

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
98 (1), pp. 67-82, 2024

The Political Thought and Foreign Policy of Saint Voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521)

Radu TASCOVICI

Radu Tascovici

University of Pitești, Romania

Email: radu_tascovici@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of foreign policy of Neagoe Basarab, as a result of his studies and experience. We also reveal the foreign relationships of Walachia, during the reign of Neagoe, with Ottoman Empire, Transylvania, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Holy See and the Republic of Venice.

Keywords:

Neagoe Basarab, foreign policy, political thought, Teachings

I. Introduction

Among Romanian monarchs, one of the most brilliant was Neagoe Basarab, who illustrated religious life, culture in general but also diplomacy, an activity that cannot be carried out successfully without elements of cleverness and high education that create closeness and knowledge. The personality of Voivode Neagoe Basarab and his reign received various appreciations from our historians. Among the older scholars, Mihail

Kogălniceanu considered that his reign marked an era of flourishing of the Romanian Country, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu called him “Marcus Aurelius of the Romanian Country, prince artist and philosopher”¹, Nicolae Iorga had contradictory opinions, considering, at first, that Neagoe Voivode was only a disciple of the monks at Bistrița monastery², later outlining the image of a valiant monarch, a good soldier and a tactful diplomat³. Closer to our era, the voivode’s personality and the positive facts of his reign were highlighted by scholars as Dan Zamfirescu⁴, Virgil Căndea⁵, Mircea Malița⁶, Radu Ștefan Vergatti⁷ etc.

II. Military and Political Context in South-Eastern Europe

Since the end of the 14th century, the Turks were present on the southern border of Wallachia, after the conquest of the two Bulgarian states (tsardoms), from Târnovo (1393) and Vidin (1396). Thus, Wallachia had to face an enemy that threatened not only its state entity, but also its internal structure: religion and culture. Relations with the Ottoman Empire were glorious for the small state south of the Carpathians, from Mircea the Elder to Vlad the Impaler; then they were harsher and more oppressive. Prior to the reign of Vlad IV the Monk (1482), our voivodes received a “reign flag” from the Sublime Porte and sometimes had to participate – against their will – in the Turkish campaigns against their blood and faith brothers. Vlad IV the Monk, for example, in 1484, witnessed the conquest of Chilia and Cetatea Albă (White Castle, Akkerman or Asprokastron) and the

¹ Bogdan Petriceicu HAȘDEU, *Cuvinte din bătrâni*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1880, p. 439.

² Nicolae IORGA, *Istoria literaturii românești. Introducere sintetică*, Bucharest, 1929, p. 55.

³ Nicolae IORGA, *Istoria românilor*, vol. IV, Bucharest, 1937, p. 292.

⁴ Dan ZAMFIRESCU, *Neagoe Basarab și Învățăturile către fiul său Theodosie. Probleme controversate*, Bucharest, 1973.

⁵ Virgil CÂNDEA, “Primul monument al experienței românești medievale: «Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab»”, in: *Pagini din trecutul diplomației românești*, Bucharest, 1966, pp. 100-113.

⁶ Mihai MALIȚA, *Diplomația. Școli și instituții*, București, 1970, pp. 91-96.

⁷ Radu Ștefan VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab. Viața, Domnia, Opera*², Curtea de Argeș, 2009, passim.

following year at the looting and burning of Suceava. Radu the Great had to pay a tribute, first 8,000 and then 12,000 ducats, and annually he made an act of submission to the sultan; more than that, in 1505 he ceded the customs and fords of the Danube to Bayezid II. To the north of the river, Ottoman detachments intervened in the disputes for the throne, such as in the case of Vlad V the Younger Voivode, in 1512. This is the moment when Neagoe Basarab becomes the voivode of Wallachia. Later, under Selim I, the Ottomans recorded new conquests in Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean; thus, Wallachia under Neagoe had a period of peace. But the danger was still present. Suleiman I (the Magnificent), Selim's successor, would resume fighting on the European front that passed by the western border of Wallachia, so that in 1529, after the death of Neagoe Voivode, the Turks arrived under the walls of Vienna. The correspondence of the Wallachian rulers with Hungary, Sibiu and Braşov, from Vlad the Monk to Neagoe Basarab, records a lot of information about the Turkish military preparations in the south of the Danube. The letter of the merchant Neacşu from Câmpulung, the first document preserved written in Romanian language, contains such accounts and was written on June 29th-30th, 1521⁸, under the reign of Neagoe; it was addressed to the Saxon mayor of Braşov, Johannes Benkner⁹.

III. The political thought of Neagoe Basarab

As we highlighted above, at the beginning of the 16th century, the international South-East European context was unfavorable to the Romanian countries, as the balance of forces had changed, being dominated by the expanding Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Neagoe Basarab's foreign policy efforts, under the given conditions, would reflect several main directions: the recognition of his reign on the House of Basarab's throne, keeping peace with the Turks by paying a tribute that excluded their interference in the country's internal affairs, and maintaining wide diplomatic relations,

⁸ Matei CAZACU, "Sur la date de la lettre de Neacşu de Câmpulung (1521)", in: *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, VI, 1968, no. 3, pp. 525-528.

⁹ Academia Română, *Istoria românilor*, vol. IV, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 412-416.

with all the Christian states and with all the forces hostile to the Ottoman Empire, a direction through which he sought to save Wallachia from political isolation, and in case of need, to be able to receive military support from the powers that were traditionally allies: the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. The Romanian countries, Moldavia and Wallachia, had to carry out similar political efforts to save their statehood, religious freedom and fundamental institutions. The elements of this foreign policy were deeply thought out by Neagoe Basarab. His reflections are represented by his foreign policy and the diplomacy and political conduct pages of the famous manual entitled *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab către fiul său, Theodosie* (*Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to His Son, Theodosie*), which he wrote. Here we find the most beautiful “summa” of the medieval Romanian political thinking. The author’s goal is to give his son and successor advice for all the circumstances of a voivode life. They rise from a rich experience, but also from a deep Christian conviction. First he considers that the voivode is “God’s anointed”: “(...) God did not gather all of you so that you could all be anointed (...), but he put you anointed and shepherd over the flock” or “(...) remember and do not give your honor to your nobles, because you put them [boyars], and they do not put you [voivode], but God put you to be His anointed”¹⁰.

The importance that the author of the *Teachings* gives to diplomacy emerges especially from chapter VIII, subtitled “About Messengers and Wars”. In the first part of the chapter, Neagoe voivode points out to his successor that the messengers come either for “peace and favor”, or “to hunt for words” through “wise and good words”, or to provoke to battle “through harsh and envious words”, each as he received a command from the one who sent him. Regardless of the messengers’ messages and intentions, all must be received with honor and gifts, therefore, in Wallachia, ambassadors were given the same respect as in the European states of the era.

From the border, the most important boyars had to welcome the ambassador with elegance and retinue, as “ambassador’s honor is our

¹⁰ Gheorghe MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab către fiul său Theodosie*, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 342-343.

honor”. Neagoe’s instructions, especially in the text of the Greek version¹¹, we find some influences of the tried and tested Byzantine diplomacy or of the experienced Republic of Venice¹². For example, “the dwelling of the messenger be far from the prince palaces”. The messenger must be called to Court after two or three days of rest. He must be impressed by the pomp and the splendor of diplomatic protocol. The voivode will be “adorned with splendor and beautified”, being surrounded by “honorable elders and counselors sitting in their places, and the younger ones, dressed in bright clothes, stand around the voivode, in a cheerful attitude, and the other servants, also standing, each according to his place and rank”¹³.

The brilliance of the reception, which was supposed to impress the messenger, as well as the cheerful face with which his message was listened to, were the appearances under which the prince’s attention was hidden, doubled by a dignified attitude, imperturbable and uninfluenced by what the messenger was saying: “Neither his harsh words make you sad, nor good ones cheer you up”. Through this conduct, one can correctly decipher “... his words and the intention of the ruler who sent him and also know his mind, whether it is good or whether it is hostile...”. This is where the first part of the audience ended. In the second one, after reading the messenger’s message, the voivode would ask “with sweetness and gentleness” if there was anything to add to what was said from behalf of the messenger’s master. The voivode’s answer must not be given immediately, but the messenger will be taken honorably “to his host”. The voivode will think about what he will answer “(...) for the word is like the wind and it goes away, and you cannot stop it after it has come out of your mouth, but you will be repenting for that word”¹⁴.

At the second audience, the voivode will answer “(...) to everything, in turn, not with anger”¹⁵. He will not have to let himself be influenced

¹¹ Vasile GRECU, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab, domnul Țării Românești (1512-1521)*, București, 1942, passim.

¹² Philippe AMIGUET, *L’Age d’Or de la Diplomatie*, Paris, 1963, pp. 287-299 (chapter about the foreign ambassadors at Venice).

¹³ V. GRECU, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab*, pp. 131-133.

¹⁴ V. GRECU, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab*, p. 133.

¹⁵ G. MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab*, p. 285.

by the attitude of the messenger: “If he speaks to you with anger, you speak to him with gentleness, if he speaks to you with enmity, you speak to him with peace (...)”. He will also have to take care to give an answer that impresses through logic and argumentation, after a secret deliberation in the royal council: “(...) let your words be full of wisdom and pierce him and his lord in the heart, like arrows, so speak to him wisely”¹⁶. This second meeting was followed by the official banquet. On departure, the messenger will receive a gift and will be driven to the border. As can be seen, everything is provided down to the smallest details in this work, which also acquires the valence of a diplomatic manual. The favorable impression on the messenger had to result from the skillful combination of abundance, courtesy, self-control and moderation. The peaceful, temperate response addressed to the messenger had to include decency and wisdom, which recalls the advice that emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus had addressed to his son¹⁷.

Neagoe Voivode pays great attention to the choice of the ambassadors sent to the European courts. First he recommends praying to God “with earnestness, so that He may strengthen our minds”. Then, following the consultation with the experienced ministers and boyars, the most suitable person will be chosen for the entrusted message, who “will speak your word very well and without fear, as if you yourself spoke your word to that ruler (...)”¹⁸. Any influence in the designation of the messenger is completely excluded: “Do not let one of your ministers tell you to send one of their relatives and they not be suitable”, but, according to the Holy Scripture, “Never give the honor and the income to another” (According to Baruch 4, 3 and Sirach 33, 24.). The indications given to the messenger differ depending on the nature of the message: to answer or to start negotiations. In this situation, the negotiations were to be more difficult, the attitude of the other party having to be anticipated as much as possible. The “teaching” will be given to the messenger by the voivode himself, with great care, because the ambassador will be far from the country, and he will base only on the indications received and on his own decisions. The ambassador

¹⁶ G. MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab*, p. 285.

¹⁷ Constantine VII PORPHYROGENETUS, *De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae*, PG 109, 73-1417.

¹⁸ G. MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab*, p. 291.

represents the one who sent him. Therefore, success or failure, good or bad impression will be attributed to its master. Although he emphasizes the importance of diplomacy, Neagoe voivode also observes its limits. Diplomacy cannot replace honor, and honor cannot be renounced: “For it is better to die with honor than to have your name with shame”¹⁹.

In chapter IX, continuing the argument from the previous chapter and moving to the military level, Neagoe advises his son and descendants: “Don’t be like that bird called cuckoo, which gives its eggs to other birds in order to hatch its young, but be like the hawk and guard your nest”. Although brave, the falcon is modest and cautious. He is ready to give up his prey to the strongest, to win his peace. Likewise, a wise prince must yield to a strong opponent, but only when peace can be saved by a non-degrading sacrifice. It was exactly the situation of the Wallachia, Moldavia, Venice and Genoa, which had bought peace with the Turks by paying a tribute; the Byzantine Empire used to do the same, using the practical solution of a peaceful, constructive, culture-creating civilization, in the face of a destructive enemy.

The pages of military art in chapter IX contain exhortations to fight bravely, but also the impressive advice of a man of great character: even defeated, “but do not leave your country”, but resume the fight “with bravery against the enemy”, “in the name of Jesus Christ”²⁰. This advice was completely fulfilled by the voivode’s son-in-law, the glorious voivode Radu of Afumați, who in only four years (1521-1525), fought 19 battles, managing to remove the great danger of the transformation of the Wallachia into a pashalik²¹.

IV. Relations with the Ottoman Empire

Considering that Neagoe Basarab occupied the throne with Turkish support and that the main political and military factor south of the Danube was the Ottoman Empire, it is natural that the relations of the Wallachia with this power were given special attention.

¹⁹ G. MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab*, p. 309.

²⁰ G. MIHĂILĂ, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Vodă Basarab*, p. 319.

²¹ V. CÂNDEA, “Primul monument...”, p. 321.

On the 23rd January 1512, when Neagoe obtained the throne of Wallachia, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by Sultan Bayezid II Veli (19 May 1481 – 24 April 1512). It is possible that the new voivode asked the relative of the Craiovești boyars, Pasha Mehmed beg of Nikopol, to inform the sultan about the change of reign, to assure him of Neagoe's good faith, stressing that, in the context of the difficulties the sultan had to face in Anatolia, in the north of the Danube, he had a reliable person; the same letter also contained the promise that the new voivode would increase the tribute by 100,000 aspers per year²².

As soon as Selim I ascended the throne as sultan on April 25, 1512, Neagoe voivode, being well informed, reacted quickly by sending congratulations and gifts, as recorded by the chroniclers Saad' eddin and Kodja Hussein²³. Thus, Neagoe proved that he had a consolidated rule in the country and that he could pay his financial obligations. Immediately after the defeat of the pretender Mircea, the son of Mihnea the Evil – end of May 1512²⁴, he sent a letter to Constantinople informing about the victory and requesting a document of confirmation from the Porte²⁵. Thus, as a result of these actions, as payment of the increased tribute, then also of occasional gifts, the defeat of the pretender Mircea, to which the interventions of Mehmed Beg would have been added, probably in the summer of 1513, Sultan Selim I granted him the *ahidnâme* or the "Bill of Oath" of investiture²⁶. Once reaching this level of relations with the Porte, Neagoe Basarab knew how to keep this level by regularly paying tribute and managing Ottoman susceptibilities, that is, he did not pursue an overt policy of rapprochement with the Christian states; he was also wise and skillful in using the potential strength of the Ottoman Empire to stop any expansionist tendencies of the Kingdom of Hungary. Thus,

²² Mustafa Ali MEHMET, *Documente turcești privind istoria României I. 1455-1774*, Bucharest, 1976, pp. 926-927.

²³ M. A. MEHMET, *Documente turcești...*, pp. 332, 467.

²⁴ R. Șt. VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab...*, p. 114.

²⁵ M. A. MEHMET, *Documente turcești...*, p. 9.

²⁶ R. Șt. VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab...*, p. 114; Șerban PAPACOSTEA, "Tratatele Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Imperiul Otoman în secolele XIV-XVI: ficțiune politică și realitate istorică", in: *Stat, societate, națiune. Interpretări istorice*, Cluj-Napoca, 1982, pp. 100-102.

when in September 1515 he went to Constantinople, Neagoe Basarab was very well received, and his knowledge of the Turkish language will have made a special impression²⁷. The same normal relations with the High Porte continued during the reign of Suleiman I, the successor of Selim I. In celebration of his ascension to the throne, Neagoe Basarab sent him gifts, requesting a new *ahidnâme* or the “Bill of Oath” to secure his reign. But the requested document would arrive in Wallachia in the last months of Neagoe’s life and reign, in the spring-summer of 1521.

We could conclude that in his relations with the High Porte, Neagoe Basarab applied the ideas recorded in the *Teachings* in the parable of the falcon and the hawk, that is, he maintained peaceful relations with the sultans’ throne and managed to preserve the legal status of autonomy of the Wallachia and remove the danger of Ottoman attacks of robbery and plunder in the country on the left bank of the Danube. He was the right man at a time when the Romanian Countries could protect themselves by using diplomacy and not by force of arms²⁸.

V. Relations with Transylvania

Contemporary documents show us that the closest economic and political ties were maintained by Wallachia with Transylvania. Interesting are the relations with Braşov, one of the largest centers of international trade, in Eastern and Southeastern Europe²⁹. Between Neagoe and the people of Braşov, shortly after the beginning of his reign, in 1512, a conflict would break out that would last almost 5 years; it was a result of the voivode protectionist policy, in favor of the Wallachian merchants. The reaction of the people of Braşov was very harsh, consisting in the killing of some Wallachian merchants; the voivode, in a letter of rare violence, reminded

²⁷ R. Şt. VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab...*, p. 116.

²⁸ Nicolae CIACHIR, Gheorghe BERCAN, *Diplomaţia europeană în epoca modernă*, Bucharest, 1984, p. 24.

²⁹ Manole NEAGOE, “Politica externă a lui Neagoe Basarab”, in: *Studii. Revistă istorică*, XIX (1966) 4, p.751.

the people of Braşov that their bad deeds would lead him to attack the Land of Bârsa:

“We would have loved peace and justice, we would not have loved war. But you don’t want peace... For this, if you have started war, then from now on you beware, and know that I will make the Land of Bârsa so that even its place will not be known”³⁰.

This economic conflict was also doubled by a political one: the townspeople at the foot of the Tâmpa mountain offered shelter to Mircea-Miloş, the son of Mihnea the Evil and pretender to the throne of the Wallachia, and supported him in an attempt to overthrow Neagoe in the summer of 1512. The action failed, and the Braşov aristocracy tried to replace Neagoe with another suitor, whose name has not been preserved. The voivode was notified in time, and his men captured the pretender, brought him to Wallachia and “marked” him, as the custom was³¹.

All the attempts of the people of Braşov were thwarted, and Neagoe consolidated its rule in the interior, so that in 1517 relations with the Transylvanian city were normalized; on March 17th 1517, a cooperation treaty was concluded between the two parties, and in 1520 the representatives of Braşov were invited to the consecration of the metropolitan cathedral in Târgovişte³². According to the treaty in 1517, Neagoe permanently informed the people of Braşov about the movements of the Turks. In 1520, for example, he informed them that Sultan Suleiman I made war preparations towards Central Europe; in the wider context of this treaty, in the summer of 1521, the Letter of Neacşu from Câmpulung – the first document preserved written in Romanian – which offered news about the movements of the Ottomans in the south of the Danube.

Relations with the second largest city in southern Transylvania, Sibiu, were good from the beginning, except for some small disputes, due to

³⁰ D. ZAMFIRESCU, *Neagoe Basarab...*, pp. 392-392.

³¹ Grigore TOCILESCU, *534 documente istorice slavo-române din Țara Românească și Moldova, privitoare la legăturile cu Ardealul (1346-1603)*, Bucharest, 1931, p. 228.

³² Eudoxiu HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor XV. Acte și scrisori din arhivele orașelor ardeleni: Bistrița, Braşov, Sibiu*, part 1: 1358-1600, Bucharest, 1911-1913, p. 243.

misunderstandings between Wallachian and Sibiu merchants. When his subjects were treated wrong, Neagoe intervened threateningly, but there was no conflict³³. It was natural for Neagoe to have good relations with the Sibians, since the Craiovescu family, of which he was a part, had established close and complex relations with the leaders of this city. On February 1st, 1512, shortly after ascending to the throne, Neagoe sent his confidant Ștefan to Sibiu, with a mission to the Sibiu aristocracy, but also to resolve some of the voivode's personal affairs³⁴. In the same year, on December 4th, he addressed a letter to them that showed how our voivode saw relations with the Sibians: "(...) Let your lordships also think that between us peace and understanding would be better than strife (...) and your lordship's people and ours, better feed with good peace and tranquility"³⁵.

The establishment of good relations with the two cities of merchants and craftsmen was also linked to the fact that both, being important centers where the Hanseatic trade ended, could help the voivode from the south of the Carpathians in the development of political relations with Hungary and Transylvania of the voivode Ioan Zápolya. For example, on July 9th, 1517, shortly after the treaty with the people of Brasov, the chapter of the cathedral in Alba Iulia was informed that the voivode of Transylvania had entrusted Neagoe Basarab and his son, Teodosie, with the domain of Geoagiu and the related villages, in the county of Hunedoara. The act of donation also records the reason: in case of "unfortunate" times, the voivode and his family would have a safe place of refuge³⁶.

VI. Relations with Hungary

Wallachia, nominally, was under the suzerainty of the Hungarian Kingdom, but because the suzerain state could not afford to pursue an active policy

³³ M. NEAGOE, "Politica externă a lui Neagoe Basarab", p. 754.

³⁴ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, p. 218.

³⁵ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, p. 221.

³⁶ Endre VERESS, *Acta et epistolae relationum Transylvaniae Hungariaeque cum Moldavia et Valachia I. 1468-1540*, Budapest, 1914, pp. 112-113.

south of the Carpathians, the voivodes were confirmed by the Turks, accepted the payment of tribute and once crowned, sent messengers in Buda, to be recognized by the kings of Hungary.

Neagoe followed the same policy with Hungary. On the one hand, he wanted to secure his back and obtain a refuge, as we presented above, for hard times and on the other hand, he wanted to prevent any possible support that the Hungarian Kingdom would have given to the pretenders to the throne. A treaty between Neagoe and the Kingdom of Hungary was signed on March 17th, 1517. Among other things, Neagoe stated that if

“it were to happen that those who are pagans and enemies of the holy cross and the holy crown wanted to cross the plains towards the Hungarian parts, in order to plunder, then my Lordship and the boyars of my reign and with all the country, if it seems to us that we can stand before them to stop them, then we will stand to stop them; and if we see that we cannot..., then let us inform... the Highness of the Kingdom and the people of Brasov...”³⁷.

Following this treaty and the one with the people of Braşov, the voivode and his son, Teodosie, received a large domain in the county of Hunedoara, Geoagiu de Jos, with the related villages, as a fief in which they could take refuge with the whole family in case of “unfortunate” times³⁸.

This document indicates that, in international relations, Neagoe Basarab used the principle of feudal law that allowed him, depending on the country’s interests, to have several suzerains at the same time. Thus, using the fragile political balance between the Christian world and the Turks, the diplomacy of Neagoe Basarab made Wallachia be included in the armistice treaty concluded between the Ottoman Porte and the Kingdom of Hungary in February 1519. The text of the document specified this vassal plurality and recorded the integrity of the territory of Wallachia, and Sultan Selim I would not impose new tributes³⁹.

³⁷ Gr. TOCILESCU, *534 documente istorice...*, p. 263.

³⁸ E. VERESS, *Acta et epistolae...*, pp. 112-113.

³⁹ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, p. 29.

Therefore, the fruits of a balanced and active foreign policy led to the fact that in 1519, Neagoe Basarab's rule was consolidated by the confirmation of the Porte (1513), by the recognition by Hungary of Louis II Jagello (1517) and the integrity of the country by an international treaty (1519).

VII. Relations with Moldavia and Poland

Initially, relations with Moldavia were strained, as the Moldavian voivode Bogdan III, in 1511, married Ruxandra, the sister of Mircea, the son of Mihnea the Evil, a claimant to the throne of Wallachia. This pretender was supported by Bogdan III and the people of Braşov in 1512. In 1514, as retaliation, Neagoe Voivode offered help to a pretender to the seat of Moldavia, who was seconded by Hungarian military support. Bogdan won, but, following this conflict, relations between the two Romanian countries did not normalize⁴⁰.

After the death of Bogdan III and the ascension to the throne of his son, Ştefăniţă (1517-1527), the relations between the two Romanian extra Carpathian states became particularly close, so that a prospective marriage was established between the Moldavian voivode and princess Stana, one of Neagoe Basarab's daughters; it was even decided that the two states should have common messengers and representatives in diplomatic relations with the West⁴¹.

Neagoe's relations with the Poles were always very good. The Polish king considered that the road through Transylvania and Wallachia was safer for his messengers going to Constantinople, than the road through Moldavia⁴². The same monarch fixed Wallachia as the meeting place of his messengers with the messenger of the king of Hungary⁴³.

⁴⁰ R. Şt. VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab...*, pp. 117-118.

⁴¹ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, pp. 307-309.

⁴² E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, pp. 151-152.

⁴³ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, p. 152.

VIII. Relations with the Republic of Venice and the Holy See

During the reign of Neagoe, there were fights in the Ottoman Empire between the sons of Bayezid II, Selim and Ahmed. In this situation, the idea of organizing a new Crusade was supported by Pope Leo X. In November 1513, at the insistence of the king of Hungary, the pope was considering measures that would lead to its organization⁴⁴. Meanwhile, king Sigismund of Poland had been appointed commander of the crusading army which was to be assembled; but due to the inability of the Hungarian kingdom to organize and maintain a larger army, the crusade led to the peasant war in Transylvania, led by Gheorghe Doja. However, the idea of anti-Ottoman struggle was not abandoned. Within this atmosphere, Neagoe Voivode sought to establish diplomatic ties with the Republic of Venice and the Holy See. The same goals were pursued: maintaining a political balance in the Lower Danube, which meant the neutrality of Wallachia, preserving the border with the Ottoman Empire on the Danube, and, in an extreme situation, the armed struggle against the Turks in alliance with the Christian states⁴⁵.

In 1518, the Ragusan doctor Ieronim Matievici was sent on a mission to Venice, representing the voivode Neagoe. It was the first messenger of the Wallachia to reach the Serenissima Republic. On February 1st, 1518, he participated in the service celebrated in the church of Santa Maria Formosa, together with the envoys of the Holy See, France, Hungary, Ferrara and Ragusa. On March 3rd, he was still in Venice and was knighted by the Doge. Also then he received an expensive cloth, which had cost over 100 ducats, for his master⁴⁶.

From the act of ennoblement, it appears that this land had a political mission, which consisted in establishing friendship ties between Neagoe Basarab and Venice. The year 1519 marks the peak of Neagoe voivode's diplomatic activity. The spiritual center of the crusade preparations was the Holy See. The voivode was aware of everything that was happening in the European political world and sought to integrate into this policy which

⁴⁴ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁵ R. Șt. VERGATTI, *Neagoe Basarab...*, p. 125.

⁴⁶ M. NEAGOE, "Politica externă a lui Neagoe Basarab", p. 758.

was active in the sense of the anti-Ottoman struggle. Only one envoy was sent to Rome, representing the interests of Wallachia and Moldavia, a Greek, Anton Pankalos. In June, he was received in audience by the pope, to whom he showed that “Basarab and his chosen sons, Theodosius and Peter and his successors and Stephen and his sons, by this Holy See and by the Roman Church, through the perpetual understanding should be united”, promising that together with the pope and the other Christian princes they will follow the expedition against “Selim, the tyrant of the Turks”, that they will never make peace with the Turks without the consent of the pope; however, they set the condition that the pope, in any treaty he will conclude with the Turks, should consider the two voivodes as allies and be included in that treaty in this capacity. More than that, the pope accepted that the Romanian voivods would share in the distribution of the goods taken from the Turks⁴⁷.

Unfortunately, the evolution of political and military events completely thwarted this plan. The diplomatic missions that represented Neagoe Basarab in Venice and Rome brought him a special prestige, but they did not change the delicate political-military balance in the Lower Danube. On the contrary, they revealed that the West was incapable of real union in the face of the Ottoman danger, so that good relations with the Turks had to be preserved further, as Neagoe Basarab had intuited from the beginning of his reign.

IX. Orthodox Church Politics

An essential aspect of the foreign policy of Voivode Neagoe Basarab is his rich gifts and aid offered to Church institutions in the Orthodox East: The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Holy Mount Athos, the monasteries of Meteors, in Serbia and Macedonia, etc. But these gifts and aids, in addition to the expression of fraternal Christian support, outlined a wider cultural-ecclesiastical framework of the anti-Ottoman struggle. We can see, therefore, in the presence of the ecumenical patriarch Theolipt, the abbots

⁴⁷ E. HURMUZAKI, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor...*, XV/1, pp. 307-309.

of the monasteries of Holy Mount, headed by their protos or superior, Gavriil, and other high church figures, at the consecration of the monastery built by the voivode at Curtea de Argeș, the symbol of a hope what was reborn in the souls of Christians in Greece and Levant of liberation from the Ottoman yoke.

At the same time, we can consider that at this post-Byzantine splendor, plans and proposals were made for the conjugation of anti-Ottoman efforts. Then, in the foreground, was the liberation of the Christians from the East, polemical discussions having no place; maybe that is why in his *Teachings* Neagoe voivode does not make a polemic but shows his sympathy towards Western Christianity. It could be, Saint Voivode Neagoe Basarab, a new ecumenical model, in which the joint action in the face of the assaults of a pagan civilization will take the place of endless polemical discussions between Easterners and Westerners.

X. Conclusion

The conclusion of what has been said so far is that in the complex person of Voivode Neagoe Basarab, the qualities of a fine and prudent diplomat, of a politician with clear plans, of a Christian with deep convictions, but also a ruler who understood the role of authority were happily united with his responsibility for his people and country. His political thought was always reflected in all his political actions. In other words, as a monarch or a devoted Christian man of state, Neagoe Basarab acted according to his convictions and his political thought.