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**ROMANIA'S DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION
PROCESS ON THE AGENDA OF THE ROMANIAN-
ITALIAN OFFICIAL MEETINGS BETWEEN 1965 AND
1981**

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TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ROMANIAN-ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN THE 20TH CENTURY (1918-1965)	18
1.1 ROMANIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR. PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE.....	18
1.2 TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND ITALY. RATIFICATION OF THE BASSARABIA TREATY.....	25
1.3 THE NEW PACT ORGANIZING THE LITTLE UNDERSTANDING (1933). ITALY'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NEW ORGANIZATION.....	29
1.4 ROMANIA'S POSITION TO THE ITALIAN PROJECT OF THE "PACT OF THE FOUR" (1933)	33
1.5 ROMANIA AND THE BALKAN UNDERSTANDING PACT (FEBRUARY 9, 1934)	36
1.6 THE ROLE OF NICOLAE TITULESCU AND THE PROBLEM OF THE ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT (1935-1936)	40
1.7 BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE YEARS 1938-1940 AND THE VIENNA DICTATION.....	45
1.8 ROMANIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS IN THE PERIOD 1948-1955.....	52
1.9 THE RE-LAUNCH OF POST-WAR RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA AND ITALY (1955-1959)	58
1.10 THE EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS UNTIL THE MIDDLE 1960s. RAISING THE LEGATION OF ROMANIA AND ITALY TO THE RANK OF EMBASSY.....	68
2. ROMANIAN-ITALIAN POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN THE PERIOD 1965-1981. COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES. FIRST CONTACTS.....	73
2.1 INITIATION OF BILATERAL POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS (1966 - 1968).....	78
2.2 POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROGRESS IN ROMANIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS (1968 - 1973)	91
2.3 MAINTAINING BILATERAL CONTACTS (1973 - 1981)	120
3. ROMANIAN-ITALIAN ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY.....	150
3.1 ROMANIAN-ITALIAN COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE.....	159
3.2 ECONOMIC AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION.....	170
CONCLUSIONS.....	192
ANNEXES.....	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	249

KEYWORDS: Romanian-Italian political-diplomatic relations, political, cultural and economic cooperation, international issues, economic diplomacy, official visits

ABSTRACT:

The present study aims to identify, from the perspective of the two political and ideological systems separated by the Iron Curtain, the evolution of Romanian-Italian bilateral relations, the process of de-tension between the two European states, the way in which the Italian model radiated in Romanian society and the extent to which it contributed to its development and modernization. It will also identify certain obstacles and explore possible solutions for a future scenario of relations, adapted to the needs of a society in constant change and development.

Particular attention is paid to the historical moments that linked the two peoples of Latin origin, to the circumstances that led to the deterioration and stagnation of political and diplomatic relations between the Romanian and Italian states at the end of the Second World War, followed by the actions taken in the early 1960s to normalise bilateral relations. Gradually, the main events that marked the re-initialization of the constructive diplomatic dialogue between the two countries will be highlighted, with their advantages and disadvantages, analyzing in parallel the geopolitical context that favored the development of dialogue through official channels between Romania and Italy.

What is new in this research is the analysis of new themes/topics that have not been or only partially addressed by other researchers. Consequently, the present study aims at illustrating significant political events of Italian and Romanian diplomacy, using as methodological support relevant documents from archives (many unpublished), official documents, political speeches or interventions, public statements of various political leaders, telegrams sent by ambassadors, following the theme of strengthening bilateral Romanian-Italian cooperation relations. This information from official documents was collected following research in Romanian and Italian archives.

The present work is based on a multidisciplinary analysis, covering fields such as political science, history, international relations and European studies, and its contribution to these fields is primarily to enrich the sources of information in these areas. There was a low level of research on the period 1965-1981 and, at the same time, a lack of in-depth research on a theme related to Romanian-Italian cooperation. Another important contribution that research brings to

contemporary society is that, by identifying and analyzing patterns from the recent past, it is possible to simulate patterns that can add value to those of the present.

The study also provides a complex and in-depth perspective on the main economic cooperation interests that have been reflected on Romania's development agenda and on the Romanian-Italian diplomatic characteristics, resulting from the research of official documents in the public and private institutions of the two countries.

The research work comprises three chapters and traces the evolution of the Romanian-Italian bilateral relations, from a political-diplomatic point of view, during the mentioned period. The two states, linked by the same Latin origin, have had significant common episodes over the years, including: the entry into the war on the side of the Entente, the position of neutrality adopted by the two states, common concerns for maintaining and recovering territories, etc.

After the end of the First World War, Italy was a member of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference, where it did not hesitate to unconditionally support Romania's territorial concerns, even though Russia did not recognize the borders laid down in the Paris Treaties and tried to influence Italy in its favour not to ratify the treaty on Bessarabia. In the end, the Friendship Treaty signed on 16 September 1926 and the efforts of Romanian diplomats to seek Italy's consent were not in vain, because in 1927 Romania's right to the territory of Bessarabia was recognized by ratification.

In the second part of the interwar period, Romania's relations with Italy declined, with disputes over the extension of the Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration signed in 1926, and efforts by Romanian diplomats to eliminate some articles that threatened the territorial integrity of the Little Agreement, of which Romania was a part, provided for in the Italian draft Pact of Four initiated by Italian diplomat Benito Mussolini.

Between 1948 and 1955 there was a tense period in the evolution of bilateral relations, which led to a diplomatic crisis, linked to the change of the seat of the Romanian Legation to the Accademia di Romania, as well as certain accusations of espionage. An analysis of how the two countries cooperated between 1955 and 1959 revealed a period of détente. This period of détente was also felt internationally after Stalin's death.

This period of hostility relations was followed by collaboration between the two countries, based on formal diplomatic practices, such as the visit of government delegations to Rome, but also economic collaboration, more specifically the commercial agreement signed in 1962 with ENI

(Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi). Post-war Romanian-Italian relations, which were in their infancy, were not collaborative, but they did have a propagandistic contribution to the establishment of future political contacts. They steadily evolved to the level of political, cultural and economic cooperation, contributing to the process of development and modernization of Romania.

The second chapter of the paper is devoted to the analysis of the visits between the officials of the two countries during the period mentioned. In the first part of the post-war period, diplomatic contacts were very limited. In the 1960s, there were visits by Romanian delegations to Italy, visits by foreign trade ministers on the occasion of industrial exhibitions in Romania, visits by the vice-president of the Council of Ministers, Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, and unofficial visits by Romanian representatives at the invitation of Italian companies.

However, there were factors that favoured the resumption of contacts at a higher level, such as: the problem of Italian goods in Romania, the renewal of some agreements that no longer corresponded to the changes in the Romanian laws, the economic imbalances, as well as the desire of the Italian business environment to establish cooperation with the socialist states, the Italian church that was closed by the representatives of the communist regime, etc. Thus, the first contacts were established through the official visit of the Undersecretary of State in Romania, Mario Zagari, who conveyed the wish of the Italian Foreign Minister that the Romanian Minister, Corneliu Mănescu, should visit Italy. This was followed in 1967 by a return visit by the Italian Foreign Minister, Amintore Fanfani. In the following period, 1968-1973, the main economic, cultural, etc. developments were noted. The high point of Romanian-Italian relations was the high-level visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu to Italy in May 1973. After the high-level visit, diplomatic contacts were maintained at a fairly high level in the period 1973-1981. The main topics discussed were, first of all, bilateral relations and the possibilities of cooperation, where the Italian side tried to respond, despite the turbulent situation in Italy, to the demands coming from the Romanian side. The second part of the talks focused on international issues, and the main discussions were: the Vietnamese problem, disarmament, the European Security Conference, the Middle East, etc.

The visits undertaken were materialized by the signed agreements: the Consular Convention (1967), the Cultural Agreement (1967), the Film Co-Production Agreement (1967), the Film Co-Production Agreement (1968), the Phytosanitary Agreement (1973), etc. All signed agreements were to be ratified. The talks held during these visits led to concrete results in the economy, culture, etc. Thus, among the many benefits obtained, we mention: language courses,

donations of books and scientific articles, access for teachers to library resources, but also to official documents, microfilms, co-production of films, the establishment of consulates in both countries, the abolition of visas for tourist travel, the balancing of the trade balance (export-import), advantages in the postal and telecommunications spheres, the common position of developing bilateral cooperation on third markets, the intensification of bilateral economic, industrial and scientific cooperation.

The third chapter analyses the legal framework of Romanian-Italian relations through the prism of technical-industrial cooperation and trade. Thus, the main agreement governing Romanian-Italian trade was the Trade Agreement signed between the two countries in September 1965 for the period 1966-1969. It was renewed in 1969 (annual protocols) until 1974, when its validity expired, and in the following period trade continued on the basis of a protocol signed in 1975. Technical and industrial cooperation was governed by the Agreement on Economic, Industrial and Technical Cooperation, signed in September 1965. The text of the agreement provided for the establishment of a Romanian-Italian Joint Commission, which was agreed to be of a governmental nature and which, in turn, was able to set up working groups where Italian and Romanian specialists met to analyze certain cooperation prospects. Thus, this agreement had to be exploited, signing various contracts between Italian and Romanian firms. At the same time, the first Romanian-Italian joint ventures were set up, including: VITAMA - for machine tools, ROMITAL - for chemical products, SORIMPEX - building materials, Rifil SRL, together with the Italian company Falco, for the production of acrylic yarns, etc. Also, the Veterinary Convention was signed in 1965, which contributed to the smooth running of trade in animals and food, the Phytosanitary Agreement, the Double Taxation Convention in 1977, etc.

In conclusion, from the perspective of bilateral relations, all these official visits undertaken by Romanian and Italian politicians have created a favourable framework for the development of Romanian-Italian political, economic and cultural relations, contributing to Romania's development. At the same time, these high-level contacts have been fruitful through the conclusion of numerous agreements, with official visits acting as a catalyst for bilateral relations.

The numerous agreements concluded between Romania and Italy have led to the economic and cultural development of both states. They have formalized and strengthened Romanian-Italian relations in several areas of common interest. As a result, there have been important achievements in the collaboration in various areas of interest, namely: linguistics, cinema, tourism, science, etc.

All this was the result of intense diplomatic efforts undertaken by Romanian and Italian diplomats during the period under study.

The visits carried out by the diplomats of both countries throughout the period 1965-1981 contributed to the construction of a significant stage of relations from the political, economic, cultural, etc. point of view. They were carried out both as a continuation of the tradition interrupted by the freeze generated by the Cold War and out of the need to bring about some improvements in relations between the countries by preparing or signing agreements. When there were no important issues on the agenda, politicians consulted on foreign relations.

During the period studied, the evolution of Romanian-Italian relations went through various stages, in the sense that there were periods of time when they experienced a continuous expansion and consolidation, but also periods when they were in stagnation or even decline. However, for most of the period under review, relations between Romania and Italy have developed positively and upwards, with frequent diplomatic contacts and the development of numerous political, economic and cultural partnerships in many areas of common interest.

Among the cultural benefits enjoyed by both countries as a result of the bilateral visits, we can mention the language courses developed by both sides within the educational systems. Emphasis was placed on the study of languages, due to the linguistic affinities between the two countries, rooted in their common Latin origin, and the deepening of knowledge of the two languages was to be achieved through academic trips, bringing together specialists, teachers and experts in the field of research and education. Also worth mentioning here are the refresher courses organized by both sides for teachers and specialists. Also for educational purposes, similarly to the refresher courses, summer courses focused on language studies were to be held. In order to strengthen linguistic cooperation, the cultural agreement provided for the donation of books, scientific articles and documents with official status.

Romanian-Italian trade was legally conducted on the basis of the trade agreement of 1965 and 1969 respectively and the annual protocols between the two countries. They had an upward trend during the period under analysis, except for 1968 and 1975, with Romania recording a positive balance and thus contributing to the state's trade and economic balance. While in the first part of the 1970s Italian imports predominated, since the 1980s the balance has been balanced in Romania's favour, with exports of Romanian products exceeding those of Italy. Although towards

the end of the 1980s the percentage increase in trade was modest, President Ceaușescu's wish, expressed in talks with Italian officials, to reach 1 billion dollars by 1980, was almost fulfilled.

Economic agreements contributed to the development of economic and diplomatic relations between the two countries, and Romanian-Italian joint ventures strengthened these ties. Through annual negotiations based on protocols between the two countries, cooperation has been achieved in several sectors of importance to Romania. The cooperation relationship established with Italy has made it possible to extend it to third markets.

From the perspective of international relations, they have contributed to understanding the position of states on important events of the time and awareness of international bodies. The most intensely debated subject was European security, which, in the view of Romanian diplomats, was a mandatory aspect to be achieved. Italian diplomats, on the other hand, although they supported détente, did not attach such importance to it. Although the two countries belonged to different military blocs, the consultations on this subject took place in a cordial atmosphere, but for each, it had a different connotation in terms of significance and at the same time slightly different opinions, i.e. for the Romanian side European security represented a non-aggression pact and the withdrawal of American troops from Europe, and for the Italian side a balance of powers. The fact that the two countries belonged to different military blocs did not stand in the way of ongoing consultations over the years on international issues at the time.