

ROMANIAN DIPLOMACY AROUND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract: *The consequences of the rivalry between the winning and the losing powers of the First World War would become more acute at the end of the fourth decade of the 20th century in the context of the obvious revengeful tendencies of Germany and its acolytes to the expense of maintaining a climate of peace and international security. The Romanian diplomatic circles were forced to undergo endeavors and specific actions in order to obtain, from the powers which guaranteed the „Versailles system” increased guarantees for the protection of our independence and integrity in the new international context, actions which were doomed to fail given the peaceful and non-confrontational tendencies of France and England; thus, Romania had to elaborate a new approach in regard to economic and political-diplomatic relations.*

Key words: *peace, security, independence, aggression, revisionism*

1. Introduction

On the eve of the Second World War, we notice an increase in political-diplomatic tensions between the powers who were victorious in the First World War and the losing countries, with Germany in the lead, who would insistently demand the abolition of the „Versailles system”, seen as the source „of all historical injustice” (DDF, Tome IV, 1933, p. 565).

Confronted with the danger of international revisionism, the guardant powers of the Peace Treaties of Paris concluded between 1919 and 1920 and especially England adopted a defeatist policy with extremely serious consequences.

In this context, the new government, presided by Lord Chamberlain in 1937 turned out to be unable to firmly respond to aggressive countries which violated the system of collective security, sealed by the Versailles system.

On the other hand, the diplomacy promoted by the British Chancellery suggested the solution was to form a „Collegium” with such members as „England, France, Germany, Italy” (xxx, 1980, p.504) an organism which was called upon to solve pressing matters

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likely to create dissension between states and as a result, this international forum would provide solutions meant to maintain peace and collective security on the continent.

In the opinion of the British prime minister, the working hypothesis was that the demands of A. Hitler and B. Mussolini „had to be met even if it entailed certain sacrifices” (xxx, 1980, p. 504).

Furthermore, the private correspondence of Chamberlain stated, on November 26th, 1937, the following – „provide us with insurance that you will not use force in Austria and Czechoslovakia and we will assure you that we will assist you in your desire for change” (DDF, Tome IV, 1933, p. 565).

All these represented acts of denouncing international guarantees regarding security and peace in Europe, but were also serious threats to small and middle states from the central and Southeastern areas of the European continent which were in the position of being the victims of aggressive states.

Even more, from their statute of countries which were protected and the beneficiaries of the system of „collective guarantees of the Paris peace conference held in 1919-1920, were transformed in bargains for the ease of diplomatic and military relations between the grant powers and the revengeful ones”. Given this situation, „London’s diplomatic circles believed Czechoslovakia was the sick man of Europe and was not supposed to undergo any action which resulted in lighting from the strong neighboring country” (Feilling K., 1946, p. 333).

Furthermore, lord Henderson stated that „we must accept unity of all Germans and allow them to arm, as it was legitimate to initiate war against the Slavic people” (Middlemas K., 1972, p. 74).

In this international context, Romanian diplomacy faced the situation of having to carefully manage the evolution of the relation of forces in the international arena by seeking different forms and methods by which its desire to maintain its territorial status quo and independence was made known.

Along with Czechoslovakia, the country which was under the most serious threat was Austria, a fact well known to English and French diplomacy, but who chose to maintain a climate of tolerance which was found to be inadmissible.

These were the coordinates of the evolution of diplomatic international relations during the time of 1937-1939; we can see the German diplomacy, by its actions, undertook a cautious attitude meant to „engulf Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia in a sentimental network in order to decrease their vigilance” (DDD, 1973, page 96). It is a well-known fact that political and diplomatic circles of Romania, namely the regime of Carol the second, did not fall victim to this trap.

The insurance provided by the Third Reich according to which Germany did not issue any territorial claims in the Balkans but merely attempted to establish contacts of friendship and economic development, were likely to cause concern in Romanian political circles who attempted to maintain the traditional alliance policy with Germany and England, although the pressure of the German circles was significantly increasing.

The resistance of the Bucharest government as well as their new forms of action regarding the protection of „the system of collective guarantees” was not unnoticed in Berlin, a fact noted by Francois Poncet, the ambassador of France in the capital of the

Reich who stated in February 1938 (xxx, 1980, p. 505) that – “it is certain that Germany will take a stand against the countries which exercise influence over Romania and Austria” (DDD, 1973, p. 96).

In this situation, Romanian diplomacy would undertake its endeavors and actions in order to strengthen regional alliances, especially with countries which were members of the Balkan Treaty and to intensify the diplomatic networks and channels with England and France.

The energy and dedication with which Romanian diplomatic circles acted in support of the chancelleries of France and England prove that there was still hope for support by the western powers in order to guarantee the territorial and political security of Romania.

A moment with extremely serious consequences for the future evolution of international relations was the annexing of Austria by Germany on March 13, 1938, when the federal government surrendered to the Third Reich; for the political circles in Romania, it was obvious the German expansion would not stop and the leading tendencies manifested by the Nazi circles, encouraged by the defeatist policy of western countries, would make room for further aggression.

It was stated by Romanian diplomacy that the assault on Austria's independence represents a “casus belli, and, as a consequence, the Anschluss was endangering the status quo of the entire Danube region” (xxx, 1980, page 505).

A document of those times states that Romanian politicians were disappointed by the hesitation and compromise made by western powers and especially France; thus, King Carol II stated to the French representative in Bucharest, A. Thiery that “Romania is forced to economically turn towards Germany due to the exclusive fault of France” (DDD, 197, p. 96).

And the fact that France would no longer acquire products from the Romanian market would make Germany „an important client and the main supplier of Romania”. (DDD, 1973, p. 96).

The annex of Austria would cause concern not only in Romanian political circles, but also in the chancelleries of Prague, Belgrade, Ankara or Athens, where the tolerant policy of England and France towards Germany's aggression would be condemned, as Germany was intentionally violating international regulations, thus rendering the Society of Nations an inefficient organism.

The annexing of Austria would result in an economic development of Germany, given the natural and industrial resources of Austria, far more important than those offered by the former colonial possessions; on the other hand, it would provide Hitler's regime with a new geo-strategic position given that its frontier would become common with Italy, Yugoslavia and Hungary and he would also largely engulf Czechoslovakia.

Given the new situation, an English historian, A. Toynbee, stated that “England and France would use their own hands to create the necessary conditions for continuing the aggression in South-East Europe, when the premises for the formation of a great economic space in which Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania would be forced to produce what was needed for the German war machine” (TETW, 1958, p. 47).

All these elements were likely to produce concern within the political power circles in Bucharest, but, at the same time, favored the ascent of pro German circles, fascist circles which believed that the days of the personal regime of Carol II were numbered.

Romanian diplomacy believed that, under these circumstances, a greater and more effective propaganda was needed by using an articulate lobby exercised on the western circles in order to make known the position of Romania, who was subjected to direct threat from Germany. Thus, Romanian foreign affairs representative, N. Petrescu-Comnen, during a work visit in Paris, in May 1938, stated, for the political circles in France that „Germany was at the gates of the country and it targets the oil and Romanian riches, while the Reich spreads its economical empire towards the Baltic countries, as its representatives search for new markets” (DDD, 1973, p. 755). Much more consistent measures are required in order to counteract Germany.

The Romanian foreign affairs representative addressed France and England demanding increased support in order to ensure status quo in the Balkan area and direct intervention which would stop Germany’s assault on the economy and resources of the countries in this area.

At the same time, the Romanian representative mentioned the special situation of Czechoslovakia, by informing the French side of the support promised for Romania on the occasion of the Sinaia Treaty, in case Romania would be under attack from Hungary. The Romanian diplomat received insurance from France that, in case Czechoslovakia is subjected to aggression from Germany, it would benefit from political help from France and England.

All these events were likely to cause vivid concern for the Romanian political and diplomatic circles, a fact also noted by the Romanian press, which saw the system of collective guarantees of the 1919-1920 treaties being disobeyed by revengeful national – fascist countries which were in full expansion.

The extremely tolerant pacifist policy of England and France against the threat of aggressive countries would be demonstrated by the fact that these countries didn’t think it was necessary to discuss, within the General Assemblies of the Society of United Nations, the problem of the illegal annexation of Austria, thus violating the provisions of article 80 of the Versailles Treaty, as well as those of article 88 of the Saint-Germain Treaty, which regulated the enforcement of a sanctioning regime directed against any country which violated the treaty.

The Anschluss was one of the first violations of the territorial regime of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919-1920, by also showing great weakness manifested from England and France towards Germany.

It was, in fact, a failure of the French-British diplomacy, as they attempted to justify the so-called „legitimate” claims of Germany by noting that the annexation of Austria was „a family matter” as the English prime minister Lord N. Chamberlain noted; on the other hand, the Anschluss did not create any responsibility for France, as Delbos would declare in a note addressed to the French diplomats.

Starting from these circumstances, Nazi Germany’s path was opened towards the Balkan area, but the most threatened country would be Czechoslovakia. The Berlin political circles would decisively declare that Germany’s intent was to subjugate the

economy of these countries by showing ignorance of the “the desire or will of these countries” (DDD, 1973, page 755) as they had to enter the influence zone of the Third Reich.

Germany would apply constant pressure over Romania, especially after the March 13th 1938 act, considering the rich natural resources of Romania, especially Romanian oil and cereals, thus Romanian politicians would unite by performing remarkable diplomatic activity and using all available means and channels, by drafting a large number of diplomatic memoirs and notes in which they warned the decision-making circles of France and England about the serious consequences triggered by the increasing German influence in this area, at the same time demanding they did not abandon Romania.

2. Conclusions

The answer of western diplomacy was discouraging for the Romanian politicians, as an English diplomat stated that „England does not want to give the impression that it would attempt to encircle Germany” (Moisiuc V., 1971, p.38).

This faulty policy promoted by British diplomacy was noted by the French military attaché in Bucharest who, in a note addressed to Paris, showed that England did not want to get involved in ensuring security for European countries, thus allowing Germany to proceed; as a result, France was unable to provide support for the countries in this area. At the same time, he noted that “in lack of a strong coalition, it is impossible for Romania to fight Germany” (Archive, 1938, p. 256).

Under these circumstances, Romania’s situation was much more difficult, as it had to counteract the ethnical and territorial revenge practice and tendencies promoted by the neighboring Hungary; thus, it had to make economic concessions to Germany so as not to aggravate its situation, as it was more and more politically and diplomatically isolated.

This is the time during which Romania noticed that it was left by all its former allies and, at national level, the personal regime of Carol II would be contested by democratic circles represented by historical parties as well as those found under the influence of Nazi Germany, which was likely to create significant problems for Romanian diplomacy which had to find new means of action.

Around the Munich agreement of September 30th, 1938, which sealed a deal giving Germany the possibility to annex southern Czechoslovakia, under the pretext that the majority population was formed of ethnical Germans, Germany’s pressure over Romania was more and more powerful, a fact which would be confirmed by the representative of Germany’s government in Bucharest, who showed that Romania must be kept close and the support granted to pro-Nazi circles must be strengthened, as in case of a conflict with Czechoslovakia „Romania must be counted upon to be neutral” (Jahrbuch, 1966, p. 146).

The same diplomat warned Berlin and launched the hypothesis that, in case the Society of Nations declared Germany an aggressor state, it would conflict with Czechoslovakia, whereas France and England would militarily intervene in its defense or “would enforce sanctions, whereas Romania, still faithful to the pledge made to the

Society of Nations, would join Germany; in this case, only a quick success of the German army, the passivity of France and neutrality of Hungary would stop Romania from entering into an armed conflict with Germany” (xxx, 1980, p. 508).

The support Romania was supposed to grant Czechoslovakia came from fulfilling its tasks resulting from the French-Czech treaty, the protocols of the meetings held within the Minor Treaty, as well as the general objectives stated by the Society of Nations.

Things would evolve in a negative manner, a fact which became obvious as a result of the position held by the chancellery in London where Lord Chamberlain claimed that British interests would only be affected in case France and Belgium’s territory would be conquered.

In this context, Czechoslovakia’s faith would be sealed during the Munich convention of September 30th, 1938 where it was allowed for the principle of national sovereignty and territorial integrity to be violated, which in turn, represented a violation of international treaties.

“Thus, the path was opened for revengeful powers to take on South-East European countries, allowing Germany to strengthen its economic, military and strategic position, so as the entire European equilibrium” xxx, 1980, p. 513) to perish.

As a consequence, the system agreed upon by the Paris treaty of 1919-1920 became compromised and, on a political and diplomatic level, the Society of Nations would prove its limitations, a fact which led to a new world war.

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