

Aspects of the Romanian-Spanish relations between 1881-1885

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Abstract

The main events that marked the Romanian-Spanish relations between 1881 and 1885 were: the sending of a Spanish extraordinary mission at Bucharest for the proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania; the opening of a Spanish Legation in Bucharest, and vice versa and the Romanian participation at King Alfonso XII funeral. For financial reasons, Madrid opted to send at Bucharest a minor diplomat, Juan Pedro de Aladro, in 1881 as a Chargé d'Affaires. He was elevated to the rank of Resident Minister in March 1883. A subsidiary problem was the controversy of accrediting the Spanish diplomat both in Bucharest and in Belgrade (1882). The Spanish Foreign Minister discouraged such attempts due to the animosity of the two neighboring countries. At the King's funeral the Romanian representatives met with the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Queen Regent, foreign diplomats from Madrid, and politicians.

Keywords: *diplomacy; King of Romania; Spanish Legation; Juan Pedro Aladro; Chargé d'Affaires Count Benomar.*

The proclamation of Carol Hohenzollern Sigmaringen as King of Romania, a great event for modern Romania and Europe also, couldn't be ignored by the poverty-stricken Madrid diplomacy. Sending an extraordinary mission at Bucharest was needed. Juan Pedro Aladro was appointed to hand a letter from King Alfonso XII to the first King of Romania. From Paris Emil Ghica delivered the news to Prime minister and Foreign Affairs interim, Dimitrie Brătianu, that J.P. Aladro would probably be accredited definitively as Minister Plenipotentiary at Bucharest after an agreement with the Romanian Government, thus solving the issue of establishing a Spanish Legation (Arhivele Diplomatice ale Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, vol. 93, hereinafter A.M.A.E 93 1881: p. 311).

In anticipation of this event, the Spanish legation in Vienna expressed his Government's gratitude to Iancu Bălăceanu for the subscriptions opened in Romania for flood victims in Murcia and Cartagena (A.M.A.E. Arhiva Istorică, hereinafter A.M.A.E A.I. 1881: C 4). Thus, Romania didn't forget its common origins with Spain and knew how to show its solidarity with these exceptional circumstances.

Regarding J.P. Aladro there was a lack of information. Announcing to Brătianu that on the 5th of May, Aladro began his journey to Romania, where he intended to attend the coronation ceremony, Emil Ghica outlined a professional portrait of the Envoy Extraordinary, which showed he wasn't such a notorious diplomat. Aladro had been Chamberlain of Her Catholic Majesty, occupied various diplomatic posts and for

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several times he held the position of deputy in Spain Cortes. Ghica reiterated the assumption he would be the future Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, adding this time the condition of reciprocity (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 312).

The Spanish diplomat served as messenger of Isabel II, the Queen Mother exiled in Paris, when he informed Ghica that Her Majesty wanted to know the staff of the Romanian Legation in Paris, for which an audience was scheduled at her residence, Palais de Castille (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 312).

In the presence of Aladro, the former Queen of Spain met the Secretary Alexander Lahovary and the diplomatic attachés Alexandru, Filipescu and Edgar Mavrocordat. Ghica appreciated Isabella's qualities as a host. She treated her guests with courtesy and addressed in glowing terms to the Romanian royal couple.

Strangely, she stated her regrets of not knowing personally the two of them (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 313), although in 1862 (Andronache 2012: pp. 208-209), in his youth, with no idea he will rule Romania in the future, Carol visited Spain and the Court of Madrid. Perhaps this omission was explained by the almost twenty years passed since the visit and Carol's change of status from Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen to King of Romania.

Isabela wasn't only pleased with sending verbal wishes to Carol and his wife Elisabeta, but wanted to address a letter to the King of Romania and entrusted Aladro with the document. The Spanish diplomat had the support of the exiled Queen, who wanted to recommend him "very specially" to the Romanian Sovereign and to the Foreign Minister, as he was a "faithful and active supporter of the dynasty" (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 313).

During the audience, Ghica was asked by Isabella to transmit to Carol another of her requests: granting the Grand Cross of "The Order of the Star of Romania" to the Marquis de Alta-Villa, Grand Master of Ceremonies of her Court. Not knowing what to answer, the Romanian diplomat assured her he would forward the request to his superior. He emphasized to Brăianu that Isabela insisted, arguing that the Marquis was already the holder of such distinctions of several orders. She added she will be "particularly pleased to see the highest official of Her Royal House receiving a distinction so valued" (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 313).

Aladro's lack of experience in handling high-level diplomatic missions have revealed even in this audience, when he asked Ghica whether he should give a speech when presenting Alfonso XII's letter to Carol I. The Romanian diplomat advised him to discuss the matter with Dimitrie Brătianu and first submit the text to the Prime minister, in case a speech was needed (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 313).

The Spanish Envoy insisted to stop in Vienna on his way to Romania as he wanted to meet the Romanian representative in this capital. In Vienna, Bălăceanu expressed his concerns regarding Aladro's behavior who had arrived for a few days, but didn't yet settled the time of his departure for Bucharest. The explanation given, a hilarious one, was he forgot to pack his uniform. Bălăceanu also informed the Foreign Minister that the Envoy Extraordinary was only a second secretary of Legation and the diplomatic circles were surprised by King Alfonso XII odd choice, given the fact he could have sent Conte instead, the Spanish Minister of Vienna. For reasons that eluded Bălăceanu's comprehension, the idea of sending Conte to Bucharest was unsuccessful (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 315).

The circumstances which made possible this option to Madrid were best summarized by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vega de Armijo, in a letter dated June

27, 1881, addressed to Count of Benomar, the Spanish Minister in Berlin. The document stated that after Alfonso was notified about the Proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania, the Spanish Government had to seek a person not that well known but with ties to King Carol I. Also that person had to support the mission expenses. Apart from this strong argument of the Spanish Government, who was trying to reduce spendings, Vega de Armijo considered a former Member of the Cortes couldn't remain in a lower rank and was given the chance to a diplomatic ascension. Furthermore, he added Aladro was chosen because their king didn't want to give such a great importance to this mission (Real Academia de la Historia, Legajos, hereinafter R.A.H. L 27.06.1881).

On May 13th, 1881 the Spanish diplomat asked Brătianu to arrange an audience with Carol I in order to hand him the letter from Alfonso XII (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 316). He also added a copy of the letter and a transcript of his presumed speech. Alfonso XII's letter dated in April 28th, expressed, in the usual tone of diplomatic courtesy, good wishes, congratulations for the important event in Romania's process of modernization and the desire to establish even closer ties between the two nations. "Without being given to me a better opportunity, Alfonso XIII wrote, to demonstrate Him the interest I have in His Person (Carol I), I instructed Don Juan Pedro Aladro, former deputy of the Cortes, to submit this letter to HM and to express my sincere congratulations and at the same time the warmest wishes for the glory of His kingdom and the prosperity of the Nation whose destinies were entrusted by Providence to HM. I believe this memorable event will forge even closer the ties of sympathy that so happily exist between Spain and Romania" (A.M.A.E. 93 1881: p. 317).

In another letter, Aladro used flattering words towards Romania and its Sovereign, preparing a way into the diplomacy of Bucharest. Soon, Dimitrie Brătianu thanked him for his statements and assured him his Government wanted to tighten the blood ties and friendship between Romania and Spain. He also insisted it was necessary for Spain to be represented in Bucharest and also Romania in Madrid (A.M.A.E. 10/A 1, 1881: doc. 2).

In early June 1881, the Government took actions in this regard, as it intended to ask the Romanian Parliament for funds to create a Legation in Madrid. Vârnăv-Liteanu, the Romanian Minister in Berlin, notified his intention to Count of Benomar, a *connoisseur* of the Orient situation, and asked him to support the dialogue between Madrid and Bucharest (R.A.H. Corespondecia..., 1881: p. 137).

The Spanish representative in Berlin took his role seriously, given the fact he gathered information about Romania from his mission in the previous year. He contacted his Foreign Minister, Vega de Armijo, and exposed his arguments for the appointment of a reputed diplomat in Bucharest. From the beginning he stated that in the absence of instructions given from his superior, during the conversation with Liteanu he did not approach the matter of the rank for a possible Romanian representative in Madrid. Moreover, he revealed Romania had Envoys Extraordinary or Ministers Plenipotentiary in the main European capitals, but in Brussels and Athens there were just Resident Ministers. He, therefore, warned Spain couldn't accept a lower rank to the ones from Belgium and Greece. He added that in reality, the most appropriate would have been an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, a rank more suitable with the international status which the Count gave to his country.

His opinion was based on the belief that the presence of a such representative would also be an advantage for Spanish interests. "Nowadays, Benomar wrote in a letter to Vega de Armijo, June 13, 1881, Bucharest is a very important diplomatic capital and

an observation center of the Eastern Question, better and more interesting than Constantinople. A diplomat with experience in the Romanian capital could give to H.M. Government very useful reports" (R.A.H. C. 1881: p. 138).

To support his statement he gave the example of the Great Powers who were represented by diplomats with a vast career and whose intelligence was widely recognized. He listed the most important foreign diplomats in Bucharest, specifying for each the positions previously held. In accordance, sending a Spanish diplomat was not a simple act of courtesy, but one that had a huge significance in Europe's eyes, and at the same time, bringing benefits to Alfonso XII foreign policy. The infiltration of Madrid's diplomacy in the Balkans was for him the equivalent of leaving "the absolute withdrawal in which we find ourselves concerning the Eastern Question, and it is possible that more than once, our opinion to be consulted in Bucharest, where it will be decided whether the Balkan Peninsula will be slavish or not in the future" (R.A.H. C. 1881: pp. 139-140).

Therefore, he appreciated that the first Spanish representative in Romania had to have an equal rank with the representatives of the Great Powers and, through his experience and magnitude, to have the appropriate status of an Envoy of Spain. He reached this conclusion by analyzing the example of Belgium who accredited in the Romanian capital an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, without enjoying reciprocity. Finally, he warned that Bucharest was a very expensive city and thus the Legation should be well equipped, (R.A.H. C. 1881: p. 140) which meant an exhausting effort for the Spanish budget.

Unfortunately, the Foreign Minister not only didn't take into account the recommendations of Benomar, but also didn't even announce him the decisions concerning the opening of the Legation in Bucharest, although theoretically he had intermediated its foundation. On June 23, 1881, due to the desire of Alfonso XII to regulate from his part the diplomatic relations between Spain and Romania, Vega de Armijo requested Eugene Stătescu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, the approval for Juan Pedro de Aladro's accreditation as Chargé d'Affaires. It was noted that the zeal and distinguished personal qualities of the diplomat outlined the perspective of a benevolent reception from the Romanian authorities, while providing credibility in accordance with the instructions sent from Madrid. The Foreign Minister said that the main purpose of these instructions was to identify the best ways of strengthening and development of mutual relations (A.M.A.E. 10/A1 1881: doc. 3).

In his reply from July 7, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told to Vega de Armijo the Romanian Government was happy with opening a Spanish Legation in Bucharest, a premise for a closer friendship between Romania and Spain. As it was customary, the Romanian Government declared its willingness to facilitate the mission of Juan Pedro de Aladro (A.M.A.E. 10/A1 1881: doc. 4).

Although there were rumors in the Romanian diplomatic circles that Aladro would be appointed as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, due to financial reasons, Madrid opted for the rank of Chargé d'Affaires, which meant less spending. It is surprising the lack of communication between the Foreign Ministry and Benomar regarding the procedure of electing the candidate for this office. Benomar was the most well-informed Spanish diplomat from this part of Europe. The Romanian Ministers in Paris and Vienna were aware of the possibility of Aladro's appointment a few months before it happened. Instead, the Spanish minister in Berlin was later

informed by a letter of Vega de Armijo that the establishment of the legation was a "fait accompli".

The Foreign Minister initially described the reasons, primarily financial ones, which have qualified Aladro for the extraordinary mission occasioned by the proclamation of the Kingdom. Then stated the Romanian Government agreed with the establishment of a Legation in Madrid, where a Minister Plenipotentiary would be named. But his ministry had no funds to ensure the reciprocity of such a gesture, being very difficult to increase costs and Aladro had to be somehow rewarded for his generosity. The Minister clearly stated until the Cortes voted a fund increase to extend the representation in Bucharest, Spain had to be satisfied only with a Chargé d'Affaires. Anticipating Benomar's distress that Spain had an inferior representation compared to other small Powers, Vega de Armijo suggested some viable solutions in the future: either Aladro came before the Cortes and plead his cause, getting promoted to a higher rank, or in case of establishing a plenipotentiary office another person should take the post (R.A.H. L 27.06.1881).

Benomar's disappointment caused by the fact he wasn't informed and his advices weren't take into account is observed from the answer to his superior, where the topic of the opening of the Legation was minimal treated, unlike the letters where he exhaustively approached the issues related to Romania. Although Madrid didn't ask for his opinion, he tried to justify his involvement in the appointment of the Spanish representative by saying he believed his duty was to supply to Armijo all the data he personally gathered about Romania during his stay in Bucharest. The Count showed some confidence in Aladro's diplomatic capabilities, stating "if he works hard, he can make a beautiful campaign in Romania, because there, as you know some aspects of the Eastern Question are better revealed, aspects which are unknown even in Constantinople". In the same letter, the Spanish Minister in Berlin declared that King Carol I had intended to appoint a Plenipotentiary in Madrid, but he reconsidered after an agreement with the Spanish Government (R.A.H. C. 1881: p. 157).

The economic difficulties had further negative effects on the actions of the Spanish diplomacy. A year later it was seen facing a dilemma regarding the opening of a Legation in Serbia, proclaimed also Kingdom. The Foreign Minister deplored the limited resources that had led to an inadequate endowment of the Spanish Legations (R.A.H. L 03.03.1882).

The lack of funds made it difficult to send a representative of Alfonso XII in this state, also considered a good point of observation regarding the Eastern Question. The Serbian Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Berlin, Milan A. Petronievici, during a visit in Bucharest in early 1882, talked to Aladro about the possibility of accrediting the Spanish diplomat both in Bucharest and in Belgrade. Finding out about this projects from Petronievici, Benomar wrote to Vega de Armijo trying to discourage such attempts, considered harmful to Spain's image. Among the reasons that explained his attitude, was the tension between the two neighboring countries. "(...) Bucharest and Belgrade are the centers of two tendencies eagerly opposed, who fight in the Balkan Peninsula and certainly one of our Ministers that would be well seen in Bucharest for that very reason it would not be in Belgrade" (R.A.H. C. 1882: p. 77).

Benomar's opinion was shared by Vega de Armijo, who informed him until then Spain had not been formally notified of the creation of the Kingdom of Serbia. He was aware of the animosity of the two neighboring countries, saying he never took into

account the appointment in Serbia of the Spanish representative from Romania. Instead, he proposed considering the low budget and the geographical proximity of Romania to send Aladro on a mission in Belgrade after the notification of proclamation of the Serbian Kingdom, while making a substantial saving for the Spanish budget (R.A.H. L. 27.03.1882).

Six months after the Spanish Legation was established, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs submitted to the Council of Ministers a report outlining the Romanian options had to meet this "act of courtesy and to contribute from our part to maintain the most cordial relations with a blood-related nation". The first option was to accredit the Plenipotentiary Minister from Paris in Madrid, and the second, the best in terms of diplomatic etiquette, was to appoint a Chargé d'Affaires in Spain. Unfortunately, the whole matter was conditioned by the financial resources of the Romanian authorities. However, Eugene Stătescu observed the first option required also a considerable monetary effort: the travel and cost of living expenses in the Spanish capital, the chancellery's rent, the salary of a secretary, at least Class II. According to these arguments he suggested creating a post of Chargé d'Affaires in Madrid. The Council of Ministers approved Stătescu's report in March 1882 (A.M.A.E. 82 1882: pp. 10-17). However, neither this time a Romanian Legation was established in Spain.

Instead, Madrid continued to show its good intentions and increased the representation in Bucharest, Aladro being elevated to the rank of Resident Minister in March 1883 (A.M.A.E. 10/A2 1883).

After Cánovas' short stay in power between 1884-1885, Sagasta and his Liberals returned for another term during 1885-1890. Alfonso XII died on the 25th of November 1885 from tuberculosis leaving behind a pregnant wife, Maria Cristina, who had to assume the role of Regent until her son reached adulthood. To strengthen her position, the chiefs of the two more important parties, Liberal and Conservative, accepting the alternation in power, signed the Pact of Pardo in the eve of the King's death.

The Royal Court of Romania, according to the etiquette, had mourned for three weeks (A.M.A.E. A.I 1885: p. 83). Because V. Alecsandri, the Romanian Minister in Paris, couldn't represent the Romanian Royal Couple at the funeral in November 1885, the diplomat Alexander Plagino and C.N. Nanu, the Secretary of the Romanian Legation in Paris, were delegated. Plagino met with Segismundo Moret, the Spanish Foreign Minister, with the Queen Regent, foreign diplomats accredited in Madrid, and with politicians. In the report of the mission were recorded his impressions about Moret and the Queen. The Foreign Minister was described as a punctual person, "nice, warm, brilliant in appearance, and in conversation".

He received Plagino kindly, speaking nicely of our country. The Romanian diplomat stated an unique fact. Moret showed him Romanian newspapers, which he claimed he can read and understand. Possibly they were provided by the Spanish Legation in Bucharest, revealing the interest of the State Minister for Romania. He was struck by Maria Cristina's appearance that of "a great and rare serenity, totally confident" and having "a freedom of spirit that surprises". Coincidentally, the audience took place in the same room where he was received before during his mission of notifying the Romanian Independence. The Queen recalled that very moment. She expressed her admiration for Elisabeta, whose evolution she watched carefully. Plagino confessed his surprise felt at hearing her speak about the Queen: "(...) She even described H.M. Elisabeta's daily life, Sinaia, Peleş, the wanderings in our Forests" as if "those things were made yesterday: and yet she repeated that only once she had the

satisfaction of a meeting; I spoke to H.M. of the fact that our Queen identified herself with our genius, was inspired by our country's traditions and legends. H.M. Cristina, who had spoken with my German and Italian predecessors in their language, expressed the regret of not knowing our language" (A.M.A.E. A.I. 1885: pp. 89-90).

Plagino detailed the main moments of the funeral Mass, commemorated in the biggest church of Madrid and attended by 30 bishops and archbishops. In the first rows there were four princes. Then followed the Extraordinary Ambassadors and in the third row the Envoys Extraordinary. As a sign of Spain's consideration for Romania, Plagino was seated "before the Turkish Envoy". Regarding the political atmosphere, Plagino considered that, currently, the Government was "able to counter any eventuality". He discussed, it seems, with E. Castelar, former President of the First Spanish Republic, about his republican ideas and the possibility of overthrowing Maria Cristina. He declared that after the wave of sympathy for the woman who lost her husband passed away, "the stranger would leave his country on the same path indicated by Amadeo" (A.M.A.E. A.I. 1885: 90-91), words that didn't come true.

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