



LIVIA DANDARA on:

A WATERSHED YEAR AND ITS SIGNIFICANCES



In a recently issued book **ROMANIA IN VILTOAREA ANULUI 1939** (Romania in the Vortex of 1939), Livia Dandara, researcher at the Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Studies in Bucharest broaches a key-moment of this century. The conjuncture was extremely important not only in Romania's history but also in the history of the whole world. Livia Dandara's book is dramatic not only through its substance. The concatenation of facts, the quality of the arguments and the elegance of the style alike provide for an exciting reading matter and a meditation highly profitable for the sake of truth. In other words the book is a genuine publishing event. Consequently we have made a brief interview on the subject:

Dear Livia Dandara, politically speaking the year 1939 was for Romania much longer and exhausting than its astronomic length could have permitted. Historians from tens of countries have studied it at length. Could we speak, today, of any unknown facts about it? Of date that would compel us to a different picture.

"It goes without saying that 1939 was a moment when European history took an irreversible course. It marked the beginning of the war and at the same time the end of an age of painful compromises. The failure of peace was, nevertheless, the moment when the forces consistently opposing peace ever since the emergence of fascist and revisionist ideas made a strong comeback. Only in 1939 fascism and revisionism were understood to be enemies that could not be openly treated. I don't think any discoveries could be made now likely to revert a conception already established in the consciousness of historians and people passionate by history. Nevertheless, the archives will always provide fresh information for us likely to help us retouch a known picture and get it ever closer to the truth. Not only history but also its expression have always been open cases. Instead, we could not know the course history might have taken if the representatives of the time had provided different solutions to their great queries. These are for example some questions worth considering: What would have happened if France and Great Britain had not capitulated in Munich? How would the flare-up have continued if the tripartite negotiations of the spring of 1939 had been successful? What would have been the evolution of things had France and Great Britain accepted, after the outbreak of the war, various peace proposals? And so on and so forth. Naturally, no reliable historian indulges too much in the use of 'ifs' but do not completely discard them either!

Nonetheless, allow me to ask you something. Are you convinced that our forerunners, the Romanians I mean, did everything they could to maintain the country's integrity and rid the notion of a participation in a war which was not its own?

"In 1939 the Romanians did everything that could be possibly done for safeguarding the country's frontiers and avoiding participation in the war. At the same time, they did everything possible to prevent the war from breaking, one way or another. We should therefore take into account the actual role Romania could have played in the European concert. And the answer should be still more nuanced were we to consider the previous period. The unending political struggles, the fractions between parties, Carol II's dictatorial penchants, the foolish hope in eternal peace and the power of the League of Nations to safeguard this peace, as well as certain inconsistencies and diplomatic failures contributed to the weakening of a willed national cohesion. For, at moments, had not the truly lucid people, become a minority? In fact, from 1933, when the London disarmament conference flopped, the official circles in Romania and other European states were living in a continuous pacific euphoria. Neither the political régime in the Romania of those years was up to creating a sound foundation for broad and deep popular cohesion. Little efforts had been made in 1939 to strengthen domestic solidarity. And yet, when faced with the danger most social strata in this country proved admirably solidary. And a splendid example in this sense was provided by the basic classes in Romania, the workers and the peasants. Without the participation of the Romanian Communist Party, the great patriotic events culminating with the May Day demonstrations of 1939 would not have had the antifascist and antirevisionist punch they had. The Social-Democrat

Party itself, known for its anti-military plank unreservedly supported the sustained effort of increasing the country's defence capacity. Moreover, we must say that no matter how nefarious the royal dictatorship, still it could not renounce some basic gains of the inter-bella Romanian foreign and domestic policy. In the first place, it could not give up the support of an active diplomacy, aiming to guarantee the country's integrity and independence. Indeed, our forerunners did everything they could to secure Romania a pacific destiny. The year 1939 was rich in such moments. Even the economic treaty with Germany, not only once tackled suspiciously by foreign historiography, had simply the same purposes. Before making any assessments on the respective treaty, we ought to know its provisions and especially, we should inform ourselves exactly on the way these provisions were implemented.

In this sense, notwithstanding the volatile climate and the aftermath of 1939 can we claim that that year meant yet a moral victory of an old Romanian pacific policy?

Obviously, 1939 meant a moral victory for the Romanians. Romania's diplomatic and propaganda endeavours were underlain by an ethic rationale and stature. They were carried out with dignity and loyalty. The country did not let herself go with the provocations and jungle practices in the Europe of those times. The very commentaries in the Romanian press of the time are still impressive through their poise, decency, sincerity, sobriety and clear-sightedness. Unlike the press and radio broadcasts in the service of those who wanted Romania's dismemberment. From this angle, 1939 was a moral victory too in point of political awareness, of the relationships between the citizen and the state, between nations and the international world. Never before had the Romanians been so well in-

formed about their country's stance and dilemmas. To a great extent the government's activity was carried out in the open. The main diplomatic documents were entirely quoted by the press. That's in fact how the national solidarity of the epoch was achieved. Over the years, this truth surges with demonstrative force: at a feverish time of back-stage negotiations, of under-the-counter wheelings and dealings, Romania chose an open diplomacy both with her people and international public opinion."

And if the battle was lost must we resignedly accept that it was waged in vain? That it was devoid of any results?

"In conclusion I avail myself of your question to point out that the Romanians' battle of that crossroad year was not only selfishly oriented at safeguarding their homeland. In 1939, the Romanian government used all the international laws in use at the time to give assistance, to the extent of the country's then possibilities, to all the tried nations in Europe, and first of all to her own neighbours. The compassion shown by the Romanian people, as well as the means of expression of public opinion, were notorious. In March 1939, thousands of Czechoslovak citizens took shelter and refuge in Romania. The encroachment of Albania's sovereignty in April 1939 caused consternation and disapproval in Romania. In September 1939, tens of thousands of Polish citizens were sheltered and fed by the Romanians. The treasure of the Polish people would have been forever lost had not the Romanian government granted it a transit permit. And there's no reason why we should not list as a result of this lost battle a certain moral example provided by the Romanians for their neighbours: the truth of this tragical history will never be erased that Romania flatly refused to participate in the dismemberment of friendly Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, this moral example was destined to be followed only by those who had given it: in 1941, Romania again refused to take part in the dismemberment of friendly Yugoslavia. In other words, in 1939 a number of constant features of Romanian political conduct were reasserted. Constant features which the country could not give up even at the time when it was no longer master of its own destiny. On August 23, 1944, the Romanian patriots resumed a natural and traditional course, interrupted in the summer and autumn of 1940. But about all this, some other time".

Thank you.

MIHAI PELIN