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REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

**Romania and the International Relationship at the  
Beginning the Two World Conflagration**

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**Abstract:** Obviously, in terms of Romania's participation in World War II, from a historiographic point of view, the situation would allow a certain thoroughness of studying the respective period, turning often to gradations of the interpretation given to the historical events. (Șuța, 1982; Anescu, Bantea, & Cupșa, 1966; Militara & Militara, 1989) Throughout the war, the main opponents of Nazi Germany, the Big Three, would clearly state their position on the political future of Germany, and especially on the territories entered in one way or another under the trusteeship or control of the Third Reich, addressing the need for redeeming their freedom and independence. For the Central and East European countries, the removal of the German military occupation would in most cases coincide with the establishment of Soviet control, the immediate consequences being the communization of the Central and South Eastern Europe. When analyzing more closely the twentieth century, we can see that the paradox of contemporary history is constituted by the causes, deployment and consequences of the Second World War. Initially triggered by Hitlerite Germany on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, in order to create and strengthen *the vital space* so necessary to the "Aryan race", it had great implications and echoes from the start, all over the world, so that the West's media and public opinion ultimately determined the Western democracies to intervene to prevent Nazi domination in Europe.

**Keywords:** Second World War; Hitlerite Germany; control of the Third Reich

Throughout the war, the main opponents of Nazi Germany, the Big Three, would clearly state their position on the political future of Germany, and especially on the territories entered in one way or another under the trusteeship or control of the Third Reich, addressing the need for redeeming their freedom and independence. For the Central and East European countries, the removal of the German military occupation would in most cases coincide with the establishment of Soviet control, the immediate consequences being the communization of the Central and South Eastern Europe.

Soviet expansion in Europe and the Far East would be underestimated by the Anglo-American representatives during high-level meetings held with the Soviet state officials throughout the conflagration, favoring a genuine lack of alternative available to this area at the end of the war. The attitude of the Anglo-Americans was therefore ambiguous in this regard, but a strong stand in this regard, urged by the political representatives of the opposition from the states recently Sovietized by the Soviets, would be adopted somewhat later when Kremlin's intentions of expansion and establishment of *popular democracies* would directly threaten Western states (Baciu, 1996, pp. 228-229; Winkler, 1996, pp. 36; 46-48; 54; Arhivele Nationale ale Romaniei/National Archives of Romania, 1996, p. 460).

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Romania's participation in the Second World War would be determined by the political and military isolation more and more pronounced, circumstances in which the only possibility to recover the territories lost in the summer of 1940 forced the Romanian authorities to consider the possibility of an alliance with Germany. The territorial losses (Simion, 1996, pp. 359-365; Constantin, 1995, p. 62; Chirițescu, 1995, p. 250) of the summer of 1940 accentuated the political decline of the monarchical regime established by King Carol II, who would eventually have to resort to the services of General Ion Antonescu to bring the country out of this deadlock. In consensus with most of the country's political forces and with the support of Germany, the new Prime Minister would urge the king to abdicate in favor of his son, Mihai, establishing a military-legionary dictatorship regime on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1940.

The external political context characterized by the unprecedented expansion of Nazism on the continent and beyond, allowed the expression of the true political interests of the Legionary Movement, reason for which the brutal divorce between the Legion and General Antonescu occurred on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and the General took over the entire power of the state. In the internal policy, the old restrictions would be maintained, and externally, Antonescu would permanently pursue the recovery of the Romanian territories lost in the summer of 1940. In order to achieve this vital objective of the Romanian state, considering the international political circumstances, Romania would become the loyal ally of the Nazi Germany, considered by the head of the state as being the only power capable of supporting the Romanian interests at that time.

The natural consequence of this situation would be the synchronization of the Romanian and German external policies, the practical actions consisting in Romania's entering into the war against the Soviet Union, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941, having as purpose the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from the Soviet occupation. General Antonescu's intention to engage the country in war against the soviets would be received with satisfaction by the Romanian public opinion, most of the leaders of the political parties expressing their agreement with the actions of the head of the state.

Military professional, General Ion Antonescu would immediately deal with solving the problems of the army, aggravated during the personal dictatorship of King Carol II. Enjoying a bad reputation abroad (Quilan, 1995, p. 59), the Romanian army had a program full of military parades, but it received much fewer financial resources needed for its endowment and fit up with equipment, as compared to other armies on the continent. The situation was aggravated by the fact that, at the time of Romania's entry into war, the traditional allies were either defeated, like France, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland, or they hardly managed to cope with Nazi's aggression, like England, and for a long time they were unable to help the Romanian authorities in any way.

The increase in German economic, political and military control would aim at attaining Third Reich's own interests, but, as far as the Romanian side is concerned, it was preferable to participate in a war with the Germans rather than with the Russians who, anyway, were not concerned by in supporting the Romanian interests in Transylvania, on the contrary, they pursued the occupation of certain territories in Romania (Markham, 1996, pp. 69-71). Fully aware of Romania's delicate political and military situation, Hitler would not consider it necessary to inform Antonescu of the German army's future offensive plans. Prior to the first meeting of the two, it was decided in Berlin to increase the troops of the German Military Mission in Romania, called to train the Romanian troops by both King Carol and Antonescu. The German preoccupations for the training and endowment of the Romanian army would be last on their minds, as the missions of the German Commands and German troops were the following in the Wehrmacht leadership's conception:

- Protecting the petroleum region against the predatory intentions of a third power, as well as against destruction;
- Training of the Romanian Armed Forces on the basis of a strict plan, according to German interests, in order to solve well-established tasks;
- Prepare the engagement of the German and Romanian troops in wartime in the case of a war with Soviet Russia, having Romania as basis.

Moreover, Hitler requested the German commanders of the troops stationed in Romania to avoid at any cost “the appearance of a military occupation of Romania” (Duțu, 1997, pp. 18-19). Taking into account the negative assessments of the German military authorities made in Berlin reference to the Romanian army, it can be concluded that the stated purpose for the stationing of Reich’s troops in Romania was in fact final, being a disguise, masking its true political and military intentions (Duțu, 1997, pp. 18-19). Contrary to all appearances, the Romanian army would receive important support from the Wehrmacht, consisting in the improvement of combat training and military technique, but the aid received was far from sufficient, the whole commanding body of the Romanian army being at that time fully aware of that.

From both political and military point of view, the rebuilding of the Romanian army was the fundamental objective of the political authorities in Bucharest, Antonescu’s intentions being expressed clearly and unequivocally both in the country and especially during his frequent meetings with Hitler. Counting everything on the fact that Germany would win the war, the international geopolitical context leaving him no other alternative, General Antonescu would declare himself “convinced” that the Germans would acknowledge – in the new Europe - the inherent role of Romania as regional hegemony (Antonescu & Hitler, 1991, p. 77).

From a certain point of view, the situation was true, however, given the fact that the summer of 1940 had been one of the worst in terms of the territorial losses suffered, the entry of the German troops into the country coinciding with the installation of an additional national security and safety, especially at the eastern border, “where the measures adopted for the purpose of achieving a frontal defense along the Prut River” (Antonescu & Hitler, 1991, p. 17) were converging at those moments with the Romanian interests and preoccupations “in the face of the endless threats from the Red Army”. (Hillgruber, p. 152)

Although the two states had begun to provide important services or concessions on a reciprocal basis when General Antonescu gained power, his willingness to participate to a potential German-Soviet military conflict from the outset would not manage to fade the conviction of the public opinion that Germany was the main artisan of the breakdown of the Romanian state in the summer of 1940, and that Romania had been treated as an object of international relations (Antonescu & Hitler, 1991, p. 39).

However, the attitude of the German Supreme Leadership will be based on the belief that Romania’s participation in the war was understandable, given the precarious international situation in which it was found, since the Romanian authorities did not make any secret of their intentions to reunite as quickly as possible with the provinces lost in the summer of 1940. By stating his loyalty to Germany in the event of a war with the Soviet Union, Antonescu would quickly become Hitler’s “factotum for the common cause of Germany and Romania”, although from the point of view of international law - no military or political alliance treaty was concluded between the two states - both of them carrying “just a parallel war against the Soviet Union” (Hillgruber, p. 151). Counting on the fact that Germany would certainly win the war - the geopolitical situation at that time leaving no other alternative - General Antonescu would consider that the only solution to restore state’s integrity was the military alliance with Germany,

but the estimates of the Romanian army among the German military authorities were particularly precarious. The planned military offensive against the Soviet Union -Directive no. 21 (“Barbarossa” Plan), adopted by Hitler on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941, did not seriously take into account the combat potential of the Romanian army, as it would only participate with “selected forces” (Duțu, 1997, p. 24).

However, as the start date of the anti-Soviet war was approaching, Romania’s strategic role was increasingly considered by Wehrmacht, the number of German troops arriving in the country rising almost exponentially, attracting the attention of the military officials of other states accredited in Bucharest (Quilan, 1995, pp. 64-65). The US military attaché, for example, in a secret report forwarded to the diplomatic authorities in Washington, mentioned the number of 30,000 German troops, the pace of entering into the country rising with the second half of December, being in average 10,000 soldiers per day, i.e. about 40 trains arrived daily (Hillgruber, p. 151).

Such measures could not escape the Romanian authorities, who, despite confirming their participation to a German-Soviet war, wanted to be informed of the date of the Soviet Union’s invasion. Secretive, the upper German leadership would not rush to inform the Romanians about the mobilizations made, as the instructions given by Hitler to the leader of the German Military Mission in Romania were to avoid a precise answer to the question of the head of the Romanian state “if Germany expects a war or whether Germany would attack Russia in case the circumstances would require it” (Hillgruber, p. 168).

Under these conditions, it was obvious that the Romanian Great General Staff would be in a situation of increased difficulty, as Romania’s military training left a lot to be desired at many levels. Moreover, the achievement of the initial combat disposition, according to a variant that envisaged the defense in the case of an imminent Soviet attack, would cause various deficits in the offensive phase of the military actions.

Although the surprise factor, relied upon by so many Germans, was decisive, it would not compensate for the shortcomings of the military collaboration between the Romanian and German command structures. The delay in informing Antonescu on the imminence of the attack on the Soviet Union until June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941, would greatly influence the optimization of the relations between the commands of the two armies, as the head of the German Military Mission stated, referring to the Romanian-German collaboration, that “the Romanian Great General Staff cannot be asked to execute the indications of the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, without concluding at least an agreement regarding Romania’s participation to the coalition war that was being prepared” (Duțu, 1997, p. 26). The German-Romanian military cooperation on a strategic and military level was not based on a legal act, this possibly giving a wider freedom of movement for Romania, the alliance between the two states being put to discussion according to the “susceptibility of any virtuality” (Constantin, 1995, pp. 124-127), but when the military operations against the Soviets began on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941, Romania would enter the war without making a statement in this regard, considering it was no longer necessary (Chirițescu, 1995, p. 214). General Ion Antonescu would endeavor to assume full responsibility for the initiation of the liberation war of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, but the popular sentiment was of satisfaction, doubled, rightly, by the grim prospects of a war that forced the Romanians to choose between fighting for the replenishment of their borders with the Germans, their former enemies, and against the Russians, former allies, but which now proved to be more threatening in terms of national security or territorial integrity of Romania (Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, pp. 216-217). The reason behind the military collaboration with the Reich will be explained by the General pragmatically, claiming to the critics that “we will fight with the Germans not for their interests, but for defending our borders; we do not help them, but they help us”; Grigore Gafencu, the Romanian diplomat, the Romanian Ministry in Moscow back then, had a similar position (Constantin, 1995, p. 127).

The justification of Romania's entry into the war had been long prepared by the Romanian authorities, consistent with the attitude of non-recognition of the territorial losses to which the Romanian state had been subjected in the summer of 1940. Considering that "it is preferable to call the abduction of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina as an act of force Romania did not accept but as is"<sup>1</sup>, Ion Antonescu drew the attention of the accredited Romanian Minister in Moscow not to respond to a possible invitation from the Government of the Soviet Union to conclude a legal agreement with possible major implications for Romania for the future. The head of the state drew the attention of the Romanian Minister that "we have no interest in legalizing this act, giving the Soviets a legal title for holding this province ... The Romanian Government considers that it is not the time to have a commitment related to our borders with the U.S.S.R." (Constantin, 1995, p. 127). Now it was time for the Romanian army to free the two Romanian provinces, taking advantage of the extremely favorable position, having a strong ally in Germany, as Romania all by itself could not cope with the huge potential represented by the Soviets.

The sense given to the politics pursued by the future Marshal was also given by the leaders of the political parties, i.e. liberal and peasant parties, with whom Antonescu kept political contacts through various means (Ciachir, 1996, p. 298), and the Romanian military action was perceived as justified by the Anglo-American political circles, which proceeded fairly to dissociate the sense and character of the East campaign from that of Germany, which was officially condemned. On June 25<sup>th</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup>, the English and American Governments made known their position to the Romanian authorities and to Maniu, through their accredited representatives to Bucharest that "all due attention will be paid to the special situation of Romania and Finland" which, as the American Minister stated, "defend themselves against a fierce and unscrupulous opponent" (Constantin, 1995, p. 127).

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