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## ROMANIAN-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS *as Conveyed by Romanian Diplomatic Documents Referring to the Balkan Area (1939)*

**ABSTRACT.** One of the most trustworthy partners of Romania was Yugoslavia. Their common purposes, defensive views, as well as the alliances they were part of, reflect this fact. These states, the forms of which were renewed at the end of The First World War, had always wished for the maintenance of peace and development according to the principles of the Peace Treaties of Paris (1919–1920). The Romanian Yugoslav cooperation in the Little Entente and The Balkan Pact represented the desire of the states in this area to settle down, to stop revisionist states' pretension of reconfiguring the borders.

Situated in a restless area, Yugoslavia was compelled to be mindful and on the look out for Fascist Italy's external politics, especially after the occupation of Albania, while Romania found itself a neighbouring country of Nazi Germany after the latter occupied Czechoslovakia. Our endeavour conducts an analysis of the year 1939 through the eyes of diplomats who struggled to stay neutral and maintain their countries' territories unaltered.

**KEYWORDS:** Yugoslavia, Romania, Little Entente, Balkan Pact, revisionism.

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One of the trusted partners of Romania was Serbia and later on, Yugoslavia. Common interests they shared, defensive outlook, as well as the alliances they had been part of, reflected this fact. As the states which have assumed a new form after The First World War, they wished to maintain and develop the principles of the Peace Treaties of Paris (1919–1920). The Romanian-Yugoslav partnership within the Little Entente as well as in the Balkan Pact has represented the desire of the States in this area to restrain or to stop revisionist states' desire to reconfigure the borders.

Situated in a problematic area, Yugoslavia was compelled to be on the lookout for the actions of Fascist Italy, especially after the occupation of Czechoslovakia. We undertake the mission to conduct an analysis of the year 1939, as seen through the eyes of the diplomats who wished to remain neutral and maintain a wholesome territory of their countries.

Romanian Yugoslav relations have known a permanent evolution. States which were known under new names after the Treaties of Paris (1919–1920), have enjoyed the fulfilling of their national ideal, the creation of a new state, which would unite between its borders the majority of the native speakers of Romanian and Serbian languages. Although they have fought for maintaining the new system they have obtained after so harsh a struggle, the revisionist danger and the birth of the totalitarian systems have not spared the two neighbouring states. That is the reason for which we hold the year 1939 to be filled with meaning for the two states of whose unsuccessful efforts to avoid the most dangerous conflagration it renders. The year 1939 conveys the efforts of states which have supported the collective security politics and the defensive inclined alliances for maintenance of stability in the area. However, it has been found that the desire of revisionist states to tear certain states to pieces or to enclose states as a whole could not be restrained.

In a larger picture of relations in the Balkans, the point of view brought by Tevfik Rüstü in a discussion with Gheorghe Filality, is to be found in a diplomatic report dated November 4th 1927:

„This can't be the case anymore, as the difficulties, instead of disappearing, grow heavier every day, but I can assure you—and I have serious reasons to think it will be so—that we will soon witness the creation of a new European constellation, composed of Czechoslovakia, Serbia and Bulgaria, the latter two ending up in mutual reconciliation, in order to form a strong Slavic mass, which they will be compelled to take seriously. Unless you wish to expose yourselves to unpleasant

surprises, before the six months are over, you must name your delegates whom should begin negotiations with ours. Only after the beginning of these negotiations, we could grant, as we have done for the others, a new prolongation, in case the Convention could not be finished in due time.<sup>2</sup>"

Starting with the middle of the XIX century until the second decade of the XX century, the Balkans were thought to be the gun powder barrel of Europe, because in this area there was a great deal of tension and numerous military conflicts.

In 1875–1876, there took place Serbia and Montenegro's military action against Turkey, as well as anti-turkish rebellions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria.

In 1877–1878 there was recorded the Russian-Romanian-Turkish war, at the end of which there was acknowledged the state independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and there was created the Principality of Bulgaria, a vassal of The Ottoman Empire.

In January 1878, there occurred a wide Anti-Ottoman rebellion in Thessaly, a territory which in 1881 was united with Greece.

Between November 14, 1885 and March 3, 1886, there occurred the war between Serbia and Bulgaria.

In April to December 1897 there occurred a Greco-Turkish war which was lost by Greece.

On October 5, 1908, Bulgaria proclaimed its independence and on October 6, 1908, Bosnia and Herzegovina was enclosed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In March to October 1912, The Balkan Alliance was created through bilateral treaties concluded by Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. In April to August 1912 there occurred a wide rebellion of the Albanese against The Ottoman Empire, as a result of which, on November 28, 1912, Albania proclaimed its independence.

Between October 18, 1912 and May 30, 1913, there occurred the First Balkan War between the Balkan Alliance and The Ottoman Empire, which ended with the victory of the Alliance.

There followed the Second Balkan War (June 29 – August 10, 1913), between Bulgaria on one side and Montenegro, Greece, Turkey, Romania on the other, which ended with the defeat of the Bulgarian army. Through the Peace Treaty, signed in Bucharest on August 10, Romania was given Southern Dobruja (the Durostor and Caliacra

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Ministry Archive fund 71/1920–1944 Turkey vol 58 f 148–149

counties). It is fit to underline the fact that for the first time, in 1913, the Balkan problems were solved exclusively by the states in this area.

On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir of Austro-Hungarian Empire was assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist. This action created the alleged reason for the beginning of the First World War, on July 28, 1914.

During the First World War, the Balkan States found themselves inside hostile alliances: Bulgaria and Turkey were part of the Central Powers alliance (Germany and Austro-Hungarian Empire), while Serbia and Romania were integrated into the Entente (France, The United Kingdom and The Soviet Union). Victory belonged to The Entente: Bulgaria capitulated September 16–29, The Ottoman Empire October 17–30, Germany acknowledged its defeat October 29 – November 11, 1918, acknowledgement which would mark the end of the First World War.

At the end of the war, there occurred important territorial changes in the South East of Europe. In 1918, Romania's national unity was realised through the unification of Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania and in the southern part of the Danube, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established.

In 1919, The Peace Conference took place in Paris. Through the Treaty of Neuilly sur Seine (September 10, 1919), Bulgaria lost Western Thrace to Greece and confirmed the bordering with Romania which dated back to 1913. The Treaty of Trianon (June 4, 1920) signed with Hungary, acknowledged the unification of Transylvania with Romania, as well as the unification of Croatia and Slovenia with Serbia.

Woeman, in a report of May 3, 1939, unveiled Turkish efforts to strengthen the Balkan Entente. Ankara and London were making efforts to reach a solution for the Romanian-Bulgarian misunderstandings. Nevertheless, The United Kingdom and Turkey had not taken any initiative regarding the Bulgarian government. The Bulgarian representative admitted that Turkey used their own initiative concerning Romania. Therefore, during a visit to Ankara, March 20–22, the Bulgarian Prime Minister displayed its pretences regarding this matter. Turkey was closely dealing with this situation, considering that in accordance with the Balkan Agreement, it was compelled to aid Romania in the case of an attack on the part of Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Cemil Kocak, Turkish – German relations between 1923–1939, Ankara, 1991, p. 150.

In the discussion of May 4, 1939 with Von Papen, Numan Menemencioglu, general secretary of The Ministry of External Affairs, at the German Ambassador's request, offered information on Turkey's external politics.<sup>4</sup> Von Papen was distressed by the treaties conducted by Turkey with The United Kingdom and France. Concerning the Romanian-German Economic Treaty, when Von Papen argued that this accord had no political characteristics Menemencioglu stated that the treaty displayed the tendencies of complete economic domination, which normally meant political domination as well. Therefore, compliant with the official opinion of Ankara, there was no doubt that Romania had only under great pressure agreed to these burdensome conditions. In his account, he was of the opinion that the occupation of Albania by Italy had also been done in order to threaten Yugoslavia and Greece, as Italy could not invoke Albanian economic or national security necessities. Albania, as well as the two contiguous states did not represent any danger to Italy. Von Papen's motivation regarding the occupation of Albania by Italy was that Mussolini resorted to it on grounds of prestige after the German success, Italy wishing to record a successful event, no matter the strategy.<sup>5</sup>

The Reich's position regarding the English-French-Turkish accords was to find a way to put an end to these accords, as Berlin saw in them an instrument aimed at consolidating the Oriental Front, on one hand, and on the other, an instrument aimed at easing the Balkan Agreement's burden of political and economic plans. Therefore, by putting pressure on Yugoslavia, it forced it to voice its disagreement concerning the accords closed between Turkey, France, and The United Kingdom, which created a certain amount of tension within the Balkan Agreement.

Romania tried to release the tension through the intervention of the minister of external affairs Grigore Gafencu, who on May 21, 1939 at Orsova, had a meeting with T. Marković, the Yugoslav minister of external affairs. The two reached an agreement, given the dangers which menaced the two states.

<sup>4</sup> Menemencioglu stated that the purpose of Turkey's external politics was to ensure peace near its borders as well as in the Balkans and to avoid the possible invasion in these areas.

<sup>5</sup> Foreign Ministry Archive, fond 71/ Turkey vol. 61, 1939-1940, relations with Romania, Telegr. Desciphr. nr. 29358 of May 9th 1939.

In order to debate upon the misunderstandings between Yugoslavia and Turkey, Gafencu paid a visit to Ankara on June 11, 1939. The Romanian politician met several times with the Prime Minister Refik Saydam, with his counterpart, Saracioglu, and with the president of The Turkish Republic, Ismet Inonu. In the wake of these discussions, there was a strong identity of interests between the two countries, as well as the decision to watch over the unity and independence of the Balkan Agreement. Given this opportunity, Gafencu agreed with the Turkish diplomats to successfully correct the Turkish-Yugoslav asperities. Furthermore, President Inonu expressed his conviction that: "if the resistance will be organized around The Berlin-Rome Axis, it will enable us to put an end to the danger of a potential war."<sup>6</sup>

Gafencu, like Inonu<sup>7</sup>, was for the extension of the Balkan Agreement's responsibilities, through a statute „which would protect not only the internal borders, but also the external ones”, of the member states.

Germany's purpose was that of creating positive relationships with each of the Balkan Pact's member states. Therefore, agreeable relations with Romania and Yugoslavia were the fruit of this policy. On the other hand, The United Kingdom wanted to turn the Balkan Pact into an alliance against Germany and to use it to its own advantage. Germany, however did not support Bulgaria's potential membership in the Balkan Pact, it even strived to keep Bulgaria out of the Pact.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Turkish historian, Cemil Kocak, Turkey needed to strengthen itself from a military point of view in the islands of The Aegean Sea because through this area the neutrality of Romania and Yugoslavia could be maintained. Officials of Ankara believed that if the southern part of their country is peaceful, Turkey would direct its strength towards the Bulgarian border and be prepared to

<sup>6</sup> Eliza Campus, *Romania's foreign policy 1913–1947*, București, Editura Politică, 1980, p. 473

<sup>7</sup> President of The Turkish Republic, Ismet Inonu appreciated position of Romania because it wouldn't agree to a Peace Treaty signed at any cost, being prepared to protect its independence and integrity on the battlefield. He declared: „The Turkish Republic has pledged itself to a politics of protection of peace and maintaining political and territorial positions as they appear nowadays in South-Eastern Europe.”

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Cemil Kocak, *Ibid*, p.153

intervene according to the Balkan Pact's provisions. In the eventuality that there would be no military strengthening, the Soviet Union could advance toward the Ciatalcea position, thus enabling the creation of a military base in that area.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that Germany's policy of obstructing and influencing the English-Turkish Pact through Romania was positive. The Romanian Minister of External Affairs met with Von Papen on June 12, 1939 in Ankara. During this meeting, the Romanian diplomat expressed Romania's uneasiness regarding the unfriendly welcome of the Romanian-German economic agreement by Ankara. The price of the Axis' occupation of Albania – declared Gafencu to Von Papen – was Turkey. On the other hand, the Romanian Minister of External Affairs, after the meeting with the Turkish government, has done all in his power so that the English-Turkish agreement would not be included in the Balkan Pact. As a result, he declared to Von Papen that the sixth amendment in the English-Turkish agreement, the one regarding the Balkans, would not be taken into consideration. On the other hand, Gafencu's opinion was that this would resemble the common French-Turkish declaration of May 12. Although Gafencu had done his best, there was no knowing whether the amendment concerning the Balkans could be excluded. Papen stated that Gafencu's behavior at Ankara was according to the German interests.

In the case of Europe, Turkey's obligations were entirely different. It did not specify its position only in the case of an Italian attack upon Greece. In the case of an attack against Romania or Yugoslavia, if Bulgaria would be part of the attack, Turkey would not fulfil its obligations in the Balkan Pact, with one exception, which was the case of an attack against Romania on the Coast of the Black Sea. The Turkish motivation was that its security area had been breached, to the extent that it could not remain neutral. The Turkish government declared that, in the case of a conflict in the northern part of Europe, the Balkan countries must remain neutral. Because of this, Turkey did not agree with Western countries making use of the armies of the Eastern countries against the Axis's military forces.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. On September 4, Romania announced its neutrality, followed by the neutrality declarations of Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria. On September 5, G. Gafencu, The Minister of External Affairs, sent a telegram to the Romanian diplomatic missions in the capitals of the member coun-

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

tries, in which he stated that “our country is keeping its commitments to the countries in the Alliance.

The splitting of Poland between the Reich and The Soviet Union had cancelled the Romanian-Polish defensive alliance. The Balkan Pact was in effect, but it had proved its inefficiency after the changing of the influence equilibrium on the continent.

Even the atmosphere in the foreign capitals was closely observed from Bucharest. Concerning this, in September 1939, Vasile Stoica informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Bucharest about the state of affairs in the Turkish capital:

“The public opinion, the Turks’ anti-German feeling is growing. Germans from different companies and institutions have mostly left; the rest are in a rush to leave. German vessels left Turkish ports. Minister Von Papen, who arrived at Ankara where the government is, only a few days ago, says he would leave tomorrow to Istanbul, where there is no one left anymore. I found out that he has ordered the paintings and the embassy’s valuable objects to be packed, in order to take them with him, which is a sign that he is preparing to leave Turkey. The Italian Embassy is silent and is not showing its face. The Italian vessels have left as well. Italian citizens have not yet received any order to return to Italy, not even the reserve officers.”

The Romanian ambassador further talked about the other official diplomats still in the Turkish capital: “The diplomatic circles – he wrote – Turkish and foreign pay particular attention to Italy’s attitude. Its neutrality, which results from Hitler’s speech, is being interpreted as Mussolini’s refusal to engage in a war Italy cannot directly benefit from. The Turkish and allied military circles believe that Italian neutrality is a very useful aid brought to Germany.”

The Balkan Pact, which had remained the only South-Eastern European Regional Accord, was viewed by the Romanian government as a shoulder to lean on. At the beginning of February 1940, in the Yugoslav capital, there opened the Conference of the Balkan Pact’s Permanent Council. At the end of the conference, G. Gafencu, through a memorandum addressed to the Romanian diplomatic missions and embassies, stated that this conference contributed to the strengthening and unity of the Balkan Pact; it was decided that a strict pacific attitude should be maintained in the present conflict, there was analysed the common wish to normalize and develop the connections with neighbouring states, especially with Bulgaria and Hungary.

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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ ЈУГОИСТОЧНЕ ЕВРОПЕ ЛУМИНА  
БУКУРЕШТ, РУМУНИЈА

ЕМА Љ. МИЉКОВИЋ

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ  
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

## РЕЗИМЕ

## ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКО-РУМУНСКИ ОДНОСИ ПРЕМА РУМУНСКОЈ ДИПЛОМАТСКОЈ ГРАЂИ О БАЛКАНУ (1939)

У периоду између два светска рата Југославија је била један од најозбиљнијих и најпоузданих спољнополитичких партнера Румуније. Такво стање одражавало се кроз заједничке циљеве, истоветна виђења спољне политике, као и савезе у које су улазиле. Ове две државе, обновљене након Првог светског рата, залагале су се за мир и развој на основу Париског мировног уговора (1919–1920). Румунско-југословенска сарадња у оквирима Мале Антанте и Балканског пакта представљала је настојање ових држава да се одржи мир на Балкану, као и да се зауставе ревизионистичке тежње за прекрајањем граница.

Позиционирана у готово непрестано немирном региону, Југославија је била приморана да води опрезну спољну политику, нарочито због тежњи фашистичке Италије, после окупације суседне Албаније, док се Румунија суочавала са истом претњом након што је фашистичка Немачка окупирала Чехословачку. Овај рад анализира дешавања током 1939. године, кроз очи дипломатâ који су се борили за територијалну целовитост и одржавање неутралности својих земаља.

**Кључне речи:** Југославија, Румунија, Мала Антанта, Балкански пакт, ревизионизам.



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