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**POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA
AND ITALY (1935-1940)**

DOCTORAL THESIS

- abstract -

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- Romania;
- Italy;
- *Il Duce*;
- Paris Peace Conference;
- World War I;
- League of Nations;
- Great Powers;
- World War II;
- Neutral Countries Block;
- The Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact.

INTRODUCTION

The interwar period represents one of the most sensitive stage of history due to its complexity and very important consequences that influenced the fate of Europe and therefore Romania. For this reason, the study of the Romania's relations with the Great Powers in the chronological segment mentioned may provide an explanation regarding the configuration of the foreign policy in Bucharest, near the collapse of "Romania Mare".

The choice of the topic is based on the present recital according to which – starting with the Italian-Ethiopian war, unleashed in autumn 1935-, the Romanian-Italian relations tend to become more acute mainly due to the position of Romanian Foreign Minister, Nicolae Titulescu, regarding the issue of sanctioning the government in Rome. Titulescu's attitude towards the Italian-Ethiopian conflict prejudiced Romania in the general context of the international situations in the years 1935-1936. Although, the Romanian minister did the right things in a general position, he was too involved in issues beyond the real possibilities of Romania. Titulescu acted perhaps in an excess of pride, rather as a representative of Geneva than one of Bucharest's. Thus Romania has attracted resentments from Italy and it became increasingly isolated in Europe, in the circumstance in which, in the second half of the '30s, the predominant role, mainly in Balkans, will belong to the revisionist states, led by Italy and Germany. However, France, the Romanian's traditional ally, gave up to be a dominant power in Europe, its purpose being to ensure its own security. Although we can't doubt his abilities, Titulescu didn't understand this phenomenon that was specializing in those years and bet everything on one card, the League of Nations.

1940 is another decisive year for Romanian-Italian relations, too. This is revealed by the role the fascist government played, led by Mussolini in support given to Bucharest in the Bessarabia issue and then the pressure on territorial cessions in favor to the U.S.S.R., Hungary and Bulgaria.

The main aim of this thesis is the analysis of political- diplomatic relations between Romania and Italy 1935-1940, in the specified context. There were used historical sources from original Romanian and foreign archives. One of the most important Romanian archives were the documents from *The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, mainly the *71/Italy* and *71/Romania* funds. Regarding the image of relations of the two states, I used the *71/U.R.S.S.* fund but also *71/Hungary* and *71/Bulgaria* funds and through the political evolution from Budapest and Sofia, the diplomacy from these two capitals being deeply rooted in the foreign policy of Mussolini. Other documents that I consider to be important are

those from the Central Historical National Archives, like *Constantin Argetoianu (1883-1935)*, *Nicolae Titulescu (1836-1971)*, *Alexandru Averescu (1913-1938)* and *Prime Minister (1859-1940) funds*. Except the original sources, I've also used documents from *Hungarian National Archive*, more precisely the *K63 fund*, that contains diplomatic documents. These documents demonstrate the duality of Mussolini's foreign policy discourse, in which on the one hand he was declaring himself a „defender of the Latin” in Eastern Europe, and on the other hand he supported the Hungarian revisionism.

The following published documents were very useful in my research: *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*¹, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*² or *Documents Diplomatiques Français*³. The Italian diplomatic documents have an outstanding contribution, although they were not so used by the Romanian historiography in that period (1935-1940). The documents are about Mussolini's policy, both externally and internally, which can generate a more complete image of the fascist regime, Italy's great power ambitions and the consequences of the policy led in Rome – for Europe in general and Romania in particular. The Hungarian diplomatic documents⁴ are very important in understanding the complexity of international

¹ *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani settima serie: 1922-1935, vol.I (13 ottobre-26 aprile 1923)*, Istituto Poligrafico Italiano, Libreria dello stato, Roma, 1953; *vol.II (27 aprile 1923-22 febbraio 1924)*, Roma, 1955; *vol.III (23 febbraio 1924-14 maggio 1925)*, Roma, 1959; *vol.IV (15 maggio 1925-6 febbraio 1927)*, Roma, 1962; *vol.V (7 febbraio-31 dicembre 1927)*, Roma, 1967; *vol. VII (13 settembre 1929-14 aprile 1930)*, Roma, 1972; *vol.IX (15 aprile-31 dicembre 1930)*, Roma, 1975; *vol.X (1 gennaio-4 settembre 1931)*, Roma, 1978; *ottava serie: 1935-1939, vol.XII, 23 maggio-11 agosto 1939*, Roma, 1952.

² *Documents on British Foreign Policy (1919-1939), 1st series, vol.V*, His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1954; *vol.VIII*, London, 1958; *vol.XII*, London, 1962; *vol.XXIV*, London, 1983; *2nd series, vol.I*, London, 1946; *vol. XV*, London, 1961; *vol. XVI*, London, 1962; *3rd series, vol.II*, London, 1950; *vol.IV*, London, 1951; *vol.V*, London, 1952.

³ *Documents Diplomatiques Français (1932-1939), 1^{er} serie (1932-1935), tome I (19 juillet-4 novembre 1932)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1964; *tome II (15 novembre 1932-17 mars 1933)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1966; *tome IV (16 juillet-12 novembre 1933)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1968; *tome VI (13 mars-26 juillet 1934)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1972; *tome VIII (1^{er} novembre 1934-15 janvier 1935)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1979; *tome IX (16 janvier-13 mars 1935)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1980; *tome X (24 mars-31 mai 1935)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1981; *tome XI (1^{er} juin-20 août 1935)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1982; *tome XII (21 août-15 octobre 1935)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1984; *2^e serie (1936-1939), tome I (1^{er} janvier- 31 mars 1936)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1963; *tome II (1^{er} avril-18 juillet 1936)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1964; *tome IV (20 novembre 1936-19 février 1937)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1967; *tome V (20 février-31 mai 1937)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1968; *tome VI (1^{er} juin-20 septembre 1937)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1970; *tome VII (29 septembre 1937-16 janvier 1938)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1972; *tome VIII (17 janvier-20 mars 1938)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1973; *tome XI (3 septembre-2 octobre 1938)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1977; *tome XII (3 octobre-30 novembre 1938)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1978; *tome XIV (1^{er} février-15 mars 1939)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1980; *tome XVI (1^{er} mai-24 juin 1939)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1983; *tome XVII (25 juin-12 août 1939)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1984; *tome XVIII (13-25 août)*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1985.

⁴ *Diplomaciai Iratok Magyarorszag Kulpolitikajahoz (1936-1945), vol.II*, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1965; *vol. III*, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1970; *vol. IV*, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1972; *vol. V*, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1982.

foreign relations from the interwar period. They also give us another perspective of Italian foreign policy and the interests of Rome in the Danube basin and Balkans.

Memoirs and journals, mostly published since 1990, are significant sources. They are useful not only for studying but also for in-depth understanding of the Romanian-Italian relations in the most intimate ways. The most relevant are those signed by important politicians of the time, including Argetoianu⁵, Raoul Vasile Bossy⁶, Galeazzo Ciano⁷, Grigore Gafencu⁸, Mihail Manoilescu⁹, Valeriu Pop¹⁰, Nicolae Titulescu¹¹ and not least King Charles II¹².

The press during the interwar years is of major importance. It stood for the defence of the territorial status quo in an overwhelming majority. Analyzing newspapers published in Bucharest in the '20s and '30s, we can get a picture closer to reality, regarding the perception of the Romanian society of the major political events of the time.

In terms of historiography, Romanian-Italian relations throughout the interwar period were approached indirectly, with only a synthesis of Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, Ion Pătroiu și Gheorghe Nicolescu (*Political, diplomatic and military Romanian-Italian relations, 1914-1947*)¹³. With an extensive record of original sources, internal and external (English, American, German and Italian), the authors address a wide range of political, diplomatic, military and economic issues. However, archival funds are only to a small extent for Italy, fact that can damage an approach to profound relations between Rome and Bucharest. In the same vein, the press is mainly used for marking the visit of general Averescu in Italy, in

⁵ Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice, vol.I (2 februarie 1935-31 decembrie 1936)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 1998; *vol.II (1 ianuarie-30 iunie 1937)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 1999; *vol.III (1 iulie-31 decembrie 1937)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2001; *vol.IV (1 ianuarie-30 iunie 1938)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2002; *vol.V (1 iulie-31 decembrie 1938)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2002; *vol.VI (1 ianuarie-30 iunie 1939)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2003; *vol. VII (1 iulie-20 noiembrie 1939)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2003; *vol. VIII (1 ianuarie-21 iulie; 25 octombrie-31 decembrie 1940)*, Editura Machiavelli, București, 2007.

⁶ Raoul Vasile Bossy, *Amintiri din viața diplomatică (1918-1940), vol.I (1918-1937), vol.II (1938-1940)*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1993.

⁷ Galeazzo Ciano, *Jurnal politic*, Editura Elit, București, f.a.

⁸ Grigore Gafencu, *Ultimele zile ale Europei*, Editura Militară, București, 1992.

⁹ Mihail Manoilescu, *Dictatul de la Viena. Memorii (iulie-august 1940)* Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1991.

¹⁰ Valeriu Pop, *Bătălia pentru Ardeal*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1992; idem, *Amintiri Politice (1936-1945)*, Editura Vestala, București, 1999.

¹¹ Nicolae Titulescu, *Politica externă a României (1937)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1994.

¹² Carol al II-lea, *Însemnări zilnice (1937-1953). Volumul II: 13 martie-15 decembrie 1939 (Caietele 8-10)*, Editura Scripta, București, 1997; *Volumul III: 15 decembrie-7 septembrie 1940 (Caietele 11-11A)*, Editura Scripta, București, 1998; idem, *În zodia Satanei. Reflexiuni asupra politicii internaționale*, Editura Universitaria, București, 1994; idem, *Între datorie și pasiune. Însemnări zilnice. Vol.I (1904-1939)*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2003.

¹³ Florin Dobrinescu, Ion Pătroiu, Gheorghe Nicolescu, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare româno-italiene (1914-1947)*, Editura Intact, Craiova, 1999.

September 1929¹⁴. On the other hand, sources from multiple destinations serve the purpose of forming a general overview of the Romanian foreign policy. The thesis is, however, a fundamental contribution to the bilateral relations of Romania from the first half of the twentieth century.

The emergence in 2011 of the synthesis *Romanian-Italian diplomatic relations. 1918-1940*, written by Lilian Zamfiroiu¹⁵ represents a new contribution to the historiography of the relations between the two countries in the interwar period. The author uses successfully certain documents belonging to the Italian diplomatic archives, showing interest in knowing the Italian historical perspective on the relations of the two countries between the two world wars.

The mentioned paper provides some insight and some evidence of unpublished documents of this period.

The minimal approach to the Romanian-Italian relations in the period preceding the World War II is compensated to some extent, by the existence of numerous papers, studies and articles aimed at Romanian's foreign policy in the interwar period and in which the connections between Bucharest and Rome are addressed, too. The works signed by Gheorghe Buzatu (*Dosare ale războiului mondial (1939-1945)*¹⁶, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*¹⁷), Eliza Campus (*Mica Înțelegere*¹⁸), Ion Calafeteanu (*Revizionismul ungar și România*¹⁹), Ioan Chiper (*România și Germania nazistă*²⁰), Valentin Ciorbea (*Din istoria secolului XX. Volumul I: 1918-1939*²¹), Viorica Moisuc (*Premisele izolării politice a României*²², *Istoria relațiilor internaționale până la jumătatea secolului al XX-lea*²³, *Diplomația României și problema apărării suveranității naționale în perioada martie-1938-mai 1940*²⁴), etc. are very useful.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.126.

¹⁵ Lilian Zamfiroiu, *Relații diplomatice româno-italiene. 1918-1940*, București, Editura Tritonic, 2011.

¹⁶ Gheorghe Buzatu, *Dosare ale războiului mondial (1939-1945)*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 1978.

¹⁷ Idem, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial, vol.I*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1988.

¹⁸ Eliza Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1997.

¹⁹ Ion Calafeteanu, *Revizionismul ungar și România*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1995.

²⁰ Ioan Chiper, *România și Germania nazistă. Relațiile româno-germane între comandamente politice și interese economice (ianuarie 1933-martie 1938)*, Editura Elion, București, 2000.

²¹ Valentin Ciorbea, *Din istoria secolului XX. Volumul I: 1918-1939*, Editura Ex Ponto, Constanța, 2006.

²² Viorica Moisuc, *Premisele izolării politice a României*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1991.

²³ Eadem, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale până la mijlocul secolului al XX-lea*, Editura Fundației România de Măine, București, 2002.

²⁴ Eadem, *Diplomația României și problema apărării suveranității naționale în perioada martie 1938-mai 1940*, București, Editura Academiei, 1971.

As for the Italian foreign policy in the interwar period there should be mentioned the works of foreign authors such as Mark Robson²⁵ și Paul Guichonnet²⁶.

The thesis is divided into four chapters:

Chapter One: *Highlights of Romanian-Italian relations after the end of World War I until 1934* which deals with the relations between Bucharest and Rome prior 1935, with special emphasis on the years 1926-1927. Then Romania and Italy become the closest in the interwar period by recognizing the union between Bessarabia and Romania and by concluding „a pact of friendship”.

Chapter Two: *The Italian-Ethiopian conflict and Romania (1935-1936)* tackles the most critical period in terms of Romanian-Italian relations. Nicolae Titulescu's attitude in favour of sanctions against Italy drew Mussolini's resentment and the diplomat's vehemence was later criticized around the tragic events of summer 1940.

Chapter Three: *Europe in face of war. Romanian-Italian relations (1937-1939)* is the result of the analysis of the way in which Romania became increasingly isolated in Europe, and Italy being the most powerful from the revisionist countries group.

Chapter Four: *Romania and Italy during September 1939- September 1940* focuses on the events that happened in the beginning of the World War II, mainly the role that the diplomacy in Rome had in the failure of the „neutral block” project and in the dismantling of Great Romania.

The analysis that we propose isn't an exhaustive one, given the complexity of the subject. The relations between the two states have been approached objectively. They had different interests in the interwar period, they followed different directions not only in the foreign policy but also internal, but they also have been able sometimes to find terms for collaboration.

²⁵ Mark Robson, *Italia: liberalism și fascism*, Editura All, București, 1998.

²⁶ Paul Guichonnet, *Mussolini și fascismul*, Editura Corint, București, 2002.

CHAPTER ONE

HIGHLIGHTS OF ROMANIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE END OF WORLD WAR I UNTIL 1934

The right of the Russian empire's nations to decide their own fate was also used by Romanians from Bessarabia, who decided the union with Romania on March 27/ April 9 1918. Henceforth, the difficulties began for Romania. The Western powers involved in the civil war from Russia avoided a period to consider the recognizing of the facts at the eastern border of Romania in spring 1918. The treaty of Paris from October 28, 1920, by which Great Britain, France, Japan and Italy recognized the rights of Romania over Bessarabia, was not the end of this issue. Italy delayed the Ratification Act from 1920, being part of the political and diplomatic game that characterized the Romanian-Italian relations between 1920 and 1927.

After "Marsul asupra Romei" from October 1922, the pressures of the Bratianu government were quite shy (January 19, 1922 – March 27, 1926). At that time, even the fascist regime opponents considered Romania guilty for not acted in time to obtain the ratification of the Treaty of Paris from Italy. In turn, the fascist regime made its intentions known by giving a memorandum to Romanian chief diplomat, I. Gh. Duca, on January 23, 1923. The main elements from this document demonstrated the Rome's desire not to ratify the treaty without receiving in return many economic advantages; the following things were requested from the Romanian government: 1. a positive solution to Italian properties problem in Bessarabia; 2. the collaboration in the industry by obtaining some privileges to Rome in the exploration of oil; 3. the intensification of exchanges between Romanian raw materials and Italian manufactures in commercial relations.

The diplomatic relations between U.S.S.R. and Italy in 1924 had an important role in the evolution of Romanian-Italian relations in reference to the treaty in 1920. This element contributed to highlight the hesitant attitude of the Italians in the issue of Bessarabia. Romania's efforts to detach this latter aspect from economic agreements with Rome didn't have the desired effect and Italians did not want to miss the right moment.

The relations between Rome and Bucharest were given a new impetus, when the general Al. Averescu, known in political circles as a strong advocate of Italy, became the head of the Romanian government on March 30, 1926. Discussions continued with much more substance, soon leading to negotiations for an economic treaty between the two parties. But Mussolini continued in his position prior to signing the pact, and the ratification of Bessarabia occurred later.

The Italian Prime Minister decided to temporarily sacrifice the relations between Russia and Italy. His efforts will be dedicated henceforth to Balkans, in the sense of economic penetration in this area. Moreover, the second goal of Mussolini's foreign policy was to increase the influence of Rome in the Danube basin and Balkans. The first objective consisted in the transformation of the Mediterranean in Mare Nostrum. These were two basic ideas of Duke, which were carried out throughout the interwar period through active external policy and applied during the Second World War.

The "Pact of friendship and cordial cooperation between Romania and Italy" was signed on September 16, 1926. Its main provisions were:

- The two parties agree to mutually support each other and to cooperate in order to maintain international order, to respect and carry out their obligations (Article 1);
- To establish the measures that were to be taken, for their defense, in case of international complications and if their common interests could be threatened (Article 2);
- If the safety and interests of one party were threatened by violent incursions from outside, the other party was obliged to pay "benevolent political and diplomatic support in order to put an end to external causes to that threat". (Article 3);
- The problems between the two parties that couldn't be solved diplomatically were subject to conciliation and arbitration. (Article 4).

Against the background of rapprochement between the two countries that occurred after signing the treaty in the fall of 1926, Italy has ratified the act of 1920 on Bessarabia on March 7, 1927. The ratification of the agreement marked the end of the period in which Italy practiced a "duplicitous game" with "pressures and blackmail"²⁷ to Romania. The characterization of the Italian policy made by historian, Constantin Iordan, is succinct and eloquent, managing to capture the essence of Italian attitude towards Romania during the delay of the ratification.

Spring of 1927 marks not only the culmination of Romanian-Italian relations in interwar period but also the onset of decline. The new external policy of Italy was the proximity of Hungary and the support of its grievances- including those aimed at changing the borders- in order to transform the Hungarian state in the main pillar of the Italian domination in Central and Eastern Europe. Little Entente destabilization – Yugoslavia caused Italy most troubles regarding the Albanian issues – became a target of pro-Hungarian policy. The

²⁷ Constantin Iordan, *România și relațiile internaționale din sud – estul european: „modelul” Locarno (1925-1927)*, București, Editura Curtea Veche, 2001, p.293.

components of this policy have gradually faded „the flirt”²⁸ with Romania which culminated with the Treaty of 1926 and then with the ratification union of Bessarabia. The impact of the Italian-Hungarian treaty (April 5, 1927) over the Little Entente states in general and Romania in particular, marked the change in Italy’s relations with Romania.

1928 represents the onset of revisionist tendencies radicalization of Italian fascism and disclosure of foreign policy intentions, because of the failure of a Balkan Locarno who was controlled by Mussolini. Titulescu’s first official visit at Rome on January 25-30 was part of a diplomatic tour that the Romanian Foreign Minister chose to start in Italy. That was a political thought. „At that time” –in 1937 Titulescu wrote in a paper dedicated to Romanian foreign policy- „the first official visit of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs used to be made in Paris. I thought to make my first official visit at Rome and then visit Paris”²⁹. Titulescu was hoping to get a positive reaction from Duke regarding the optants’ process which still affect Romania and the possibility to get a rapprochement between Italy and France.

The negative turn of Romanian-Italian relations could not be changed anymore, the two countries being on opposite sides during the fourth decade of the last century. As Italy was increasingly claiming its strong revisionism, Romanian people struggled to protect themselves from the consequences of this policy.

²⁸ The American Minister in Bucharest, Culbertson, used the term „flirt” to characterize the relation between Romania and Italy during 1926 and early 1927, according to Constantin Iordan, *op.cit.*, p.340.

²⁹ Nicolae Titulescu, *Politica externă a României (1937)*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1994, p.173.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ITALIAN - ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT AND ROMANIA (1935-1936)

The expansionary policy promoted by Mussolini is not created by fascism, but it represents a line adopted and promoted by pre-war Italian political leaders. Powerful trends exhibited by Italy at the end of World War I received a powerful blow at the Paris Peace Conference. The victorious and allied parties did not respect their obligations from the agreements with the government of Rome during the conflagration. The division of colonies deeply discontented the delegation led by Prime Minister Vittorio E. Orlando, and the Italian claims weren't considered.

After the Paris Peace Conference ended, a new opinion trend known as the “mutilated victory myth”³⁰ in Italian historiography, has arisen in Peninsula. This started from the idea that Italy was “deceived” by the winners from 1918. When the fascists overtook the power on October 1922, the idea mentioned before was promoted as a policy. Italy “elected” Ethiopia, the only independent state in Africa, in order to implement its expansionist ideas. The target was not random; Italy suffered a humiliating defeat in another attempt to create a colonial empire in the last century.

The reactions of Great Britain and France were, as so often in the interwar period, in opposition to the interests of each individual state. Thus, England reacted swiftly and severely, demanding the punishment of the aggressor. In contrast, France has encouraged the Italian aggression. Since both Italy and Ethiopia were members of the League of Nations, they had to obey the Pact, more specifically the Articles 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16. However, the conflict was treated superficially by members of the Society, and their actions were “drawn-forever”³¹ due to the contradictions between the Great Powers.

The Italian delegate at the League of Nations, Pompeo Aloisi, presented on September 1935, a voluminous file with photographs accompanied through which a real indictment of Ethiopian policy was made in the most aggressive terms. Ethiopia was defined as a barbarian state that lacked the equality in rights and obligations towards the civilized states. In conclusion, “feeling deeply aggrieved in its dignity of civilized nation”³², Italy could not

³⁰ Valentin Ciorbea, *op.cit.*, p.169.

³¹ N. Z. Lupu, Gh. N. Căzan, C. Bușe, *Istoria Universală Contemporană, vol. I (1917-1945)*, București, 1979, p.377.

³² *Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1^{ere} série (1932-1935), t. XII (21 août-15 octobre 1935)*, doc. 111, a telegram nr. 115 signed by Robert Massigli, a representative of France at The League of Nations Council, to the Foreign Ministry of Affairs, Geneva, 4 septembrie 1935, p.153.

continue to discuss on an equal footing with Ethiopia. Moreover, Italy reserves the right to take “all freedom of action in order to defend its interests” in the colonies, to “withdraw the Addis-Abeba government confidence”³³.

September 1935 marks the first attempts of the Great Powers to take action not necessarily against Italy, but rather to find an “honorable” solution for all parties. Analyzing the possible repercussions of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, the general of the French army examined in a secret document the precautions that France might need to take. According to it, Italy “seems determined to reach its goal³⁴, whatever obstacles might arise from the League of Nations or some other power, stating that sanctions mean war.”³⁵ England’s attitude was seen in line with the interests it had in the area. Thus, London’s position could only be one in defense of Ethiopia which had a strategic position, that is a portion of the road to British Indies and the way to Cairo. The British government wanted the compliance of the Anglo-Franco-Italian Treaty of 1906 and threatened Italy with sanctions³⁶. The document we refer to, appreciated the British attitude „possible if not likely” to be more theoretical so that it can be intimidated by the „intransigent will” of Mussolini, therefore it could allow Italy to conquer Ethiopia without resorting to the „sanctions provided by the League of Nations” that are not binding on anyone.” However, an Italian-British conflict could not be excluded, although the risk was minimum. In this case, the other powers were brought in discussion. Thus, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi would be found in a favorable position to England. It was thought that the United States were still attached to Monroe doctrine and Soviet Russia would remain neutral. Other countries like Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Japan had „claims”. France was considered to be „caught between the friendship towards England and the friendship towards Italy”, and therefore, in case of armed conflict between the two countries, Paris should adopt an attitude of „strict neutrality”. The position was justified by the fact that France need to „devote full attention to maintaining peace in Central Europe.”

In conclusion, it was recommended that the incidents between Italy and Ethiopia remain localized and the members of the League of nations to avoid applying „effective” sanctions which might trigger a world war.³⁷

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ According to the document, Italy’s goal was to “establish military protection for Ethiopia”.

³⁵ *D.D.F, 1^{ère} série (1932-1935), t. XII (21 août-15 octobre 1935)*, doc. 138, a note of the Second Bureau of the Army as regards the possible consequences of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict and the precautions that France could be obliged to use., Paris, 9 septembre 1935, p.181.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.182.

³⁷ *Ibidem*

The Romania's position towards the Italian- Abyssinian conflict, adopted through its Foreign Minister, Nicolae Titulescu, can be considered the generator of the most tense moment of the whole evolution of political and diplomatic relations between Romania and Italy in the interwar period. In Geneva in September 1935, Titulescu appreciated the Italian-Ethiopian dispute as a „decisive test”³⁸ for the League of Nations. He was outraged by the ways in which Italy sought to achieve its goals, considering them „a very dangerous precedent for the small powers”³⁹. On the eve of war, Titulescu did everything possible to persuade the French Prime Minister Pierre Laval to encourage the British government in its firm attitude. But his intransigence created uproar in Geneva and the British representative noted that „ Titulescu would want war rather than an agreement”⁴⁰. Titulescu confessed to Laval that a military confrontation would create “a chance to determine the League”. However, the Romanian Foreign Minister was convinced that Romania together with the Little Entente, would take part in any decision made by the League of Nations. He declared that he didn't confide in economic sanctions, considered too slow to be effective and would have liked to impose military sanctions. At that time Germany and Italy were trying to clarify the possible economic sanctions. Titulescu's proposal was welcomed because any possible military intervention would be generated Bucharest fewer losses than economic sanctions. *We believe, however, that his intransigence and stubbornness prejudiced Romania effectively.*

Economic sanctions against Italy were approved in Geneva, and they would be implemented on November 18. They established: the imposing of the embargo on arms exports to Italy; the banning of the imports of Italian goods; the termination of loans and credits; the prohibition of the products export in Italy as war materials; mutual help between the countries that adopted sanctions⁴¹. Among the banned products there were oil, coal, iron and steel. When Titulescu got back in Romania on November 5, he declared to the press that in Geneva “no action is taken against Italy, but for peace”⁴².

The European diplomatic situation would be simply reversed by Hitler who ordered German forces to occupy the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936. From that moment on, the Italian-Ethiopian conflict took the second place⁴³ in the concerns of European countries, the Great Powers being interested in finding a satisfactory finality for all

³⁸ *Documents on British Foreign Policy (1919-1939), 2nd series, vol. XIV*, doc.598, telegrama nr.77 semnată Edmond pentru S. Hoare, Geneva, 20 septembrie 1935, p.658.

³⁹ Raoul V. Bossy, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.258.

⁴⁰ *D.B.F.P.*, 2nd series, vol. XIV, doc.598, telegrama nr.77 semnată Edmond pentru S. Hoare, Geneva, 20 septembrie 1935, p.658.

⁴¹ N.Z. Lupu, Gh. Căzan, C. Bușe, *op.cit.*, p.379.

⁴² C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p.159.

⁴³ *Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe*, fond 71/România, vol.94, f.257.

the parties. In the new international context, Romania's position was united with French attitude, aiming to end sanctions against Italy in order to form a common front of European powers against Germany. Being aware that the sanctions could not be taken anymore and that his attitude was drastically sanctioned by Rome, Titulescu tried a 180° change of his perspective. He himself insisted on finding a solution regarding the sanctions imposed on Italy. Even King Charles II, deplored the fact that „we were forced by our covenants game to atake action against Italy”, especially because, according to a confession of C. Argetoianu, the sovereign „has a lively admiration for Mussolini and treasures him.”⁴⁴

The League of Nations was unable to take firm decisions against an aggressor state that violated the Pact. Plagued by intrigues of the Great Powers, the League of Nations could not but adopt the decision of sanctions, thus recognizing not only defeat, but also inefficiency. The Romanian Foreign Minister, Nicolae Titulescu, was removed from the government, on August 29. The reason for his dismissal was expressed by King Charles II in a meeting with the Minister of Czechoslovakia in Bucharest and was closely related to his position towards the Italian-Ethiopian conflict: „No need, as Mr. Titulescu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, said, to be made public the exponent of this policy and to lead Romania among the first sanctionists. If our place should have been in the sanctional group we could have remained somewhere in the middle, but not where Titulescu decided *against my wish and that of the members of government*.”⁴⁵

Overall, Titulescu's attitude towards “Ethiopian business” prejudiced Romania in the general context of the international situation in the years 1935-1936. Although, basically the Romanian minister did the right thing in a general position, he was too involved in issues beyond the possibilities of Romania. Titulescu acted, rather as a representative of Geneva and not as one of Bucharest, perhaps in an excess of pride. Therefore, Romania has attracted the resentments of Italy and became increasingly isolated in Europe, in the second half of the '30s, in the case in which the preponderant role, especially in East, would belong to revisionist states as Italy and Germany. However, Romania's traditional ally, France, gave up the ambitions of a dominant power in Europe, its purpose being to ensure its own security. While *we do not doubt his abilities*, Titulescu couldn't understand this phenomenon and he bet everything on one card, the League of Nations.

⁴⁴ C. Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.264.

⁴⁵ Apud Ion M. Oprea, *Nicolae Titulescu*, Editura Științifică, București, 1966, p.317.

CHAPTER III

EUROPE IN THE FACE OF WAR.

ROMANIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS (1937-1939)

The main directions of the Romanian foreign policy – fidelity to France and England, Little Entente, Balkan Entente and the League of Nations – were maintained after the removal of Nicolae Titulescu from the government. Through the policy led by the leaders, the Romanian state has had the same principles for twenty years. The adaptation to the new situation in Europe created by the conquest of Ethiopia and the remilitarization of Rhenanie could be gradually designed by following old commitments. The historian Ioan Chiper identifies the following factors as playing a leading role in the international complicated situation in which Romania was during the fall of 1936 and 1937: 1. the countries' policy in Western Europe, rather than mistakes of Romanian foreign policy⁴⁶; 2. Difficulties in making new commitments or refusing them⁴⁷; 3. the pressures of Germany and Italy on Romanian foreign policy, not directly, but through Yugoslavian and Polish allies⁴⁸.

A new item intervened in Romania's relations with Italy during October-November 1936: the Hodza plan. The project named after Czechoslovak premier Milan Hodza, aimed at creating an economic center of the Little Entente, which would turn into a "performance tool" that could be used by regional alliance members⁴⁹. An eventual success of the plan would have increased the competition for the Protocols system in Rome, and implicitly for Italy. Surprisingly, the fascist state apparently reacted well.

The real intentions of Italy would be unveiled very soon by the Romanian Minister count Ciano in Italy. "An extension of the Protocols of Rome" was what Rome really wanted, "a practical element between the members of the Little Entente and Italy", which had to be implemented through "a series of individual adhesions" instead of a regional agreement⁵⁰. Italy claimed instead to respect the territorial status quo of the Little Entente members, an offer for which they were willing to make concessions. But the old Italian desire for hegemony in this part of Europe was undermined by the German competition, directly interested in Czechoslovakia. Along with Roman procedures for capturing Little Entente in its sphere of domination, Germany and Italy were getting closer. This ideological plan had to be translated in a political segment too. The interest shown by Hitler in Austria and

⁴⁶ Ioan Chiper, *op.cit.*, p.203.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p.217.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p.203.

⁴⁹ Eliza Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, Editura Științifică, București, 1968, p.261.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p.262.

Czechoslovakia influenced Mussolini to fall back. He stopped being interested in Germany and he gave up to some of his European wishes. However, Mussolini's nostalgia to turn Italy into a dominant force in central and south-east policy continued even after the formation of the European Axis, during 1937.

A provision of Italian politics from the end of 1927 was the affinity towards Hungary. The Italian ambitions to dominate Central and Eastern Europe were supported by Hungary in the interwar period, and the latter has found a revisionist tendencies supporter in Mussolini. On November 1, 1936, Mussolini declared himself again in favor of Hungarian claims of modifying the peace treaty. It was pointed out that "until justice is made in Hungary, there will be no final settlement of the situation in the Danube basin. Hungary is truly devastated: four million Hungarians live beyond its current boundaries"⁵¹. Further, *Il Duce* showed a few pleasantries to Yugoslavia, thus directing Hungarian revisionism only towards Romania and Czechoslovakia.

The statements of the Italian leader had a disconcerting effect for the Little Entente states that were then in the midst of talks with Italian diplomacy on how to approach the Rome Protocols to Little Entente states. The reason for this sudden change of attitude could be motivated by the pressures that Hitler made on Mussolini to isolate Czechoslovakia, especially in the conclusion of the Axis Rome-Berlin. Austria also entered the German sphere so that Hungary was now the last Italian bastion that could help the fascist leader to dominate the Central Europe.

Mussolini's speech caused different negative reactions of Romanian political circles, from anxiety and consternation, to revolt, and the Romanian Parliament became the scene of carrying out these reactions.

In early spring of 1937, Romania's foreign policy would be strongly affected by the conclusion of the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty in Belgrade. On March 25, 1937, Milan Stoiadinovici, Prime-Minister and Foreign Minister, and Count Galeazzo Ciano signed the *Friendship Pact between Yugoslavia and Italy*⁵². This document wasn't registered at the League of Nations. The Treaty was made up of two main agreements –political and economic- and some secret agreements. The articles of the political agreement were the most important for Romania and Czechoslovakia. The first article provided "the mutual obligation to respect the common borders" and "refrain from any kind of help in any way" in case of an unprovoked assault on other borders⁵³. Despite the denials of Italians and Yugoslavians, the

⁵¹ Eliza Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, Editura Științifică, 1968, p.264; Lilian Zamfiroiu, *op.cit.*, p.196.

⁵² Al. Vianu, Z. Zamfir, C. Bușe, Gh. Bădescu, *Relații internaționale în acte și documente, vol.I (1917-1939)*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1974, pp.256-257.

⁵³ A.M.A.E., fond 71/România, vol.97, ff. 535-536.

article was designed to protect Yugoslavia from the Hungarian revisionism that Italy strongly supported. Article 1 of the Italian - Yugoslavian pact included the warning that the Hungarian revisionism was guided towards the other two members of the Little Entente. The Treaty of Belgrade had immediate and direct consequences on Romania and Czechoslovakia, whose orientation has remained the same.

Romania became the most exposed member state of the two regional alliances (Little Entente and the Balkan) as a consequence of the agreement between Belgrade and Rome. Czechoslovakia was in a similar vulnerable situation. The Little Entente continued to function after the Italian-Yugoslavian pact, specifying that Yugoslavia was defended in two directions – on the one hand, Romania and Czechoslovakia had to assist the ally in case of an unprovoked assault from Hungary, on the other hand Italy undertook not to support Hungary against Yugoslavia- while the Hungarian revisionism was now directed - with the Italian blessing – only against Romania and Czechoslovakia. The situation began to increasingly complicate after Italy attacked Abyssinia, after the remilitarization of Rhenanie and the creation of Berlin-Rome Axis, but Romania continued to feel protected due to its participation in the Little Entente and Balkans. The Romanian state was affected when it lost the loyalty of Yugoslavia.

Immediately after the Belgrade Treaty, Romanian leadership along with the Czechoslovak tried to keep their Yugoslav ally together. The meeting of the Permanent Council of Little Entente from Belgrade in April 1-2, 1937 ended with the approval of the completed acts between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Italy, the decision to recognize the right to weapons of Hungary in exchange for concluding non-aggression treaties with the member states of the Little Entente and to minimize the gap between facts in Ethiopian issues. This latter issue was considered achieved through the establishments of Romania and Czechoslovakia consulates in Abyssinia and the title as “*King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia*” used in the Treaty of Belgrade to designate the Italian sovereign⁵⁴. The decisions taken in early April in Yugoslavia represented the consequences of the Italian-Yugoslav Treaty thus forcing the hand of Romanian and Czechoslovak politicians. The Italian-Hungarian affinity was too well known, and the penetration of Yugoslavia in the sphere dominated by Rome, was supposed to improve relations with Hungary. Little Entente made a formal step towards Hungary. In this context, the indirect recognition of the Italian empire no longer seemed to be an effort for Yugoslavia’s allies.

An important consequence of the Italian-Yugoslav Treaty was the attempt of Rome to attract Romania with Hungary and Yugoslavia in its domination game in central and

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, vol.98, ff.52-57.

southeastern Europe. In the bilateral relations between Romania and the Italian fascist state, the treaty concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia –in his view- was the prerequisite for signing a similar agreement with Bucharest. The end of March 1937 marks the beginning of negotiations between Rome and Bucharest to sign a treaty; these negotiations were compromised by a prior arrangement between Romania and Hungary.

The Romania's attitude towards the Italian proposals that Victor Antonescu separated from Germany in his discussion with Bossy only because of its repeated insistence on concluding a treaty with Romania, "it shows me that, without looking for too intimate links that would upset France and especially England, we would be happy to strengthen the traditional friendly relations".

The fact that "Rome provided a place détente with Hungary, and this cannot be always foreseen- but not from our fault" leads the Romanian foreign minister to a resignation not very challenging: "Never mind, we do not hurry"⁵⁵. The last words seem to give the full measure of Romanian policy towards Italy, but not only to the fascist state. Being protected by the alliances, the Romanian political circles minimized the importance that Germany and Italy had in the European policy. This aspect of Romanian politics does not eliminate the fact that Hungary was very little disposed to yield to the Italian pressures for an agreement with Romania, which negates the efforts of Rome and the sincere availability of Romanian politicians to improve relations with Budapest.

The first half of 1937 has condensed the effects of the Treaty in Belgrade, - on the Little Entente, but also on direct relations between Romania and Italy- and the tension created by the issue of participation of Italy and Germany's diplomatic representatives in Romania, at the funeral of Legionnaires Ion Mota and Vasile Marin. The incident created between Bucharest on one side, and Berlin and Rome on the other side, has stirred the spirits of both parties for a month. The foreign Minister issue was solved as a result of Romanian politicians' endeavors, whose position in relation to Axis states tended to worsen. After accepting the Italian-German missive claiming to put an end to the tension, the Romanian chief diplomat exposed the contents of the note to the Assembly of Deputies on March 9, 1937, and the government underwent a reshuffle because of the way in which they managed the whole situation.

The formation of Goga-Cuza government at the end of 1937⁵⁶, determined an effusion movement in the Italian press, whose result was the revival of the Italian public

⁵⁵ Raoul V. Bossy, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p.320.

⁵⁶ Ion Mamina, *Monarhia constituțională în România. Enciclopedie politică. 1866-1938*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2000, p.347.

opinion on the Latin state in the Eastern Europe. The strong attitude of Rome's leadership to support the formal plan of Goga-Cuza government originated from the desire "to force a little the hand of the Romanian government, by assigning through the press some tendencies and radical attitudes of Italy", hoping that the new executive could not deny in public the newspaper articles from another state⁵⁷. As regards the Romanian government, which caused the reactions of media mentioned earlier, it found itself in a difficulty: the friendship evidence of Italian origin was maintaining the French-British suspicions about what the new government would bring in the Romanian foreign policy. For these reasons, the new prime minister was forced to make statements in the media seeking to maintain a balance.

Along with the joy of the Italian press about the new executive of Bucharest, a heavy blow was given internationally to the status quo established at Versailles: Anschluss. The Italian-German friendship has been achieved primarily due to Austria. This was an ally of Rome. Their alliance was strengthened through Rome Protocols of 1934, and was helped by Italy in ensuring the integrity of borders and respect for sovereignty. Besides the evidence offered in mid-January 1938 by Italian Foreign Minister to approach Italy to Romania, a press campaign started in Rome in favor of Goga-Cuza government. These are the components of an adapting policy to the international configuration post – Anschluss, in which Rome wanted to fill the void left by the disappearance of Austria from the Protocols of Rome. Italian political and diplomatic circles simulated an efficient collaboration between the Axis members, by carefully hiding the tension created by Germans in the bilateral relations⁵⁸.

The main consequences of the occupation of Austria by the German Army, which passed directly over Italy, include: the lapse of Protocols from Rome, Hungary's loss of confidence in the ability of Rome to stem the expansion of German, getting Hungary under German rule and creating a clear hierarchy in Axis, with the Italian fascist state in an inferior position. The Romanian international situation was deeply modified. The Little Entente was compromised by exposing the Czechoslovak ally against German aggression, while Germany had geographically advanced towards the Romanian state and had a border with Italy⁵⁹. Foreshadowing the German support for Hungary's territorial claims would have determined an extremely unfavorable context for our country. Unfortunately, further developments became real fears of Romanian politicians.

After Anschluss was implemented, the political-diplomatic Italian circles continued to challenge Bucharest. Ciano already had an opinion about the fate of Czechoslovakia and „to

⁵⁷ A.M.A.E., fond 71/Italia, vol.64, f.229.

⁵⁸ Contele Galeazzo Ciano, *op. cit.*, p.19.

⁵⁹ Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire, vol.II, partea a II-a (noiembrie 1933-septembrie 1940)*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988, p.1438.

offset the progresses that were thought to be made by Germany in the central Europe, he would want to strengthen ties with Yugoslavia and possibly with other Danubian countries”⁶⁰.

In the summer of 1938, Italian fascist attitude towards Romania has evolved in the same direction since the beginning, due to the loss of Austria and the increase of German expansion in the same area that Italy was equally interested in. Hungarian politicians were put in mind that they have to resist the German penetration and they could be helped by Yugoslavia and Romania⁶¹. In these circumstances Hungary tried to reach an agreement with the two countries towards which it had harbored territorial claims.

The fall of 1938 brought with it the second biggest victory of the Nazi Germany: the Conference from Munich. The solving of the sudeten Germans issue from Czechoslovakia was not a joy for Mussolini, despite the role the fascist leader assumed, without being obliged to do so. But the disappearance of the Little Entente represented not only an old goal of the Duke to impose hegemony of Rome in the Danube basin, but also the opportunity to turn this European sector into a barrage in the way of German expansion.

The agreement between Romania and Hungary remained even after Munich the bottleneck in the relations between Bucharest and Rome. The Italian fascist officials believed that Hungarian territorial claims would be „satisfied once for all by the piece that would be received from Czechoslovakia”. Romania should have seen this aspect as a „happy event” because that went out of Hungarian sight.

The situation created at the end of 1938 by the Czechoslovak crisis and the Vienna Diktat not at all favored the progress of the Romanian-Italian relations. The evolution of the international relations at the beginning of 1939 was influenced by the decisions taken in Munich. Germany continued its policy and occupied Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939. The inevitable happened and „Czechoslovakia died at only 20 years old, abandoned by those who created it and who gave it to Hitler’s Germany”⁶². The French historian, Jean Paul Boncour, synthesized the fate of the state with which Romania had very close ties and which disappeared in half a year after the Munich Agreement. The situation of Romania in the international relations was deteriorated once again in a short time. In Romania, the official circles were deeply concerned about the new German assault and they feared that a new phase would be the subjugation of Romania due to the conflict with Hungary and German minorities.⁶³

⁶⁰ A.M.A.E., fond 71/Italia, vol.64, f.323.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, vol.65, ff. 35-36.

⁶² A. Călinescu, *Însemnări politice (1916-1939)*, București, Editura Militară, 1992, p.410.

⁶³ A. Călinescu, *Însemnări politice (1916-1939)*, București, Editura Militară, 1992, p.410.

The new event completely surprised Italy, the Foreign Minister Ciano noting that „the axis only works for the benefit of the power that acquires a greater importance and acts in exclusive initiative, taking too little account of the other.” Further, Mussolini’s son-in-law made another objective statement that „the German intervention does not destroy Czechoslovakia in Versailles, but the one that was built in Munich and Vienna. What importance will be given in the future to other statements and promises that concern us? It is useless to hide that all these concerns and humiliate Italian people. Therefore we must give satisfaction and compensation: Albania”.⁶⁴

The decision to attack the old European state was not caused by the German intervention in Czechoslovakia. The effect of the rapid advance of the Italian Army on the Albanian territory – the capital of the European state was occupied on April 8 – over the ministers of Greece and Yugoslavia in Tirana, was „the depression” caused by „the concern for the future as regards the penetration of Italy in the Balkans⁶⁵”. The most exposed country was Yugoslavia whose options were very limited.

Two very important events for the relations between the member states took place in the first half of April 1939. The two issues – Italy occupying Albania and giving French-British guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece – initially disjoint, have become intertwined, the first turning into the catalyst of the second. The presidents of the Ministers Councils from London and Paris, were making identical public declarations: the guarantee of the borders for Romania and Greece in case of an assault that would disturb their independence. The gesture of the two governments was unprecedented and imposed by the extremely complicated situation that was created in the escalation of international relations by force from different directions.

The conquest of Albania produced a change in the Italian-Romanian relations through the increasing of closeness between Rome and Budapest. This latter aspect and the tightening of the Italian straps that surrounded Yugoslavia, created a relational triangle, which was obviously unfavorable for Romania. The new geopolitical framework was based in a very favorable opportunity for Budapest to directly contribute to the isolation of Romania, until constant claims towards the territory of the latter were satisfied. The role of Italy in the Hungarian game was essential for distancing the two allies.

The second half of the last month of peace brought a coup de theater on the international political and diplomatic scene: the Nazi-Soviet pact, which occurred during the

⁶⁴ Conte G. Ciano, *op.cit.*, p.45.

⁶⁵ A.M.A.E., fond 71/România, vol.108, f.144.

negotiations between Soviet and Anglo-French people. Nothing could predict the possibility of rapprochement between the two sides in early August, quite the contrary.

The chief diplomat in Rome becomes aware of the Germans' victory only a few hours before the Romanian politicians. Taken completely by surprise, Ciano was evaluating the effects of the Nazi diplomatic movement, noting the importance of the pact with Soviet Russia: „There is no doubt that Germans have managed: the situation in Europe is ransacked. (...) the encircling system of the small states (Franco-British guarantees, n.n.) will it last as long as the Moscow support is gone? However, we don't have to take hasty decisions; we must wait and be ready, if possible, to get our part from Croatia and Dalmatia.”⁶⁶ The fascist foreign minister noticed an important consequence of the Ribbentrop – Molotov Pact over the South-East Europe: the neutralization of the Anglo-French guarantee system, whose existence was based on a possible war in the region, attracting Soviet Russia. The agreement of the two opposing regimes affected the thinking that led to giving guarantees in the spring of that year, leaving the small Balkan Entente countries unprotected. Ciano understood that his country's role in terms of major decisions was much eroded, the Italian Minister summarizing the fascist expansion's plans to the undermining of the Yugoslavia's independence by supporting the Croation movement.

The guarantees from spring, in conjunction with the tripartite treaty concluded with Turkey, had given protection to this part of the Balkan Entente against the German-Italian advance towards this part of Europe. The Ribbentrop – Molotov Pact wanted to cancel the practicality of the Franco-British guarantees, thus jeopardizing the situation of the small states in South-East Europe.

⁶⁶ Contele G. Ciano, *op.cit.*, p.107.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANIA AND ITALY DURING SEPTEMBER 1939-SEPTEMBER 1940

Throughout the month of August it has become clear for the Italian fascist leadership that Germany has no reluctance in provoking a general conflict, in which Italy would have been drawn, according to the recently concluded military treaty. This resolution gained in a short time, caused a reaction perceived by the French ambassador in Rome as „perplexity, anxiety, anguish which seem to be embraced by the public opinion and the political circles.”⁶⁷ From the moment the imminence of the German aggression became obvious, Rome tried to get out of this situation⁶⁸. On August 10, Ciano tried to draw the Ribbentrop’s attention to the consequences that could result after attacking Poland, but he was forced to conclude that „if Germans were given more than they asked, they would still attack, because they are possessed by the demon of destruction.”⁶⁹

Italy’s military inability to enter in a conflict that could bring benefit, generated the resistance of a peninsular state to Germany’s intentions and the hope that the situation will be settled at the green table, like Czechoslovakia in former times. Mussolini’s attempts to prevent the conflict have transformed him into the last hope of Western democracies.

On 1 September 1939, German troops entered Poland, implementing the „White Plan” (Fall Weiss). It was the beginning of a world war in which 61 countries were involved, using more than 110 million combatants⁷⁰ in the military operations.

The new international events have produced concern in Bucharest. The declarations of war of France and England against Germany forced the Romanian officials to clarify their position on 3 September 1939. Therefore, the next day, the Council of Ministers chaired by Armand Calinescu published a new statement: „Regarding the foreign policy, we are determined to keep on the same peaceful attitude so far, aiming at a good understanding with all the country’s neighbors. In this sense, the government is ready to renew the proposal to

⁶⁷ *D.D.F (1932-1939), 2^e serie (1936-1939), tome XVIII (13-25 aout 1939)*, doc.123, telegram nr.3310 of Francois – Poncet, the French ambassador in Rome, to George Bonnet, the foreign Minister of Affairs, 18 august 1939, p.166.

⁶⁸ Contele G. Ciano, *op.cit.*, p.101.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p.102.

⁷⁰ *Marea conflagrație a secolului XX. Al doilea război mondial*, Ediția a II-a revăzută și adăugită, Editura Politică, București, 1974, p.537.

conclude a non-aggression pact. However, the government ensured the safety of national interests and made the necessary arrangements to resist the border's defense".⁷¹

In this context, it was resumed the initiative to establish a „Neutral Countries Block” which would bring together the neutral and non-belligerent members from Balkans and Danubian areas. The idea was a little older and actions were carried out in the months preceding the outbreak of war, leading to the strengthening of ties between the countries.

The first concrete action to form the „Neutral Block” came from Romania on 5 September 1939, when the Romanian Foreign Minister informed the embassies in Ankara, Belgrade and Athens that Bucharest kept its „hands free”, being determined to respect „commitments towards friends from the Balkan Entente”.⁷² The Romanian ambassadors were specifically instructed to explain that „through our endeavors we also seek to strengthen the feelings of solidarity between the Balkan states and specify a common action. You will explore the grounds on which we can establish such a common action.”⁷³

These first surveys initiated by the Romanian government apparently enjoyed a favorable reception in Athens, Ankara and Belgrade, but gradually the reticences specific to the countries' interests started to foreshadow: Greece feared not to review the borders in order to attract Bulgaria in the Neutral Block, Yugoslavia tried not to exceed the Rome's border, and Turkey – which is closely related to Anglo-French interests – expected the Allies' accept.

The attempts to implement the „Neutral Block” project were conditioned by Italy's attitude. Its entry into the war wouldn't have allowed the project, therefore, the Romanian political diplomatic circles have made a series of steps to attract Italy to the Neutral, on the one hand, and on the other hand the members of the Balkan Entente to accept its participation. The great advantages of entering Rome in the project were: 1. the ensurance that Italy will not attack any member of the Balkan Entente, 2. the Italy's participation would attract Hungary and Bulgaria, fact that would have ensured Romania and Yugoslavia, and also Greece.

The block neutral states issue was one of the most debated issue in the first three months of the new war, in many European capitals and it was formed in a central point of Romanian-Italian relations. Despite this, the adherence to a common neutral was not directly approached, but only in a few occasions such as the meetings of Grigore Gafencu – Pellegrino Ghigi and Galeazzo Ciano –Raoul V. Bossy. Therefore, the observations regarding Romanian

⁷¹ M. Mușat, I. Ardeleanu, *op.cit*, vol.II, partea a II-a (noiembrie 1933-septembrie 1940), p.996; V. Moisuc, Gh. Matei, *Politica externă a României în perioada Munchen-ului (martie 1938-martie 1939)*, în *Probleme de politică externă a României (1919-1939)*, Editura Militară, 1971, p.231; vezi și „Affaires Danubiennes”, No.5, septembre 1939, p.290.

⁷² Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă...*, vol.I, p.48.

⁷³ *Apărarea patriei, a independenței și suveranității naționale*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, p.194.

– Italian direct contacts on forming the „Neutral Block” are reduced to the several approaches to the topic – not very engaging – by Romanian Minister in Rome.

The Italy's position tended to be clarified by the end of November. The Italian Foreign Minister said to Francois-Poncet, the French Minister in Rome, that on 25 November, his government neither encourages nor discourages the formation of a Balkan bloc. The basic idea was that Italy refuses to participate in such a project, preferring to conclude bilateral agreements with countries in the region.⁷⁴ The final refuse of the Italian fascist state to intervene in grouping the neutral states issue proposed by Romania took place on December 1939.

Germany's attitude would be decisive for the failure of creating a defensive alliance, it gradually evolved, from the immediate support – for the urgent need to preserve peace in the Balkans in the early days of the war – into the explicit manifestation of its disapproval and even boycotting the Romanian project.

The Soviet Russia was one of the biggest fears of the Romanian political circles, after the division of Poland between the two signatories of the Pact in August, even if the content of the secret protocol on Bessarabia was unknown. The Moscow's anti-Romanian politics during the twenty years of Great Romania does not need any introduction in these circumstances. Therefore, politicians such as Constantin Argetoianu, were considering Russia to be the most dangerous threat to the Romanian state, both before and after the start of the new conflict – European for the moment. The Romanian politician received from Rome on September 20, 1939, after the meetings with some Italian officials, information which showed that „as far as Germans told about their treaties with Russians, Germans and Italians have never referred to Bessarabia or Romania in their treaties.” Italians were convinced that the secret protocols that accompanied the German-Soviet agreement would have contained provisions only for Poland and the Baltic states, not Romania – that Germany was directly interested in⁷⁵. However, most likely, Rome was not informed by its German associates of the content of the secret protocols, the only evidence in this respect may be the diary of the Count G. Ciano. Italian minister's notes do not contain indications that he had known the provisions of the secret protocols, thus his reactions are natural as these provisions are implemented.

Palazzo Chiggi decided to change his attitude towards the most threatened state by Russia –Romania- for its determination to resist intimidation or even a possible aggression from Soviet Russia.

⁷⁴ Raoul V. Bossy, *op.cit.*, vol.II, p.197.

⁷⁵ Constantin Argetoianu, *op. cit.*, vol.VII, p.148.

In the situation created by the Soviet threats that become known through the media, the failure of the „Neutral Block” and the occupation of a part of Poland in a perfect state of collaboration with Germany, the Romanian diplomacy intervened with the Anglo-French, to find out whether their guarantee could be valid in case of a Sovietic attack. The fact that the attitude of the Allies depended on the position of Italy put Romania in a delicate situation: its efforts to attract the fascist state in neutral countries group failed, the Italian foreign minister stating in a formal speech that he no longer wants the name of his state to be linked to the Romanian project. However, Rome itself made the first moves towards a rapprochement to the Romanian state in December 1939.

At the beginning of 1940, the fascist state was able to commit helping Romania against Germany's ally, both by providing various machines, war materials and military equipments and by putting pressure on Hungary, whose importance in the Italian foreign policy would temporarily decrease compared to that of Bucharest. The mediation of Romanian- Hungarian relations by Palazzo Chigi to create an anti-Soviet front would be part of the new position adopted by Italy towards Romania.

The fate that Romania would meet, entered in a straight line in the first month of the spring of 1940. The different issues like Bessarabia and Transylvania were treated as common due to the precipitation of the events. For the Romanian leadership, the two issues became interdependent due to their connection through Italy. Rome double took commitment to support Romania in case of a Russian attack and in the same time to withhold Hungary from any anti-Romanian action. Moreover, the fascist state neutrality was a condition attached to the Russian extension of the Anglo-French guarantees. We can say that the destiny of Romania was found for several months in the hands of Italy.

Italy visibly changed its attitude towards Bucharest, especially after taking the decision to enter the war, being increasingly tied to Germany now, and not being willing to create „a dissent” in the Axis. After Italy entered the war against Anglo-French, its new position clearly shows its inability to keep the anti-Soviet promises. What remained possible was the attitude of fairness towards Bucharest, which could be maintained by Ciano by simply refusing to try to divert the Romanians' attention from the imminent danger. And such a position would have been achieved without any compromising involvement.

After receiving the ultimatum from Moscow, Italy, which so often recommended us to resist against any Bolshevik aggression, advised us to yield⁷⁶, Ciano saying that Rome will appreciate the sacrifice that we make on behalf of the peace in the south-east. This is a favor both for Italy and Germany, especially since „a nation of 20 million people cannot fight alone

⁷⁶ Carol al II-lea, *op.cit*, vol.III, p.217.

against 170 million and no one can ever blame you that you didn't fight risking your capital city, if not the whole country⁷⁷." Moreover, the Soviets' intentions were known three days before in Rome, just like Ciano himself confessed in the meeting with Bossy on June 27.⁷⁸ Rome motivated its disrespecting of the commitments towards Romania by Italy's intervention in the war, that would have changed the possibilities of the Italian government.

In Viena, the place where the failure of talks from Turnu Severin became known, Italy and Germany decided that the only way out of the conflict remained arbitration. Despite the procedures used in Viena by the two ministers in a perfect agreement, their members' interests regarding Romania, have coincided due to the circumstances created by the participation in the war on the same side of the barricade. On Rome's way to Balkans, Romania could have a role in the Italian game, even with its economic enslavement. Moreover, since the beginning of 1940, the Italian politicians began to feel annoyed by the Hungarians claims. But Budapest's decision not to escape the momentum created by the Soviet ultimatums, being ready to attack Romania even with the risk to fight without the support of Italy and Germany, has not left any option for the two belligerent countries.

The granting of the Italian-German guarantees represented the only satisfaction for the ceded territories. Romania could not but obey. It was the end of a road that started two decades ago, an ecstatic journey without too many worries, and now concluded in an agony that would perpetuate.

⁷⁷ R.V. Bossy, *op. cit.*, vol.II, p.252; A.M.A.E., fond 71/Italia, vol.67, ff.285-286.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p.251.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the World War I Romania and Italy were among the winning states. But, while, Romania joined the members which defended the „order of Versailles”, Italy adopted a revisionist policy, being dissatisfied by the territories received at the Paris Peace Conference. This fact determined a rapprochement between Italy and Hungary, a neighbour state of Romania, and which declared the Trianon Treaty to be a „dictate”, fighting for border revision.

However, the Romanian-Italian relations started relatively well, the discussions of the third decade of the twentieth century being about the ratification of the Treaty of 28 October 1920 by Italy. This Treaty concerned the recognition of the union of Bessarabia and Romania, by the Great Powers. The climax of good relations between Rome and Bucharest was reached during Averescu's government, when a treaty was signed between Italy and Romania and the membership of Bessarabia to Romania was recognized.

The cooperation between the two states in this period was generated by Italy's intention to dominate the Danube and the Balkans. Romania refused the proximity to Rome because of the conditions, such as the conclusion of treaties with Hungary and Bulgaria. These countries already were under the „protection” of Italy. The failure of this approach for Italy meant the return to the revisionist policy and supporting the claims of Hungary and Bulgaria.

The attempt of Italy to set up a Directorate of the four major European powers caused vehement reactions of small European countries, especially those of the Little Entente, including Romania. The result was a new distancing between Rome and Bucharest.

The critical point of the Romanian-Italian relations was reached during the Italian-Ethiopian conflict. Romania – through Nicolae Titulescu- adopted an uncompromising position, wanting to establish economic and military sanctions. Nicolae Titulescu's attitude towards the Italian-Ethiopian conflict prejudiced Romania in the international situation during 1935-1936. Romania has attracted Italy's resentment and became increasingly isolated in Europe, in circumstances in which in the second half of the 30's, the revisionist states like Italy and Germany will have the preponderant role. However, France, the Romania's traditional ally, gave up ambitions to be a dominant power in Europe, its purpose being to ensure its own security.

The changing of Nicolae Titulescu from the Foreign Ministry – welcomed with enthusiasm by the Italian press – has not led to an improvement in relations between Romania

and Italy. The Romanian officials have once again ignored the political and diplomatic relations with Rome first.

Since 1937, the Little Entente has lost its unity, Yugoslavia trying to adapt to the new European policy through Stoiadinovici government. Attracting Belgrade in Rome's sphere of influence had a double meaning: on the one hand the Little Entente was weakened, and on the other hand the Czechoslovakia was encircled, a country which was to become the first victim of the revisionist states.

The year 1938 clearly demonstrates that these revisionist countries, led by Germany and Italy, were to decide in Central and South-East. The Western democracies – England and France- which were anchored in the policy of appeasement, have left the allies that they had „seduced” throughout the past. However, Mussolini becomes aware that his country can not support a war – even in the short term – and tries to „picture” himself into a „champion of peace”, a situation that came out so well at the time of the Munich Agreement.

The Romanian officials continued to hope in traditional alliances, their hopes being fueled by guarantees from April 1939. The German – Soviet alliance embodied in the Ribbentrop – Molotov paralyzed every gesture of England and France and eventually led to the outbreak of the World War II.

One of the accusations that was made of the Romanian politicians in the fourth decade of the last century was their lack of realism – in fact, pragmatism. Amid early foreshadowing of the Germany's intentions and force, which inevitably was joined by Italy, the Romanian leadership ought to have abandoned the old policy and any of its principles, in order to put itself in the German-Italian orbit. The question is where would the training lead it in the avalanche caused by the two countries? The impossibility of having a satisfactory answer to this question, leads us to the conclusion that Romania adopted the only foreign policy possible – to which sometimes more balance could have been added - for the geopolitical situation.

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