

From university professorship to diplomacy. Gheorghe Tașcă – Plenipotentiary Minister of Romania in Germany (1930-1932)*

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Article history: Received 11.11.2021; Revised 3.12.2021;

Accepted 18.12.2021; Available online 13.04.2022.

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Abstract: In this study we analyse some aspects of Gheorghe Tașcă's activity as Extraordinary Envoy and Plenipotentiary Minister of Romania to Germany. The focus is on Tașcă's analysis of the economic and political situation in the Weimar Republic, as well as on his contribution to Romanian-German economic relations. We also want to observe how a head of legation from outside the diplomatic corps, as was Tașcă, but with expertise in the economic field, managed to face the challenges of a diplomatic mission that was difficult to manage.

Keywords: diplomacy, Gheorghe Tașcă, Romania, Weimar Republic, legation

Rezumat: De la catedra universitară la diplomație. Gheorghe Tașcă - ministru plenipotențiar al României în Germania (1930-1932). În studiul de față analizăm câteva aspecte ale activității lui Gheorghe Tașcă în postul de trimis extraordinar și ministru plenipotențiar al României în Germania. Accentele cad asupra modului în care Tașcă a analizat situația economică și politică din Republica de la Weimar, precum și asupra contribuției sale în planul relațiilor economice româno-germane. De asemenea, dorim să observăm modul în care un șef de legație provenit din afara corpului diplomatic, așa cum era Tașcă, dar cu expertiză în domeniul economic, a reușit să facă față provocărilor unei misiuni diplomatice dificil de manageriat.

Cuvinte cheie: diplomație, Gheorghe Tașcă, România, Republica de la Weimar, legație

* This work was supported by a Grant from the Ministry of Research and Innovation CNCS-UEFISCDI, Project Number PN-III-P4-ID-PCCF-2016-0131, within PNCDI III.

Introduction

Relations between Romania and Germany in the interwar period have been analysed over the years by several Romanian and foreign historians. These preoccupations have resulted in the publication of monographs and studies focusing on various aspects of relations between the two countries (political, economic, cultural, etc.). However, we still know quite few aspects of the activity of some of Romania's extraordinary envoys and plenipotentiary ministers in Germany. One of them was Gheorghe Tașcă - the only head of the legation in Berlin during the interwar period who came from outside the diplomatic corps.

Tașcă's mission to Berlin was "regarded" ambivalently in Romanian historiography. Some historians insisted on his expertise in economics, which explained his appointment at the head of the legation in the German capital¹ but presented his actions disparately,² while others argued that Tașcă had visible limits in the analysis of political life in the Weimar Republic and in "deciphering" the objectives of German foreign policy.³ In contrast, other contributions call for a reassessment of his diplomatic work, which is placed on the same level of excellence as his teaching and scholarly work,⁴ judging that it was Tașcă who concluded "an important preferential customs agreement" with Germany.⁵ In a completely different tone are the observations of some contemporaries about Tașcă's presence in Romanian diplomacy. For example, Constantin Argetoianu, known for his "edgy" statements, which sometimes contain a certain dose of exaggeration, notes: "In Comnen's place I found at our legation Gh. Tașcă, who had been appointed there for no reason and who had penetrated the diplomatic world and Berlin circles like a nail in a stone."⁶

¹ Dorin-Demostene Iancu, *Relații culturale româno-germane în perioada interbelică* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2015), 66.

² Constantin Buchet, *România și Republica de la Weimar 1919-1933. Economie, diplomație și geopolitică* (Bucharest: Editura ALL Educațional, 2001), 81-94.

³ Ioan Chiper, *România și Germania nazistă. Relațiile româno-germane între comandamente politice și interese economice (ianuarie 1933 - martie 1938)* (Bucharest: Editura Elion, 2000), 37-45.

⁴ Sorin Popescu, Tudor Prelipceanu, "Gheorghe Tașcă - economist și jurist de seamă, victimă a represiunii comuniste," *Memoria. Revista gândirii arestate*, nr. 94/1 (2016): 78-86; Robert Păușan, "Gheorghe Tașcă - om politic și diplomat," in N. N. Constantinescu (coord.) *Studii de istorie economică și istoria gândirii economice*, vol. 1, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1996), 51-54.

⁵ George-Felix Tașcă, "Un fiu uitat al Bârladului, prof. Dr. G.G. Tașcă (1875-1951) - membru corespondent al Academiei Române", *Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis*, XV-XX/II, (1993-1998): 241.

⁶ Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, vol. IX, partea a VIII-a (1930-1931), ed. Stelian Neagoe, (Bucharest: Editura Machiavelli, 1997), 100.

Based on these points of view, we propose to analyze Tașcă's activity as head of the Romanian legation in Berlin, focusing on two aspects: his role in the Romanian-German economic negotiations and the way he analyzed political life in Germany, in a context marked by the impact of the economic crisis and the rise of Nazism. We will also seek to explain the factors behind his appointment in Berlin and the elements that led to the end of his mission in Germany.

Biographical sketches

Gheorghe Tașcă was born on 30 January 1875 in Bălăbănești, Tutova county (today Galați county),⁷ the son of the tax collector Gheorghe I. Tașcă (1847-1935) and Maria (Marghiolița) Dabija (1849-1945).⁸ Tașcă attended primary school in his native village and then the "Gheorghe Roșca Codreanu" high school in Bârlad. In 1896 he became a student at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest, which he graduated in 1898.⁹ After graduating he practiced law, collaborating for a time with Nicolae Basilescu (1860-1938), a professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest, politician and businessman.¹⁰ His wife Cordelia (née Demetriescu),¹¹ who was in the entourage of Queen Elizabeth of Romania,¹² also played a role in his bookish ambitions. This is why Gheorghe Tașcă, like some of his peers, headed for Paris, a university centre that attracted Romanians aspiring to a doctorate in law. On 28 May 1907, Gheorghe Tașcă defended, under the supervision of Professor André Weiss (1858-1928), his doctoral thesis *Considérations sur les lois relatives à la propriété rurale en Roumanie, Angleterre et Irlande (étude de droit comparé)*.¹³ Back in Romania, Tașcă had an attempt to be co-opted as associate professor at the Department of Political Economy of the Faculty of Law at the University of Bucharest.¹⁴ However, he was accused of not being able to teach political economy because he had a PhD in law and not in

⁷ In his birth certificate his name was Iorgu Tașcă, but during his high school years he changed his first name to Gheorghe (Tașcă, "Un fiu uitat," 234; Andrei Filotti, *De peste mări și țări. Amintiri din viața diplomatică de odinioară*, (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2020), 73).

⁸ Tașcă, "Un fiu uitat," 234.

⁹ Tașcă took the bachelor's exam in October 1898 (*Anuarul Universității din București pe anul școlar 1898-1899*, (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice "Carol Göbl", 1899), 52.

¹⁰ Dan Falcan, "Ctitori de București. Familia Basilescu", *București – Materiale de istorie și Muzeografie*, XVI, (2002): 316-322.

¹¹ Tașcă married in 1905 (Tașcă, "Un fiu uitat," 237).

¹² *Ibid.*, 237.

¹³ The thesis was published by V. Giard et E. Brière and was 352 pages long.

¹⁴ Tașcă gave "free lectures" at the University of Bucharest and published his lectures in a volume (*Lecțiuni de introducere la Economia politică predate la Facultatea de Drept a Universității din București*, (Bucharest: Tipografia Profesională Dimitrie C. Ionescu, 1908), 110 p.

economics.¹⁵ Therefore, the following year he enrolled in Paris to obtain a PhD in economics. The result of this was his doctoral thesis *Les nouvelles réformes agraires en Roumanie*¹⁶ on 26 May 1910. With two doctorates in law and economics in his scientific portfolio, plus several other published works, Gheorghe Tașcă was appointed associate professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest in 1911. Almost a decade later, in 1921, he was promoted to university professor and chair of political economy with special reference to agrarian, industrial and mining legislation.¹⁷

In 1913, Gheorghe Tașcă was involved in another important academic project, namely the creation of the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies, where he was appointed professor of political economy and history of economic doctrines.¹⁸ One of his future colleagues, a well-known economist and politician, Ion Răducanu, noted in his memoirs: "The chairs, in the first year of operation, were distributed to political friends. Thus, among those appointed because they were members of the Conservative-Democratic Party were: Gheorghe Tașcă, Benone Marinescu, Stanislas Cihoski and D.R. Ioanișescu, the latter a associate professor. Of all of them, only Tașcă deserved to occupy a seat."¹⁹

Gradually, through his publications and the prestige he gained as a professor, but also through his involvement in politics, Gheorghe Tașcă became one of the nationally recognized specialists in economics. His scientific prestige, coupled with the support of personalities such as Nicolae Iorga, led Gheorghe Tașcă to be elected, on 4 June 1926, a correspondent member of the Romanian Academy.²⁰

Gheorghe Tașcă combined his activity as a university professor with that of lawyer and politician. He entered political life at the beginning of the 20th century, being elected in 1905 as a deputy on the Conservative Party lists. He then migrated to the Conservative-Democratic Party, led by Take Ionescu, and after the death of the leader of the party, Tașcă became a member of the Nationalist-Democratic Party, led by Nicolae Iorga.²¹ Moreover, between 1927 and 1930, Tașcă was director of the newspaper "Neamul Românesc", the mouthpiece of the party led by Nicolae Iorga.²²

¹⁵ Filotti, *De peste mări și țări*, 76.

¹⁶ The thesis was also published by V. Giard et E. Brière and was 212 pages long.

¹⁷ *Universitatea din București 1915/1916 - 1923/1924* (Bucharest: Tipografiile Române Unite, 1924), 63.

¹⁸ Ion Vorovenci, *Istoria Academiei de Înalte Studii Comerciale și Industriale (1913-1947)* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei de Studii Economice, 2010), 146.

¹⁹ Ion Răducanu, *Din amintirile unui septuagenar* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001), 113.

²⁰ Dorina N. Rusu, *Membrii Academiei Române (1866-2016). Dicționar, II (M-Z)*, ediția a 5-a, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2016), 698-699.

²¹ Tașcă, "Un fiu uitat," 237.

²² He was director alongside N. Georgescu, while N. Iorga was "political director".

Gheorghe Tașcă was elected rector of the Academy of High Commercial and Industrial Studies in 1929,²³ with political support. However, his economic thinking was closer to liberalism than to the views of the conservatives, of Iorga's followers or the nationalists.²⁴

So, in 1930, Gheorghe Tașcă was on the heights of professional affirmation: he was a university professor, rector of the Academy of High Commercial and Industrial Studies, correspondent member of the Romanian Academy. He had been a member of the Romanian Parliament on several occasions, but had not yet occupied a ministerial post.

Appointment at the head of the Romanian Legation in Germany

By a decree issued on 30 April 1930, Gheorghe Tașcă was appointed, starting from 1 May, at the head of the Romanian legation in Berlin. Tașcă's appointment as Romania's envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Germany was part of a wider 'movement' in the diplomatic corps. For example, Ion P. Carp was appointed to head the diplomatic mission in Ankara, while Gheorghe Grigorcea was appointed to the same position in Brussels.²⁵ Of the three new heads of diplomatic missions, only Tașcă was from outside Romania's diplomatic corps.

The appointment of an outsider (non-career head of mission) to head a diplomatic mission was not new, as it was a measure allowed by the Law on the Functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the years after the First World War several specialists from different fields, some of them working in politics, dabbled in diplomacy (Victor Antonescu, Simion Mândrescu, Traian Stârcea), while others made real careers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Nicolae Titulescu, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, Theodor Emandi).

Tașcă replaced Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen in Berlin, a diplomat "integrated" into Romania's diplomatic corps at the age of 42 (in 1923), who had headed the legation in the German capital since February 1928.²⁶ Gheorghe Tașcă's appointment in Germany attracted public attention and was commented on by contemporaries. For example, Constantin Argetoianu, in his memoirs, claimed that the appointment of Tașcă to the

²³ See Ion Gh. Roșca, Liviu Bogdan Vlad, *Rectorii Academiei de Studii Economice din București*, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei de Studii Economice, 2013), 48–56.

²⁴ Ovidiu Buruiană, *Construind opoziția. Istoria politică a Partidului Național Liberal între anii 1927 și 1933*, (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2013), 56.

²⁵ Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României), Problem 77 Fund, file T 57 – Gheorghe Tașcă, unpagged (hereinafter: ARMFA).

²⁶ On Petrescu-Comnen's career in diplomacy, see Adrian Vițalariu, *Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen – diplomat*, (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2014), *passim*.

German capital was part of the National Peasants' Party's strategy to place reliable people in the best possible positions. Argetoianu pointed out that Iuliu Maniu had wanted to appoint Ion Răducanu, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Welfare, to Berlin, but he declined the proposal of the head of government, which led him to move on to Gheorghe Tașcă, after Dimitrie Gusti had refused the appointment in the city on the banks of the Spree.²⁷ Argetoianu's remarks, although they paint a fairly accurate picture of the reality surrounding appointments to diplomatic posts, reveal his aversion to the leader of the National Peasant Party, Iuliu Maniu, and to Professor Gheorghe Tașcă. Argetoianu considered Tașcă's appointment to Berlin to be "a gesture of kindness" towards Iorga, as the professor at the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies was close to the great historian.²⁸ Moreover, the National Peasant Party government included several of Tașcă's acquaintances.²⁹ Gheorghe Mironescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest and a former member of the Conservative Democratic Party. In addition, Ion Răducanu, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Welfare, was a professor at the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies and took over as rector of the higher education institution after Tașcă left for the diplomatic mission in Berlin.³⁰

A possible appointment of Tașcă to Berlin was discussed since the end of 1929 and the beginning of 1930.³¹ On 10 January 1930, Iorga noted in his diary that Maniu had proposed to Tașcă either the leadership of the Berlin legation or that of the Hague legation.³² In the immediate aftermath this plan took shape. This is why, at the end of March, Tașcă confided to his friend Theodor Emandi, Romania's plenipotentiary minister in Prague: "My appointment in Berlin, which was a mere hypothesis, began to take shape. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has asked for my consent because there are now major economic issues being debated in Germany and the government there needs a man with an economic background. I am very honoured by the choice that is being made, in my person, but I am leaving here a work in progress and an entire household. My hope is that the trip

²⁷ Argetoianu, *Memorii*, 100–101. Rumours about a possible appointment of Gusti to Berlin had been circulating since June 1929. See Political Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes), Rumänien Fund, file R 73657, Bucharest, telegram of 26 June 1929, unpaginated (hereinafter: PAMFAB, Rum.).

²⁸ Argetoianu, *Memorii*, 101.

²⁹ Păiușan, "Gheorghe Tașcă," 53.

³⁰ Roșca, Vlad, *Rectorii*, 57–70.

³¹ *Neamul Românesc*, (May 4, 1930): 1.

³² N. Iorga, *Memorii*, vol. IV, *Agonia regală și Regența*, (Bucharest: Editura "Națională" S. Ciornei, 1939), 378.

will be short. Once the economic agreements are concluded, I will, I believe, be able to regain my freedom and resume my occupations".³³ On this subject, "Neamul Românesc" of 17 April noted that "there is insistent talk" of appointing Tașcă as minister plenipotentiary in Berlin.³⁴

The German legation in Bucharest has carefully analysed the rumours concerning the appointment of Petrescu-Comnen's successor at the head of Romania's diplomatic representation in Berlin. As early as the end of March, German diplomats in Bucharest had been saying that Tașcă was to be appointed to head the legation in Berlin. As usual, they also produced a portrait of the future head of the legation. His political and academic activity was highlighted, as well as the fact that he had no experience in diplomacy. A positive element was that his wife was a good German speaker.³⁵ The characterisations of Tașcă were therefore balanced, with an emphasis on his economic expertise, which could be a good omen.

In early May, when the appointment became official, Tașcă settled some of his "political business" in the country. He withdrew from the leadership of "Neamul Românesc"³⁶ and from the party led by Nicolae Iorga,³⁷ thus preparing for a new stage in his life and career.

Start of the diplomatic mission in the German capital

Professor Tașcă took over the leadership of the legation on 15 May 1930.³⁸ On 26 May the ceremony of handing over the letters of accreditation to the German President, Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, took place. However, German protocol stipulated that the speech given on the occasion of the presentation of the letters of accreditation should preferably be delivered either in German or in the native language of the head of the diplomatic mission. To avoid being put in a delicate protocol situation, Tașcă chose to prepare his speech in German. Therefore, in the first days of his mandate, the new head of the legation in Berlin, who had minimal knowledge of German, began to systematically repeat the grammar of the German language and, at the same time, learnt by heart the speech he delivered to the President of the Weimar Republic.³⁹

³³ National Library of Romania (Biblioteca Națională a României), Special Collections, St. Georges Fund, Theodor Emandi Archive, CI 5, Letter from Gheorghe Tașcă to Theodor Emandi, 28 March 1930 (hereafter: NLR, TEA).

³⁴ *Neamul Românesc*, (April 17, 1930): 1.

³⁵ PAMFAB, Rum., R 73657 (Bucharest, telegram of 29 March 1930; Bucharest, telegram of 7 May 1930).

³⁶ *Neamul Românesc*, (May 3, 1930): 2.

³⁷ *Neamul Românesc*, (May 4, 1930): 1.

³⁸ ARMFA, Problem 77 Fund, file T 57, unpagued.

³⁹ NLR, TEA, CI 5, Letter from Gheorghe Tașcă to Theodor Emandi, 25 May 1930.

Perhaps Tașcă's most important objective at the beginning of the mission was to get up to speed with "legation business", to get to know the staff and to assign work tasks. As the Berlin legation was one of the important diplomatic missions in the geography of Romania's international representation, and the mediation of Romanian-German relations required a large workload, the staff was more numerous than that of other legations. Tașcă's first impression was hopeful. He confessed to Emandi: "[...] I had the good fortune to find in the legation a staff trained and animated by the greatest goodwill". Gheorghe Aurelian, minister plenipotentiary 2nd class, was an experienced diplomat who, in his seven years in Berlin, had built up contacts in German society and the diplomatic corps. Aurelian was, in fact, Tașcă's "right-hand man", as he had been for his predecessor. Next came Noti Constantinide and Radu Florescu, considered by Tașcă to be "peerless [...] always benevolent", as well as another young diplomat, Caius Văleanu. They were joined by Iosif Șchiopul, the press adviser, and Petru Ilcuș, the press attaché, who had also been working at the legation in Germany for many years. The economic component of the mission was provided by Victor Geormăneanu, the commercial attaché, who also had a wealth of experience in his field of expertise. Being an important legation, Berlin also had a military attaché, Colonel Ioan Negulescu.⁴⁰ So Tașcă found a well-trained team at the Berlin legation, made up of several experienced diplomats with various contacts, both in the diplomatic corps and in German society. Therefore, Tașcă's settling-in period in Berlin went smoothly. However, as a result of developments in domestic and international politics, Gheorghe Tașcă had to make analyses of the situation in Germany quite quickly and become involved in brokering Romanian-German relations.

Aspects of political life in Germany

When Professor Gheorghe Tașcă took over the leadership of the legation in Berlin, the German government had not long been led by Heinrich Brüning (1885-1970), one of the leaders of the (Catholic) Centre Party. He was trying to form a parliamentary majority, so the issue of dissolving parliament and holding new elections was on the agenda. The scenario was put into practice. So, Tașcă witnessed the election campaign and the parliamentary elections held on 14 September 1930. The outcome of the elections was also important for Romania, because Bucharest wanted to negotiate a trade treaty with Germany.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The September 1930 elections did not bring the governing coalition the hoped-for parliamentary majority. Moreover, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (the Nazi Party) led by A. Hitler won 18.3% of the vote, becoming the second most popular political party in Germany.⁴¹ Taşcă notes that the election result "shook the German financial market".⁴²

After the surprising election result there was a legitimate concern to explain the electoral success of the Nazi Party. Therefore, in October 1930, the Legation sent to Bucharest a summary report, compiled by Radu Florescu, in which a number of explanations for the election result of The Nazi Party were presented. The document was not well received by ministry officials. The report was annotated, pointing out that such information should have been sent and assumed by the head of the legation and not by a lower-ranking official like Florescu.⁴³ We do not know to what extent this suggestion was passed on to Berlin. What is certain is that only a few days later, Taşcă sent his most extensive report on the situation in Germany to Bucharest. He commented on several dominant themes: the anti-Semitic violence of the Nazi Party, the political disputes in the Reichstag, Germany's armament process, aspects of the Brüning government's foreign policy, and the impact of the economic crisis on the German state.⁴⁴ Taşcă believed that a rapprochement between France and Germany was important to maintain peace in Europe, but warned that a future alliance between Germany and the USSR could pave the way for a new war.⁴⁵ Even though these scenarios were being discussed in European political circles, we note how the Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary in Berlin dealt with such sensitive issues.

Nevertheless, Taşcă made an effort to capture developments on the German political scene as nuanced as possible. The trend he noticed was that the Brüning government was relying on increasingly weak parliamentary support, and the parties of the far right and left were becoming more vocal. This led him to note in December 1930 that 'the National Socialist Party, intoxicated by repeated electoral successes, has become very bold'.⁴⁶ This growing influence of extremist parties, but especially of the party led by Adolf Hitler, led the German government, according to Taşcă's assessment, to recalibrate its foreign policy strategy. This is why, both at the end of 1930 and during the following year, Taşcă

⁴¹ Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic 1919–1933*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 63–65.

⁴² ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 34, s. 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, s. 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 46–67 (the report is dated 15 October 1930).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 54–55.

⁴⁶ ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 1, s. 105.

felt that Germany lacked a coherent foreign policy strategy. This shows that the head of the Romanian legation in Berlin failed to provide a 'top-down' picture of the dominant elements of the Weimar Republic's foreign policy.⁴⁷ What was certain, however, was that the Brüning government and Foreign Minister J. Curtius had departed from the 'Stresemann line' of closer cooperation with France.⁴⁸ The German strategy seemed to be to isolate France and to achieve results in the extremely important matter of war reparations. It was not by chance that Tașcă insisted in many of his reports on the German government's policy towards reparations, sending to Bucharest information on the negotiations on the subject, accompanied by personal interpretations. The head of the Berlin legation claimed that reparations were perceived in Germany as a "tribute". But he stressed that in German society the "tribute imposed by the victors" was seen as the cause of the economic and social problems facing the Weimar Republic. "Everyone in Germany, economists, politicians, industrialists, bankers, businessmen, see no other cause of evil than <tribute>".⁴⁹

Some of the statements made by Tașcă were questionable. It was no coincidence that diplomats at the headquarters of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who handled correspondence with the legation in Berlin, sought to corroborate information they found problematic. For example, in the autumn of 1930, they noticed a difference between the way Hindenburg was presented by Florescu and Tașcă. While Florescu noted that the German President's working capacity had diminished, as he was unable to intervene to mediate political disputes, Tașcă was of the opinion that Germany's political life was concentrated in the hands of Hindenburg "who, although past 80, has an extraordinary vigour and serenity of spirit".⁵⁰ Even if Tașcă's observations were closer to the reality of German⁵¹ political life, the "delivery" to Bucharest of contradictory information by members of the same diplomatic mission caused confusion and diminished the credibility of the head of the legation.

Nevertheless, Tașcă tried to carry out his mission diligently. He wrote thick reports, which showed that the Romanian diplomats in Berlin were gathering and trying to analyse a great deal of information. And yet, sending dozens of pages of reports with lots of "raw information" about the situation in Germany was not always to the liking of officials in

⁴⁷ Chiper, *România și Germania*, 44.

⁴⁸ ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 1, s. 128.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, s. 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, file 34, s. 109.

⁵¹ See Larry Eugene Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg. The 1932 Presidential Elections and the End of the Weimar Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 55–86.

Bucharest. For example, a 33-page report sent on 29 January 1931 to G.G. Mironescu (Prime Minister and acting Minister of Foreign Affairs) read: "Interesting but much too long".⁵²

As the economic and political crisis deepened in Germany, Tașcă devoted more and more space to these themes in his reports. From the reports and telegrams he sent to Bucharest, it can be seen that he felt at ease when analysing the economic problems facing Germany. Tașcă offered a wealth of data and pertinent analysis.⁵³ But things were different when he presented political developments. He was prone to using many clichés and did not organise the information very rigorously.

In the first months of 1932, Tașcă noted that the political situation of the Brüning government was increasingly delicate. He believed, like other diplomats accredited in Berlin,⁵⁴ that the Nazi Party's entry into government could lead to a "loss of prestige among the masses" and would be a remedy for the "Hitler psychosis" facing the German people.⁵⁵ These are among the last analyses of political life in Germany, influenced by Hindenburg's re-election as president in April 1932.

The avatars of an Economic Treaty between Romania and Germany

At the time when Tașcă took over the leadership of the legation, economic negotiations between Romanians and Germans were underway. This led to the signing of a provisional⁵⁶ trade agreement in Bucharest on 18 June 1930. However, this document, which came into force a few months later, did not provide a stable framework for Romanian-German economic relations affected by the world economic crisis. But the signing of an economic treaty, introducing clear rules and a dose of predictability, would have benefited both countries, given that Germany was Romania's main trading partner and Romania was the Weimar Republic's most important economic partner among the countries of South-Eastern Europe.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Germans were well aware of the situation

⁵² ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 34, s. 150.

⁵³ See the report of 17 July 1931 (Ibid., s. 270-281).

⁵⁴ This was also the impression of the American ambassador in Berlin, especially after his discussions with Hitler in 1932 (Bernard V. Burke, *Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the collapse of the Weimar Republic, 1930-1933. The United States and the Hitler's rise to power*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185-187.

⁵⁵ ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 35, s. 18.

⁵⁶ Hans Tonch, *Wirtschaft und Politik auf dem Balkan: Untersuchungen zu den Deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen in der Weimarer Republik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Weltwirtschaftskrise*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 88-96.

⁵⁷ Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire. German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 171-172.

in which the agrarian states of South-Eastern Europe found themselves and sought to take advantage in order to increase their economic influence in the region.⁵⁸ A central objective for the Berlin legation was therefore to find solutions to unblock Romanian grain exports to Germany. Tașcă, who owned an estate producing and selling grain, knew from his own experience the impact of the crisis on the grain market. That's why signing an economic agreement was one way to stabilise trade relations.

Without Tașcă having had any contribution, a first round of negotiations took place in Vienna in March 1931, with the aim of initialling a trade treaty between Romania and Germany.⁵⁹ However, the signing of the agreement for the creation of the Customs Union between Germany and Austria on 21 March and the replacement of the government led by G. G. Mironescu led to the provisional suspension of the negotiations.⁶⁰ The German side was unhappy that the Romanian delegation decided to suspend the negotiations.⁶¹ Instead, through Tașcă, the Romanian government conveyed to the Germans that the suspension of negotiations was to be short-lived.⁶²

After the political situation in Romania stabilized, with the coming to power of the government led by N. Iorga, it was decided (27 April) that the Germans would be invited to Bucharest to resume negotiations.⁶³ Obviously the Germans also wanted to resume negotiations. This act was closely linked, in Tașcă's opinion, to the fact that the German-Austrian Customs Union Affair was to be debated in the Council of the League of Nations, which was to meet in mid-May. If Germany had signed the treaty with Romania, then the German delegation would have had more economic arguments to defend its point of view in Geneva. Therefore, Tașcă was of the opinion that Romania had to use the momentum to get the most favourable form of the trade treaty with Germany. But a diplomatic incident triggered by the German chargé d'affaires in Bucharest meant that negotiations broke down in early May.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ibid., 162–169; Hans-Paul Höpfner, *Deutsche Südosteuropapolitik in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983), 256–258.

⁵⁹ The Romanian delegation was also negotiating an economic treaty with Austria.

⁶⁰ ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 73, s. 145; ARMFA, 2 Conventions Fund, G 14, file 2, unpagéd (Vienna, report of 31 April 1931). It seems that the suspension of the negotiations was also at the suggestion of the French (Tonch, *Wirtschaft und Politik*, 103–104, 106).

⁶¹ ARMFA, 2 Conventions Fund, G 14, file 2, unpagéd (Berlin, telegram of 13 April 1931).

⁶² Ibid., unpagéd (Bucharest, telegram of 14 April 1931).

⁶³ Ibid., unpagéd (Bucharest, protocol of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 28 April 1931).

⁶⁴ Höpfner, *Deutsche Südosteuropapolitik*, 267–268; Tonch, *Wirtschaft und Politik*, 104–105.

However, Tașcă believed that the Germans were still interested in signing a treaty, and the solution they proposed was for the Romanians to give the signal to restart negotiations. Moreover, German officials suggested that negotiations should be held in Berlin. Romania's plenipotentiary minister in Germany seemed pleased with how to overcome the diplomatic incident in early May.⁶⁵ It was important for Tașcă to prove useful in developing economic relations between Romania and Germany, as this was a major objective of his mandate in Berlin. That's why he contacted *Auswärtiges Amt* officials at the end of May to lay the groundwork for the resumption of negotiations. During the meetings, Tașcă set the coordinates for the resumption of negotiations in Berlin on 8 June 1931.

This time, he was not part of the delegation representing Romania in the negotiations with Germany. Tașcă was informed about the progress of the talks, but did not have access to official documents. Towards the end of the talks, however, the diplomat came to the fore. He suggested to the Romanian authorities that certain provisions in the documents to be initialled could be detrimental to Romania. His intervention led to the redrafting of some paragraphs of the trade treaty. Moreover, along with the treaty, the Germans wanted to impose a secret protocol whereby the Romanian government committed itself to buying industrial products from Germany, with Romanians receiving payment facilities and a ten-year credit. Warned by Tașcă, members of the Romanian government did not accept the secret protocol and, on 23 June 1931, asked him to intervene with the German Foreign Ministry to demand the annulment of the document. The Romanians argued that the signing of the trade treaty should not be linked to the assumption of contracts with German industry. Tașcă held several rounds of negotiations with *Auswärtiges Amt* officials, finally succeeding in getting the German side to renounce the secret protocol. These impediments having been overcome, the Treaty was signed in Geneva on 27 June 1931.⁶⁶

The Romanian-German economic treaty provided, among other things, for the imposition by the Germans of "preferential tariffs" for corn and barley from Romania, while the Romanian state was obliged to reduce duties on various German goods. But for the treaty to function, the 'preferential tariffs' provision had to be approved by the states benefiting from Germany's most-favoured-nation clause.⁶⁷ Romania and Germany

⁶⁵ ARMFA, Problem 71/Germany Fund, file 34, s. 235-237.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, file 73, s. 163-176.

⁶⁷ ARMFA, 2 Conventions Fund, G 14, file 2, unpagged (verbal note from the German Legation in Bucharest, 8 August 1931).

had agreed that the treaty would become operational on 15 November 1931, by which date Germany had to receive consent from its trading partners who enjoyed the same 'economic treatment'.⁶⁸ Most states responded favourably, but by 10 November the USSR, USA, South Africa, Turkey and Argentina had not yet expressed their views. The most difficult case seemed to be Argentina, where elections were due and the government wanted the decision to be taken by the new parliament.⁶⁹

In this context, the Germans proposed to the Romanians a postponement of the coming into force of the treaty. This proposal was not favourably received in Bucharest. The Romanians suspected the Germans of not having acted vigorously enough to obtain the agreement of the reluctant states, while the Romanians managed to convince the Czechoslovaks. Delaying entry into force put the Romanian government in a delicate situation, with the potential to generate public backlash. It could also set a precedent that would have damaged the credibility of concluding similar treaties.⁷⁰ Instead, the Germans responded that they would seek solutions to resolve the situation.⁷¹

In this context, Gh. Tașcă considered that Germany was no longer interested in the economic treaties with Romania and Hungary (signed on July 18, 1931) coming into force. If in the spring of 1931, the Germans were also involved in the project of creating a customs union with Austria, by the autumn the project had failed and the German leaders were no longer convinced that favouring cereals from south-eastern Europe would increase consumption capacity and generate orders for German industry.⁷² Yet Tașcă came up with a solution. He proposed applying the model used following the French-Yugoslav trade agreement. Under this document, the Yugoslavs would pay duties on grain sold in France, and at the end of the year the French would refund part of the duties. This would have eliminated the procedure of requesting the agreement of states that had economic cooperation with Germany on the basis of the most-favoured-nation clause. The option suggested by Tașcă was not considered by the Romanian authorities, who, in collaboration with the Germans, were looking for solutions to unblock the situation.

⁶⁸ Tonch, *Wirtschaft und Politik*, 114–115.

⁶⁹ ARMFA, 2 Conventions Fund, G 14, file 2, unpagged (Berlin, telegram 9805 of 10 November 1931).

⁷⁰ Ibid., unpagged (Ghika to Berlin legation - telegram is recorded in the archives as dated 18 November).

⁷¹ Ibid., unpagged (Prague, telegram 9175 of 20 November 1931).

⁷² Ibid., unpagged (Berlin, Tașcă's report of 17 November 1931, no. 9129).

A round of negotiations between representatives of the two countries took place in Bucharest on 7 December. It was agreed to continue the efforts to bring the Treaty of 27 June into force and to hold negotiations to unblock bilateral trade in the short term.⁷³ This explains the signing on 19 December 1931 in Berlin by the representative of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Cezar Popescu, of a Supplementary Agreement to the Provisional Trade Arrangement of 18 June 1930.⁷⁴

Taşcă did not take part in the negotiations this time either, but he was the one who liaised with the two foreign ministries. Although various options were tried to unblock the situation and “save” the economic treaty signed on 27 June 1931, the international context marked by the deepening effects of the economic crisis, as well as the change of strategy on the part of the German government,⁷⁵ meant that the Romanian-German economic treaty did not enter into force.

From the Berlin legation to the Romanian government

Professor Taşcă’s departure from the leadership of the legation in Germany was announced by the Romanian press at the beginning of 1932. The press reported that the head of the legation in Berlin might take over the Ministry of Justice, a portfolio left vacant after the death of Constantin Hamangiu.⁷⁶ However, Valeriu Pop was appointed head of the Ministry of Justice, and Taşcă remained only an aspirant for a ministerial portfolio.⁷⁷ In parallel, rumours were circulating about the appointment of a new minister plenipotentiary in Berlin. King Carol II himself was of the opinion that Taşcă should be replaced and Petrescu-Comnen reinstated at the head of the legation in Germany.⁷⁸ On 24 March 1932, Iorga noted in his memoirs that he had discussed with the Foreign Minister the appointments at the head of the diplomatic missions. “Comnen would take over Berlin. We discussed how Taşcă would return without offense, being appointed, after his resignation, to a post of trust.”⁷⁹ So Iorga wanted to help his political partner by preparing an honourable exit from diplomacy and a

⁷³ Ibid., unpagéd (note of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Filality, 11 December 1931).

⁷⁴ Ibid., unpagéd (Berlin, telegram 9722 of 19 December 1931). See also Toch, *Wirtschaft und Politik*, 116–117.

⁷⁵ Gross, *Export Empire*, 173–175.

⁷⁶ *Dimineața*, XXVIII/8938, (January 10, 1932): 7.

⁷⁷ Iorga proposed him to King Carol II, in the government formed under his leadership in April 1931, but the sovereign refused (N. Iorga, *Memorii*, vol. VI, *Încercarea guvernării peste partide (1931-1932)* (Bucharest: Editura “Naționala” S. Ciornei, 1939), 86.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 311.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 355.

return to domestic politics that would not hurt his pride. First came the possibility of appointing Tașcă as head the Higher Economic Council,⁸⁰ and then the possibility of him being appointed to head a ministry. Under these circumstances, Tașcă submitted his resignation from his post in Berlin, which was accepted on 16 April. Under these circumstances, the post of Head of Legation in Berlin was to become vacant from 1 May 1932.⁸¹ Although he would have liked to return to Romania sooner, the visit to Berlin of Princess Ileana of Habsburg, sister of King Carol II,⁸² led Tașcă to end his mission in the German capital on 1 May 1932. On the same day, he left Berlin, provisionally leaving the leadership of the legation to Gheorghe Aurelian.

Back in Romania, the former Minister Plenipotentiary in Berlin was appointed to head the Ministry of Industry and Trade. It seemed to be a successful formula for reintegration into domestic politics, given his economic expertise. But the Iorga government resigned at the end of April 1932, so Tașcă's ministry of Industry and Trade was short-lived.

Even though he remained involved in political life, Gheorghe Tașcă did not hold any important positions after 1932. He dedicated himself to his academic career, continued to give lectures and publish scientific papers. Professor Gheorghe Tașcă was arrested in May 1950, like many members of the former political and cultural elite, and imprisoned in Sighet Prison, where he died on 12 March 1951.⁸³

Conclusions

Taking over the leadership of the Romanian Legation in Germany was a real challenge for Gheorghe Tașcă. He stepped out of the "comfort zone" of the academic world and domestic political life and sought to integrate into a profession with strict rules - diplomacy. At the same time, he worked in a country affected by internal political tensions and the devastating effects of the global economic crisis, whose language he knew only approximately and whose culture was much more distant than his French one. Although he worked hard to overcome these barriers, Tașcă found it difficult to build the contacts in German society that are so important to a successful diplomatic mission. A serious and studious nature, Tașcă preferred working in the legation's chancellery to social gatherings, unlike his predecessor. This explains his lengthy diplomatic

⁸⁰ ARMFA, Problem 77 Fund, T 57, unpaginated (telegram 18852 of 6 April 1932).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., unpaginated (telegram 1401 of 7 April 1932).

⁸³ Filotti, *De peste mări și țări*, 528–529; Popescu, Prelipceanu, "Gheorghe Tașcă - economist," 86.

reports, based mainly on analysis of the German press, but also the fact that we can hardly find in them references to information received from conversations with various politicians, members of the German government or the diplomatic corps accredited in Berlin. However, Professor Gh. Tașcă tried to explain, sometimes in a nuanced manner and clearly, sometimes wordy, the political and economic situation in Germany. He drew attention to the danger posed by A. Hitler and the Nazi Party, but also analysed the increasingly visible political presence of the German Communist Party.

Sent by the Romanian government to Berlin to contribute to the development of trade relations with Germany, Tașcă tried to showcase his economic expertise. He provided Bucharest's leaders with useful analyses of the German economy and sought to help delegations negotiating with the Germans with suggestions. But he was not integrated into the negotiating team with Germany. Nevertheless, Tașcă's observations before the signing of the Economic Treaty of 27 June 1931 demonstrated his flair for international trade issues. Despite his efforts, the economic treaty did not enter into force and Tașcă's diplomatic mission to Germany ended without any notable results.

