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Political and legal aspects regarding Romania's participation in the Second World

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Abstract: Romania's participation in the Second World War was determined by political considerations and strategic needs, generated by the evolution of the international political situation in the middle of the twentieth century. The loss of an area of about 1/3 of the national territory and 6 million inhabitants, in favor of the three neighbors of the Romanian state, respectively the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria will be the fundamental reason for Romania's participation in military operations on both fronts. east and west, of the second world conflagration.

Keywords: military disasters; soldiers; agreements

Introduction

Thanks to the institutions that guided its development and the spirit in which it had evolved, starting with the second half of the 19th century, Romania had come appreciably closer to Europe, in terms of political development, the model accepted by Romanian society being parliamentary democracy, although, at the practical level it did not rise to the height of the ideal. Slower but just as firmly, the economy had also taken steps towards the Western system oriented towards the free market and competition of the capitalist type, and the social structure had already acquired a Western aspect, manifested by the predominance of the working-class middle in the political and social life of the country. The intellectuals and political people were perfectly aware of Romania's belonging to the culture, civilization and practices of Western-type democracy, seen through the very process of building the Romanian nation, the creation of Greater Romania, and its defense, as essentially representing a European phenomenon. This Romanian reality will soon be replaced by another,

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equally marked by the convulsions of the European political system. The process of the destructuring of state institutions and the loss of democracy in favor of arbitrariness and intolerance will be triggered immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War, during the regime of monarchical authority of King Charles II. The territorial losses (Simion, 1996) in the summer of 1940 will seriously affect the sovereignty of the state, the confidence in the person of the monarch who, due to the lack of internal political support, will be forced to abdicate in favor of his son Mihai. It could not be said that Romania did not do everything possible to avoid having to participate in this war. From September 1939 until June 1941, the state's foreign policy will be subordinated to the idea of non-alignment and neutrality (Constantin, 1995, pp. 27-41). However, the storm of war will also attract Romania, following the unfortunate events of the summer of 1940 (Bărbulescu, Deletant, Hitchins, Papacostea & Pompiliu, 1999, pp. 449-451), so that on June 22, 1941, the Romanian troops will cross the Prut, on the order of the head of the state at that time, General Ion Antonescu (Constantiniu & Schipor, 1995, pp. 163-170).

The establishment of the personal military dictatorship regime of General Ion Antonescu, combined with the efforts of the war against the Soviet Union, will act quite violently on state institutions and mentalities, contributing to the preparation of the ground for the accession to power of a new social and political order. The occupation of the country by the Soviet army after August 23, 1944, and the rapid rise to power of the communist party will move Romania away from its natural course, moving it away from Europe and towards the East. In political life we will witness the "burying of intellectual and spiritual affinities specific to an experiment of parliamentary democracy" under the auspices of the monarchy, for almost a century, in favor of an unprecedented authoritarianism (Constantiniu & Schipor, 1995, p. 42), in economic life, rigid centralized planning and management have replaced the free mix of private enterprises and coordination at the state level, and in terms of the intellectual and spiritual field, cultural personalities of all ranks were obliged to put their creative abilities at the service of building a new society. (emphasis in Gh. S).

The military campaign of the Romanian army on the Eastern front had as its main objective the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, territories that had been torn from the body of the country by the Soviet Union following the ultimatums of June 1940 (Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, pp. 216-221). It is no less true that Ion Antonescu also hoped for a reevaluation of Romania's position on the part of

Germany and the retrocession of Transylvania, which is why Hungary will also send troops to the Eastern front, declaring war on the U.S.S.R (Constantiniu, 2001, p. 51).

Thanks to the alliance with Germany, the two provinces will be liberated during the month of July with special human sacrifices (Kirițescu, 1995, p. 269) and the political controversies fought on the edge of the continuation or not of the anti-Soviet war beyond the Dniester will erupt fiercely between the political opposition of the “historical parties” and the cabinet of Marshal Ion Antonescu. Obviously, the opinion of the head of state will prevail and the Romanian soldiers will fight in the immensities of Russia, proving their special bravery, alongside the German allies who, more than once, will thank for the support and sacrifices made. The three great defeats, suffered by Romania alongside Germany at Stalingrad, in the Crimea and on the Moldavian front at Iasi - Chisinau, will have the dimensions of military disasters, unfortunately punctuating the course and the military end of the Romanian army’s campaign on the Eastern front, which it had lasted three years and two months (June 22, 1941-August 23, 1944). The defeat of the Romanian army on the Moldovan front, during the Soviet Iasi-Chisinau offensive, combined with the effects of the attack on the palace and the arrest of the marshal and his close collaborators, will pave the way for Romania’s exit from the alliance with Germany (Duțu, 2000, pp. 214-216), against a country that, with all its fault to have dispossessed us of an important part of the national territory, had become the “comrade in arms of our traditional allies”, together with whom the national unity of the nation (Kirițescu, 1995, p. 188) had been achieved.

In the new context created, the Romanian authorities in Bucharest will alone manage to face the wave of German anger, the Romanian troops disarming and liberating by themselves most of the national territory, including the capital, and covering the advance and deployment of the Soviet army. Regarding the meaning and importance of the act of August 23 over time, it will undergo substantial changes, depending on the evolution of political events (Marcou, 1998, pp. 68-87). However, the implementation of the *volta-face* by the Romanian troops will not be spared from unpleasant events, which occurred mainly on the Moldovan front. As soon as the units of the Romanian army on the front will receive the order to cease fire against the Soviet army and achieve detachment from the German troops, by withdrawing immediately to the south of the fortified line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Brăila (Duțu, 2000, p. 170), the unit commanders will obey the order of M.St. M., who expressed the will of the sovereign and will cease hostilities against the Red Army, trying to save

what could still be saved from the Romanian army, after the breaking of the front by the Soviets (Duțu, 2000, p. 170).

The Soviet commands will not take into account, in any way, this new situation, ordering the troops of the II and III Fronts in Ukraine to continue the offensive against the enemy, the result being the capture of a significant number of Romanian soldiers who had stopped fighting and their transformation into prisoners of war, a situation that will extend, curiously enough, until September 12, and, sporadically, even after this date¹. The situation of the crews of the Romanian fleet in the Danube Delta and the Black Sea will prove equally disastrous, forced to cease fire, following the order received from the Romanian authorities, being later forced to disembark from the ships and interned in the Soviet camps. On this occasion, most of the Romanian commercial fleet and, of course, the entire war fleet, requisitioned by the Soviets, will be lost². Cases in which the capture of Romanian soldiers by Soviet troops took place will also be found after the end of the armistice of September 12, and, curiously, most of them took place in regions where no military operations had been carried out between the Romanian-Soviet forces, such as Muntenia. All this took place while the soldiers of the Romanian army had to face the attack of the German troops, who had received the Führer's order to restore the situation in Romania, which threatened to collapse the entire German military apparatus in the Balkans.

On August 23, 1944, the Romanian military campaign in the anti-Soviet war ended, not without heavy losses in terms of the number of those missing in battle, not to mention the material losses suffered as a result of the bombings, the occupation of the territory or military equipment. Romania was Germany's most important ally on the Eastern front, having since 1942 a number of 26 Romanian divisions, compared to only eight Italian, 12 Hungarian and a fluctuating number of Finnish military units. As a result of these rather impressive military forces, of the 46 allied military units the Germans had on the eastern front, more than half were made up of Romanian units, a natural consequence being the number of considerable human losses suffered, proportional to the number of sent to the front.

The events of August 23 will radically change the international political conditions of Romania, which will be forced to fight, for the same causes, alongside former

¹ Arh M.Ap.N., fond 948, dosar 1799, f 23-24. The number of Romanian soldiers captured on the Moldovan front oscillates in Romanian documents between 60,000 and 160,000 prisoners, the most likely being the one given by an M.St.M. information note, respectively 130,000 Romanian soldiers.

² Idem, fond 379, dosar 10, f 45.

enemies and against former allies. This turning point of Romania in the course of the war, in addition to the considerable advantages brought to the cause of the United Nations, will be done at enormous costs, the Romanian authorities and the army personnel “finding themselves for a period of time in front of two enemies”, a fact that cost it an important number of Romanian soldiers taken prisoner by the Soviet troops¹. With all these important losses in men, material and combat equipment, Romania will be able to align on August 23, thanks to a cautious policy led by M.St.M. Romanian, 5 operative divisions, with full war strength, plus 29 other divisions, mostly made up of recruits and other regular elements, stationed at the sedentary services of the troops on the battlefield. The Romanian military units in the front area, being largely disorganized and destroyed following the Soviet offensive, the military campaign against Hitler’s Germany will be carried out with these divisions of recruits, constantly maintained in the country by the care of the M.St.M.

Signing of the Armistice Convention between Romania and the United Nations on September 12, 1944 will constitute the general framework in which Romania’s military campaign against Germany and its satellites will take place. The implementation of its clauses was the responsibility of an Allied (Soviet) Control Commission which, according to the agreements of the Big Three, would throw Romania into the arms of the Soviet Union. The brutal interference of the representatives of the control commission will decisively affect the course of internal political events, at the same time unbalancing the state budget through the massive takings of goods, raised on the basis of the Armistice Convention.

Determined to proceed as quickly as possible to the improvement of Romanian-Soviet relations and the liberation of Transylvania, the Romanian authorities will send to the front a greater number of military units than the 12 divisions provided for in the text of the armistice, passing on a large scale to the fulfillment of the economic tasks of the convention. Regarding the number of Romanian soldiers engaged in military operations against German troops, it amounted to approximately 538,536 soldiers, out of a total of 1,100,000 mobilized made available to the United Nations. Between August 23, 1944 and May 12, 1945, the Romanian armies covered about 1,700 km, at an average rate of 6. km per day, they forced 12 watercourses, 20 mountainous massifs, conquering 3,831 localities, including 53 important cities. All

¹ Arh M.Ap.N., fond 514, dosar 8, f 96.

these feats of arms were done at the expense of 169,822 soldiers, dead, wounded and missing.

Romania's contribution to the cause of the United Nations will be significant, leading to the shortening of the war by about 200 days and ensuring them a significant strategic, material and human advantage. Although Romania's economic war effort, estimated at the enormous amount of 1,200,000,000 dollars, 1938 currency, placed it on an honorable fourth place in the hierarchy of the United Nations that led the fight against Germany, the co-belligerency status, rightfully deserved by the country ours, he will be denied for political reasons known only to the Great Powers. Among all the states in a situation somewhat similar to that of Romania, none has made such a great military or economic effort to defeat the Nazi war machine¹.

The social and political situation in Romania did not deviate from these general rules during the mentioned period. Romania had already fallen into the zone of influence of the Soviet Union, following the agreements made in Moscow by the Prime Minister of Great Britain, W. Churchill and the head of the Soviet state I. V. Stalin (Baciu, 1990). What's more, the Red Army was on the offensive since January 1943, successively "liberating" the previously lost territories, quickly gaining possession of the entire area of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Trying to avoid at the last moment the dissolution of the state institutions through the military alliance with Germany, the young King Mihai I will proceed, in agreement with the political forces of the opposition, to remove from power Marshal I. Antonescu, from the head of the state². The new government appointed by the king on August 23, 1944 will present its point of view immediately through a political declaration, which had as its objective the conclusion of the armistice and the restoration of democracy, by reinstating the constitution of 1923³. Although the cessation of hostilities on the front, cumulative with Romania's political exit from the Axis forces, it was natural to surprise the Soviets, they will unjustifiably delay the signing of the armistice with the representatives of the Romanian government who arrived in Moscow, until September 12, 1944, at which time the Red Army occupied the entire country, and taking advantage of the order to cease hostilities given to the Romanian army by the

¹ A.N.I.C.B., fond Casa Regală, dosar 21/1945, f 1-12.

² The episode of the arrest of Marshal I. Antonescu on August 23, 1944 is widely covered by contemporary historiography, a detail from the point of view of the unfolding of events can be found in his work V. Frunza: Istoria stalinismului in Romania Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1990, p 131-134.

³ The given constitutional acts are: Decree 1626/1944 for "Fixing the rights of Romanians within the framework of the Constitution of 1866 and with the amendments made to the Constitution of March 29, 1923 Ioan Muraru, Drept constitutional si Institutii politice, Editura ACTAMI, Bucuresti, 1998, p 100.

sovereign, he will proceed on the Moldovan front to disarm and intern the Romanian soldiers as prisoners (Onisoru, 1996). The omnipresence of the Red Army will allow the Soviets to brutally intervene in Romania's internal affairs, giving the Communist Party the opportunity to overthrow the government, first that of General Sanatescu, and then that of General Radescu. The tactics of implementing the Communist Party in the power structures political, you will follow, first of all, the participation in national union governments from within which they could very easily take over the portfolios of key ministries, such as justice, the army, the interior (Soulet, 1998, p. 25).

Once installed in these key positions and having the argument of the anti-fascist purge, it will be very easy for the Romanian communists to reorganize as they please the gears of the state power structure according to a scenario consistently applied throughout Central and Eastern Europe, under the direct supervision and tutelage "of the army liberating reds" (Deletant, 2001, pp. 64-65; Markham, 1996, p. 178). Dominating without problems the administration, the army and through the people's tribunals, the judicial apparatus, the communists will unleash a powerful persecution against their opponents, harassing the members of the historical parties in order to capture the entire political apparatus.

The geopolitical context in which Romania was located will allow the Soviet Union to have direct decision-making power through the Allied Control Commission established according to the Armistice Convention by the Allies. This fact allowed the process of establishing "people's democracy" regimes on the borders of the U.S.S.R. to be precipitated, as a consequence, Romania will be forced to change the political regime and, finally, even the form of government. One of the communists' methods aimed at weakening citizens' trust in state institutions was the triggering of anti-government demonstrations, in parallel with sabotaging the government from within it, thus forcing the resignation of the cabinet (Sănătescu and Radescu, as the case may be) Exacerbating the political conflict within the government between the representatives of the communist party and those of the historical parties, will lead the Soviet Union to impose the bringing to power of a government dominated by communists on the grounds that the previous political cabinets do not respect the provisions of the Armistice Convention, protecting the collaborators of the Antonescian regime, without being able to do against the "important anti-fascist political demonstrations of the population" (Onisoru, 1996, p. 215).

The imposition of the Petru Groza government was made with the broad competition of the representative of Soviet diplomacy, Andrei Vishinski, who through

intimidation will succeed in obtaining the resignation of the Radescu cabinet. However, the democratic appearances had to be saved, so the Groza government will be presented as a government of broad national concentration, representative of the entire people, hence the legitimacy that the communists wanted to obtain for future political measures. The context in which they came to power will force the communists to take into account the existence of a large opposition so that “Scânteia” and “Free Romania” will start a skillful propaganda in order to attract the most important political support.

The first of the populist measures with which the government will seek to win the approval of the rural population will be the promulgation of the agrarian reform (Șandru, 2000; Deletant, 2001). The establishment of the Groza government will bring with it the total subordination of law enforcement to the representatives of the communist party, now having a completely different mission, namely that of contributing to the strengthening of the political stability of the government dominated by the communists. The army will undergo important “democratic transformations” as a consequence, the purge in successive waves of officers, considered to be little or no loyal to the regime, parallel to the formation of the future core of the “people’s army”, made up mainly of ex-Romanian prisoners from U.S.S.R. and are now constituted in the two divisions of volunteers, namely: “Tudor Vladimirescu” and “Horia, Cloșca și Crișan”¹. Externally, the Groza government was only recognized by the Soviet Union, which is why on March 9, 1945, the Romanian government will receive approval for the re-establishment of the administration in Northern Transylvania. At the end of the war, the refusal of the United States and Great Britain, to recognize him, will lead King Mihai to demand the resignation of the cabinet, but the prime minister, having the support of the Soviet Union, will not consider the sovereign’s request².

Although fluctuating, due to the signing of the Romanian-Soviet military protocol on October 26, the Romanian military forces employed in the theater of operations will be permanently above the minimums imposed by the Armistice Convention. Moreover, Romania’s contribution was total³, with the authorities and the population

¹ Vezi Arhiva M.A.P. N., fond 3570, dosar 350, f. 12-13; Arhivele Istorice Centrale(AIC), fond Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, dosar 94/1944, fila 17, dosar 88/1945, f. 321, dosar 123/1946 f. 16; Arhivele Statului Galați, fond Legiunea de Jandarmi Covurlui, dosar 92/1945, f. 104, dosar 99/1945 f. 106.

² Ibidem, p. 221. In total contrast to the constitutional provisions, the government will issue a statement in which it states that "it is determined to remain steadfast in its post to continue and complete the constructive work".

³ Arh M.Ap.N.,fond 948, dosar 177, passim.

making considerable efforts to support the military campaign of the Romanian troops. no military organizations, troops or any other type of military associations or units continued the fight against the United Nations after the return of arms against Germany on August 23. For example, Italy contributed 100,000 partisans to the United Nations cause, while 5 infantry divisions and 2 aviation squadrons will continue the fight in Northern Italy on the German side. In the case of Hungary, it is about 10 divisions, Bulgaria - a pro-fascist division, Yugoslavia - 3 divisions, 9 brigades plus a guard division and a cavalry division. In France, the number of those who continued the fight against the allies will amount to the effectives of a fast division and, in Poland, to around 20-25,000 soldiers¹. The memorandum submitted by Romania to the Paris Peace Conference mentioned, in addition to the direct military and economic war effort made by our country, the amount of the obligations fulfilled until July 1, 1945, under Article 3 of the Convention, which amounted to of 77 billion lei, 1938 currency.

The defeat of Nazi Germany, so desired and welcomed by the majority of the peoples of eastern and southeastern Europe, will not be an occasion for maximum joy, since the alternative to the communist system, brutally imposed by the Soviet model, will be repudiated in most among the eastern societies, disturbed by the war and the “liberation of the red army”. Hundreds of thousands of people would fully feel the “advantages of Soviet liberation” and the consequences of the transformation of their countries’ political systems into Soviet-inspired “people’s regimes”. The conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference will allow the government to conclude the Peace Treaty between Romania and the Allied Powers on February 10, 1947. The treaty contained important provisions that affected state sovereignty by allowing the Red Army troops to continue stationing on Romanian territory. The text of the treaty stipulated, among other things, the abolition of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission, so that the Soviet interferences will have to acquire another aspect, namely that of requests, addressed directly to the legitimate and constitutional communist government (subl.ns. Gh.Ş). The year 1947 will represent a decisive year in the establishment of popular type democracy in Romania and not only, the outbreak of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union favoring the emergence of the two opposite political-military blocs.

¹ Idem, dosar 151, f 105-110.

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