‘Friendly with the Whole World’: The Goga–Cuza Government and the Comnen Foreign Ministry, December 1937 to December 1938

The short-lived Goga–Cuza government installed in late December 1937 did little to speed up the process of rapprochement with the Reich, despite Octavian Goga’s desire for an alliance with Germany. The cabinet was in fact divided between pro-westerners and those who sought strong links with the Axis powers. This division reflected King Carol’s decision to steer a neutral course between the Great Powers. Within this policy of informal neutrality between the powers, Romania’s traditional alliances and western links were to be maintained. At the same time, relations with the Reich were to be gradually strengthened. With the king ultimately in control of foreign policy, there was to be no room for an overt pro-German policy as originally advocated by Goga and as still called for by his political partner, A. C. Cuza.

The appointment of the anti-bolshevik, pro-German Octavian Goga at the head of the government represented an assurance for Germany of Romania’s good intentions towards her and confirmed that Romania would not enter into closer relations with the Soviet Union. As the Romanian minister to Berlin, Comnen, informed Foreign Minister von Neurath, the new Romanian government ‘represents an evolution in the normalisation of our relations with Germany’ and was ‘a complete guarantee regarding our relations with Russia’.

At this stage, Goga was probably the best known Romanian in Germany. Hitler described the coming to power of the Goga government and its subsequent policies as the ‘first happy event of the New Year’. Goga was not the only pro-German in the new government. Although

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his outspokenly germanophile and antisemitic political ally, A. C. Cuza, was relegated to minister without portfolio, his son, Gheorghe Cuza, became minister of labour. Other pro-Germans in the cabinet included Ion Gigurtu, as minister of trade and industry, Eugen Savu, as financial minister and Irimescu, the air and sea minister.\(^5\) Some of the most important cabinet posts were, however, taken by pro-westerners. Thus, Armand Călinescu of the National Peasant Party, became minister of the interior.\(^6\) General Ion Antonescu was appointed minister of national defence, with General Teodorescu as his under-secretary.\(^7\)

Istrate Micescu, the new foreign minister, was a member of the National Christian Party. Although pro-German, Micescu had promised to follow Carol’s commands and the advice of the former foreign minister, Victor Antonescu, in keeping with Carol’s determination to keep ultimate control of foreign policy.\(^8\) Nevertheless, the sharp ideological divisions which existed in this heterogeneous cabinet led to a number of highly contradictory foreign-policy announcements, even by Carol’s otherwise loyal foreign minister.

On 31 December 1937, Micescu informed members of the diplomatic corps that the general aim of policy was to create lasting links with Italy and Germany as soon as possible.\(^9\) Yet within a fortnight of this declaration, the ‘German-friendly’ Constantin Argetoianu was complaining in his diary of Micescu’s pronouncements in favour of the League of Nations and of the alliance with Czechoslovakia.\(^10\) Micescu’s itinerary of foreign capitals in mid-January 1938 did not include the Axis capitals, but instead Geneva, home of the League of Nations, Belgrade and Prague. In the Czechoslovak capital, Micescu assured his hosts that Romania would respect her Little Entente obligations.\(^11\)

Minister President Goga’s foreign-policy declarations also reflected this ambivalence between pro-German statements and assurances of Romania’s loyalty to her traditional allies. On 31 December 1937, Goga assured Fabricius of his wish for a treaty of friendship with Germany. On the following day, Goga stressed in a newspaper article his desire for a new commercial treaty with the Reich. At the same time, he stated his wish to maintain the traditional links with France and to strengthen ties with Britain.\(^12\) In keeping with this position, Goga, on his elevation as minister president, sent telegrams of friendship both to Romania’s traditional allies (Czechoslovakia, France, Poland and Yugoslavia) as well as to Italy and Germany.\(^13\)

Goga’s New Year telegram to Hitler constituted one of the government’s few concrete attempts to foster the German connection during