

# Martha Bibescu and the Inside of Romania's domestic Policy

Valeriu Bălteanu

---

**Résumé :** *Cet article révèle une série de problèmes suggérés par le contenu du journal politique de Martha Bibescu, la genèse de certains scénarios politiques, la situation de la Roumanie dans un moment critique de son existence, les relations entre la culture et la politique, etc. Le journal de Martha Bibescu couvre la période entre 1939 et 1941, une époque de grands troubles dans l'histoire et la politique roumaine. Le dernier, mais non le moindre, le journal prend un voyage original dans les coulisses de la politique au cours de la période entre les deux guerres.*

**Mots-clés :** *coulisses, politique interne, journal, scénario.*

Princess Martha Bibescu, a renowned figure of the Romanian exile, left a number of memoirs which allow a better understanding of the insides of interwar European politics, but also of the Romanian domestic policy. In what follows, we aim at taking a look in the insides of Romania's domestic policy during the interwar, tracing the objectives the authoress herself had in view in writing her memoirs:

## *1. Resorting to high-class sources*

---

Often, Martha Bibescu obtains extremely important information right from the actors involved in certain actions. There are certain aspects in the *Political Diary* that indicate the fact that the princess had been frequently acquainted to some facts before they were made available publicly. Sometimes, such information actually remains completely unknown by the public. Some years after the events, the *Diary* presents some interesting details concerning the relationship between the Romanian politicians between 1939 and 1941; thus, we are informed about the discontents of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigore Gafencu, with regard to a political action pursued by King

Charles II: “so, the King has two kinds of politics: mine and Tilea’s” (Bibescu, 1979: 71). Essentially, King Charles II was trying to preserve the balance in the foreign affairs and acted, at times, disregarding his Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this particular case, he acted directly upon Romania’s ambassador in London, Tilea, without asking for Gafencu’s opinion. The latter’s reaction is known as a result of an account of a meeting in which princess Bibescu took part.

General Antonescu’s coming into power with the support of Fascist Germany is “predicted” in the *Diary* with the assuredness of a person informed about the great political movements: “Antonescu will get out of prison leading a military group only to dethrone Charles” (*Ibid.* 194). The note is dated July 17, 1940, a few weeks before Antonescu actually came into power!

## *2. Concise pointing out of events*

---

Although Martha Bibescu’s notes may seem sketchy, they contain the fundamental benchmarks of the events and, more often than not, the barely noticeable reactions of the participants. It is truly remarkable how the authoress informs her readers with regard to Charles’s attempts to resist the increasing pressure of Germany:

“Tătăărăscu Cabinet comprises Al. Vaida Voievod and I. Gigurtu for the balance of Germany to weigh heavier. Gafencu is both former and present minister” (*Ibid.* 133).

As it is well-known, under German pressure, Romania and Germany had concluded, in March 1939, a commercial treaty which, in fact, concealed the constantly increasing German influence in our country. At the political level, the increase of this influence was proven by the presence of some philo-German politicians in the Romanian government (e.g., Gigurtu). King Charles II kept Gafencu in the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs to suggest that the country’s foreign policy had essentially remained unchanged in its orientation towards the traditional allies, France and England.

The authoress touches briefly upon Gigurtu, philo-German politician: “president of great a many managing boards, a rich man thanks to the gold mine which once Cazimir, my father’s secretary, offered to George (Martha Bibescu’s husband, our note.)” (*Ibid.* 192). It is more than enough to understand what is there to understand!

### 3. *Observing the reactions of the actors involved in an event*

---

Martha Bibescu is particularly skilled in observing the reactions of the politicians involved in various events. For the example, speaking of a tragic event – the murder of Prime-Minister Armand Călinescu by the Legionnaires – she insists on King Charles' reaction: "very affected by the events, he is really pale" (*Ibid.* 106). She also observes the unusual verbal reaction of the King: "Bastards!" (*Id.*). Another example: a note concerning the Romanian-German relationships written on 21 November 1940 is accentuated with a remark of her interlocutor, general Tătăreanu: "The Germans are wooing us. They need us against the Russians" (*Ibid.* 226). It is worth mentioning that this time the authoress provides her own opinion, as well: "as far as I'm concerned, he is perfectly right" (*Idem*).

### 4. *Pointing out her own opinion*

---

The example provided above may be followed by dozens of others. The writer pays attention to her own reactions, especially when they may be suggestive. Nicolae Iorga's assassination is mentioned in a single intervention which hides her true attitude towards the event: "the Legionnaires did *justice*" (*Ibid.* 228). The fact that she emphasised the word *justice* is self-explanatory. Another political assassinate – the murder of I.G. Duca, in 1933, triggered a much more explicit reaction on the part of the authoress. Forced by the young Liberals, I.G. Duca had removed George Bibescu, the writer's husband, from the candidates list and thus he had eased the way for Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, the leader of the Iron Guard. In her *Diary*, the princess is merciless: "and Codreanu commanded Duca's assassination. But Nemesis (Goddess of Revenge) succeeded as well!" (*Ibid.* 76). King Charles' relinquishment of the throne brings about some bitter remarks on her part: "It's insane! 1930-1940, ten years of reign and no one to stand by him!" (*Ibid.* 206). Indeed, Charles had been abandoned by all his former supporters, some of them changing rapidly sides to Antonescu.

"In Romania, the crown passes from father to son, then back again, from son to father" (*Ibid.* 210) – a subtle allusion to an oddity of the

Romanian history: in 1930, Charles had bereft his son, Michael, of the royal crown and, in 1940, the same Michael was enthroned. The authoress' attitude towards Legionnaires was constantly negative. Hitler chose between them and Antonescu so that the Legionnaire Rebellion, presented in many details in Martha Bibescu's *Diary*, was quashed. Germany sacrificed the Legionnaires because they needed the Romanian army commanded by General Ion Antonescu in their war against the Russians. The authoress' remark is suggestive: "the tool is always cast aside" (*Ibid.* 236).

### *5. Pinpointing the hidden connections between events*

---

Martha Bibescu is a true craftswoman in this respect. The majority of the details presented in the *Diary*, whether they deal with domestic or foreign policy, are usually related to other facts or events. Many of the decisions made by King Charles II can be understood, as princess Bibescu suggests, if they are regarded in relation with the increasing pressure exercised by Fascist Germany. Also, the criminal deeds of the Legionnaires can be more easily understood when put in relation with the connections they had with the ruling class in Nazi Germany, an aspect unknown by many. And there can be much more examples.

In a previously published paper, we have dealt with the details in the *Diary* that pinpoint to Romania's foreign policy. Today, it is a well-known fact that princess Bibescu was, for a while, an unofficial ambassador of King Charles II. Martha Bibescu's memoirs are also important for gaining awareness of the fundamental evolution of the Romanian domestic policy during the interwar period. Due to her intellectual prestige and her connections in the highest political and cultural circles, princess Bibescu had access to information often remained unknown by ordinary people. Her memoirs, although problematic in what reception is concerned (they address to intellectual elites), represent a significant 'reference book' in learning the inside of the Romanian domestic policy during the interwar period.

## **References**

- Bibescu, Martha, *Jurnal politic*, Editura Politică, București, 1979.  
Gafencu, Grigore, *Însemnări politice*, Humanitas, București, 1991.  
Manolescu, Ion, *Literatura memorialistică*, Humanitas, București, 1996.  
Zaciu, Mircea, Papahagi, Marian, Sasu Aurel, *Dicționarul scriitorilor români*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 1995.