has been useful for developing the external relations of the new state. This has been the case of the most former Soviet Union Republics, which after 1991 form their Foreign Ministries also benefiting from the experience of those who had worked in the Ministry of the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of 1988, Aurelian Dănilă was the first deputy minister of culture of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. After he was in March of the same year in the capital of Romania to discuss the possibility of establishing cultural relations between Bucharest and Chisinau – on which occasion he met and discussed including the Soviet ambassador E. Teajelnikiv – a few months later he was appointed cultural attaché within Embassy of the USSR in Romania. Within the diplomatic mission, he also found many diplomats from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, who facilitated a faster adaptation to the new post-Soviet environment. As he confessed, the activity within the embassy in Bucharest can be divided into two stages: until December 1989 and after this moment. The job routine meant respecting and fulfilling the agreement of collaboration in the field of culture between the Soviet Union and Romania, however, the new cultural attaché also boosted the relationship with Chisinau, many Romanian artists visiting the mentioned city, but also vice versa. Although he witnessed the events that took place in Bucharest in December 1989 that led to the removal of the Ceaușescu regime, Aurelian Dănilă does not go into many details. However, the diplomat has a clear position towards those events. According to him, the rumors about the “special guards formed by foreigners” causing disorder on the streets of Bucharest - an idea that can be found in the specialized literature dedicated to the events in 1989 - are “inventions” (p. 49).

After two and a half years spent in Bucharest, Aurelian Dănilă was appointed consul general of the USSR in Iași, a consulate only opened towards the end of 1990. He arrived at the post in July 1991, mentioning, from the very beginning, the difficulties to find accommodation for the consulate building. He also mentioned that the local community was, at first, not keen on the idea of opening a Soviet consulate. From Iași he enjoyed the moment of the proclamation of the Independence of the Republic of Moldova, on August 27, 1991. A few months later - meanwhile the Soviet Union collapsed – in January 1992 he was appointed ambassador of the Republic of Moldova in Bucharest. At the same time, Ion Bistreanu, a chargé d'affaires, was sent from Bucharest to Chisinau, to open the diplomatic mission of Romania in the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, Dănilă's memories complement very well those left by Ion Bistreanu and published in 2012, capturing various aspects of bilateral relations: the meeting of the two presidents, Mircea Snegur and Ion Iliescu, on January 24, 1992, in Ungheni, the difficulties of opening the first diplomatic mission both in Bucharest and Chisinau, and the outbreak of the war in

Transnistria. The part of the memoirs is combined with that of interviews given more than 30 years ago for various newspapers in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The reason why he included these interviews is given to us by the author himself: “because the answers from that time save me from describing some events or situations, but also from the conclusions I was making at that time, even if today I would intervene with very small details thirty years later” (p. 91). A possible research in archives, in years to come, of the diplomatic reports from Bucharest will give us an even more in-depth perspective of the realities of that period.

The ambassador recalls how he organized the first anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Moldova, which did not take place in the embassy premises, but at the Elisabeta Palace. He had some doubts whether the members of the accredited diplomatic corps would come to Bucharest, given that it was the only embassy of the Republic of Moldova open in another capital. Ultimately, he was glad when many diplomats participated in the event, an opportunity for the members of the embassy of the Republic of Moldova to socialize.

During his mandate in the capital of Romania, Dănăilă had discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania about the intensification of bilateral relations, especially at the economic level, about cooperation in the field of agriculture, but also in other fields, such as: transport and communications, education, health, assistance and social protection.

By the decree of February 8, 1994, he was appointed ambassador to Vienna. It was a new challenge, given that – unlike the mission in Bucharest – he did not know much about the Austrian political and diplomatic establishment. In the Austrian capital it was not an easy mission. The financial problems were pressing: renting apartments for the head of mission and his staff and even delays in the payment of the salaries. The post in Vienna had its importance for the Republic of Moldova, especially due to the relationship with the CSCE, an intense one in 1994, today the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in the context of the Transnistrian problem. According to Aurelian Dănăilă “the organization was the only serious possibility to truthfully inform what is happening here, often denying the false news coming from Moscow” (p. 151). However, he did not stay in the post for too long, because in the spring of 1995 he was recalled to Chisinau and appointed first deputy minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was a new challenge with many responsibilities; but, in particular, he was responsible for the bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania, in a period when, as he mentioned, the relations had known “a period of coldness” (p. 159). According to his notes, the coldness of the authorities in Bucharest was influenced by some decisions taken at Chişinău: joining the economic structures of the Commonwealth of Independent States - an organization created after the disintegration of the Soviet Union - but also the formalization of the “Moldavian language” included in the Constitution.

The main activity was the negotiation for the signing of the bilateral agreement. In this sense, mixed commissions were established that met in Chisinau and Bucharest during 1995 to discuss the Interstate Basic Treaty. The researchers have at hand the memoirs of the Romanian ambassador to the Republic of Moldova from that period, Marian Enache, as well as those published by Marcel Dinu, secretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to observe how the bilateral negotiations proceeded. In addition to those memoirs, Aurelian Dănilă's book provides some fresh insights into those negotiations, which were marked by different points of view. For example, the Romanian side insisted on the special and privileged character of the relations, insisting on the phrase "two Romanian states" while the experts from Chisinau presented a typical version of the treaty, similar to the one concluded with other states, insisting on the consolidation of the integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

During the period in which he was active in Chisinau, Aurelian Dănilă was also appointed president of the Commission for the delimitation and demarcation of the state border between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Those negotiations have also been marked by difficulties. It was necessary to consult the topographical maps that the two commissions had - some from the 1950-1960s, to travel to the territory to determine the southern point of the state border line in the confluence area of the Prut river with the Danube, although there had been changes in the relief of the land and the river beds.

Dănilă was in various delegations and visits, such as Washington in 1996, where he had meetings with Counsellor J. Collins, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security, A. Carter, and Steve Pifer, Director of the White House National Security Council for Newly Independent States Affairs. The sequence of these meetings has its logic. During the meetings, the issue of bilateral relations, the issue of NATO expansion, but also military aspects were addressed. He was assured, among other things, that "the Pentagon pays the most serious attention to the development of relations with the Republic of Moldova and in this context with the Ministry of Defense" (p. 188).

After the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in Bonn in March 1995, the relations with Germany intensified. The visit of President Mircea Snegur in October of the same year, as well as that of other parliamentary delegations and officials also contributed to this. In this context, in August 1997 Dănilă was appointed ambassador to Bonn, presenting his credentials a month later. The main mission was the start of negotiations on the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. The answer, quite delicate, he would receive in January 1998 from the State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FRG Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz, who would tell him that "we will have to work quite seriously to fulfil the accession conditions and that we must arm ourselves with a lot of patience, because there are other countries, more advanced like us, which will still have to wait" (p. 202).

The mission in Germany marked the end of the first stage of his diplomatic career, which ended rather suddenly in 2001. Although at one point there was talk of sending him as ambassador to Athens, he had to leave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The disagreements with Foreign Minister Cernomaz contributed greatly to his withdrawal from diplomacy. Dănilă would return in about 15 years, in a different context, and appointed first secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in Kyiv, being responsible, at the beginning of his diplomatic activity, for cultural activities. The diplomatic memoirs written by Aurel Dănilă are worth reading, being among the few left by former ambassadors of the Republic of Moldova.