

**ROMANIA'S INTERNATIONAL SITUATION  
IN THE LIGHT OF THE DESPATCHES OF THE POLISH EMBASSY  
IN ROMANIA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES  
SEPTEMBER 1939 – JUNE/JULY 1940**

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As a result of the defeat of the September 1939 campaign in Poland, the state found itself in ruins, although – from the formal legal point of view – the continuity of the Polish state authorities was preserved. The government was reconstructed – in September and October 1939 – in exile in Paris, and then – following French suggestions – its headquarters were moved to Angers, where the Polish guests formally enjoyed the privilege of extraterritoriality. Romania played a significant role in Polish policy at the time. Firstly, the war led to a large number of Polish refugees seeking refuge in that country. Despite hostile pressures from Germany – the Romanians provided considerable material aid to refugees, and also tolerated Polish filtration to the West, to the Polish Army that was being reconstructed in France. Secondly, Romania soon became a very important element of communication routes which, in various forms, linked the Polish authorities and exiled community with the home country occupied by the Germans and the Russians<sup>1</sup>. Hence, Romania's international standing had a major importance for the Polish authorities. Thus it is not surprising that the Polish Government paid significant attention to information coming from the Polish Embassy in Bucharest.

From the beginning of the war, Romania was favourably disposed towards its northern neighbour. Already at the 6 September session the enlarged Royal Council “[...] unanimously decided on the Romanian state's observing the rules of neutrality [...]” At this forum, Prime Minister Armand Călinescu announced: “We

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<sup>1</sup> After 17 September 1939, after the Soviet aggression on Poland, a group of 50 thousand Poles crossed to Romania, of which about half was made of officers and soldiers, while the other half – of civilians. In this context, it must be pointed out that owing to the favourable attitude of the Romanian authorities, rather soon, all the interned military staff were evacuated either to France, or to the Middle East; T. Dubicki, “Konspiracja polska w Rumunii”, vol. 1: “1939–1940”, Warszawa 2002, p. 11; T. Dubicki, “Wojsko Polskie w Rumunii w latach 1939–1991”, Warszawa 1994, pp. 16–20, 61–66, 187–249; T. Dubicki, “Bazy wojskowej łączności zagranicznej ZWZ-AK w latach 1939–1945. Studia i materiały”, Częstochowa 2000, passim; T. Dubicki, S. J. Rostworowski, “Sanatorzy kontra sikorszczycy czyli walka o władzę na uchodźstwie w Rumunii 1939–1940”, Warszawa 1993, passim.

have moral obligations towards Poland, as we are allies.” The Council’s position was approved by both western powers, namely France and the United Kingdom, and by Poland itself. The Red Army’s invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939 made vain all the hopes that the Polish authorities had in Romania, both as a direct supplier of material aid, in particular including war materials, and as a transit country. The situation was additionally complicated by the assassination of Prime Minister Călinescu<sup>2</sup> on 21 September. In this unstable situation, the government was subsequently headed, briefly by two politicians: Gheorghe Argeșanu and Constantin Argetoianu. The assassination of Călinescu apparently had very negative consequences to the further fate of Polish refugees, particularly members of the government and high command. This was clearly admitted in private statements by Romanian diplomats<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile, during the first period of internment in Romania – in the context of Polish issues – was dominated by Romania’s relations with Moscow. On 23 November 1939, the Polish ambassador in Bucharest, Roger Raczyński, reported to his Ministry that under the pressure of the Soviets Bucharest closed down its Consulate in Lvov. Consul Ene went, via Berlin, to Warsaw, where he intended to spend some three weeks to “[...] sort out the apartment issues of the Romanian Embassy in the capital of Poland”<sup>4</sup>. This euphemistic term actual meant the formal closure of this office in Warsaw.

Autumn 1939 brought about significant changes on the Romanian political arena. On 24 November that year, an outstanding liberal politician, Gheorghe Tătărescu, became the Romanian Prime Minister, replacing the previously mentioned Argetoianu. Ambassador Raczyński interpreted this move as “[...] a manifestation of the King’s [Carol II from the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty – W. R.] attempt to relieve the crown from responsibility for the deteriorating internal political and economic situation.” In a further part of the report, he claimed that it proved impossible to extend the basis to include a major part of the bourgeois and agrarian opposition. At the same time, however, he pointed to the shift of power within the National Front towards the liberal and democratic opposition. He hoped this would lead to some form of *détente*. He stressed that the entire cabinet was more friendly to the Allies than the previous one and that the Polish issue had “proven friends” among the new ministers. He clearly pointed to the importance of the fact that Grigore Gafencu continued to hold the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs<sup>5</sup>.

On 29 November, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Angers received information about Minister Gafencu’s parliamentary speech on Polish issues and the opposition’s response. The government assumed that the Minister’s speech

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<sup>2</sup> K. Dach, T. Dubicki, „Marszałek Ion Antonescu. Biografia żołnierza i polityka”, Łódź 2003, pp. 47–48; T. Dubicki, „Wojsko...”, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> W. Pobóg-Malinowski, “Na rumuńskim rozdrożu”, “Kultura”, Paris 1948, No. 8, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, hereinafter IPMS), A. 26. I/7a, k. 19.

<sup>5</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 25.

would not end with a debate. However, an outstanding historian, Professor Nicolae Iorga, insisted on reopening the session and criticised Minister Gafencu's speech. "He protested against the wording that Romania accepted Polish refugees with compassion. «It would be cowardice – said Iorga – not to speak on the Romanian nation's sentiment for our allies and friends. The great Polish nation fought a heroic battle for its sacred rights. We have been in solidarity with them for ages. When Poland regained independence, we also felt stronger, when it suffered a disaster, we are also in danger. We will not allow for the trampling of national ideas in this war. Every nation has the right to an independent state. It is not against neutrality where we stress the vitality of the national idea and sentiments towards our friends. We must not forget about France. It is not neutrality when the press repeats anti-ally articles and news.» At the end, he stressed the common interests of Romania and Hungary in view of the changed international situation. As Ambassador Raczyński reported, "The speech was loudly applauded and will find considerable response among Romanian society. The government was clearly surprised and discontented, and will attempt to silence the important nature of this manifestation in the parliament"<sup>6</sup>.

In the first days of December, Ambassador Raczyński had an official appointment with Prime Minister Tătărescu. During the conversation, the Prime Minister stressed he believed in the future of Polish-Romanian relations, in the reconstruction of the Polish state and reestablishment of the alliance. He rather euphemistically announced he intended to quickly resolve the issue of the former Polish President Ignacy Mościcki<sup>7</sup>. He also pointed out that he could not begin his official rule with this move. The Ambassador insisted on allowing a possibly large number of refugees to leave for the West, which, in his opinion, was in the interest of both parties. Passing on to relations with third countries, the Prime Minister critically assessed the Romanian-Soviet relations. At the same time, he did not perceive a direct threat on the western border with Hungary<sup>8</sup>.

In turn, on 23 December, Ambassador Raczyński had a meeting with the Ambassador of Turkey, H. Suphi Tanriör, who had just returned from Ankara. The latter announced that the actual reestablishment of strict cooperation within the existing Balkan Entente was becoming topical again. Greece had formally agreed to this already. The stakeholders were waiting for Yugoslavia's position. However, there were no plans to extend the existing agreement to Hungary or Bulgaria. In this context, the Turkish Ambassador clearly stated that in the event of Soviet aggression against Romania, Bucharest would not be left without military aid. This statement was supported by Greek Ambassador, K.A. Kóllas, who added that Turkish

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<sup>6</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 28.

<sup>7</sup> The President indeed left on 25 December 1939 by parlour-car of Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Freiburg; IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 62; S. M. Brzozowski, T. Jędruszczak, Mościcki Ignacy [in:] "Polski Słownik Biograficzny", vol. XXII, book 1 (92), ed. by E. Rostworowski, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1977, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 35–36.

active opposition against further Soviet expansion was not to be doubted. Ambassador Raczyński, however, simultaneously quoted the views of the British Embassy, who believed Turkey was much more restrained in this case. At the same time, London pressed Bucharest to regulate the issue of Southern Dobruja favourably to Bulgaria<sup>9</sup>.

It must be pointed out that Ambassador Raczyński seemed not to notice the Hungarian threat at the time. On 23 December, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano, conferred on this issue with the personal emissary of King Carol II, Victor Antonescu. His Romanian interlocutor was concerned with both the Soviet and Hungarian threats. He even asked his host what position Italy would take if Moscow were to attack the Romanian border. Ciano indeed expressed Rome's anti-Bolshevik attitude, but at the same time evaded "[...] making any commitments [...]" that could restrain Italy. Antonescu on his part suggested that Rome should have a moderating impact on the Hungarian attitude. He argued that this would greatly facilitate Bucharest's relations with the Russians. Minister Ciano commented on this as follows: "This would be possible if not for [István] Csáky's persistence which leaves no major illusions about it"<sup>10</sup>.

Romania did not neglect attempts to acquire support of other states for the concept of stabilising their situation. Ankara was rather reserved in this matter. On 30 December, its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Şükrü Saracoğlu, stated "[...] that Turkey believes the existence of a strong and independent Romania to be vital to its interests. However, it does not wish to make its position precise for now, not knowing what the allies will do and not wishing to speak against the Soviets in view of hypothetical situations." The Polish Ambassador in Ankara, Michał Sokolnicki, commented on this statement as follows: "The present tactics to leave the USSR uncertain about possible Turkish intervention has already proved to be positive, having an inhibiting effect on the Soviets. Turkey also does not wish to extend the commitments of the Balkan Pact. In the above case, there is an action [...] on the part of France, effectively weakening the resistance of England, and even willing to carry out relevant military staff negotiations with Turkey"<sup>11</sup>. Turkey

<sup>9</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 61–62; according to Elżbieta Znamierowska-Rakk, at the time, in Sofia, there was "[...] a conviction that if for the English-French block, particularly for London, the preservation of the status quo in Western Thrace was the fundamental issue [...], the territories lost by Bulgaria to Romania could, in the British opinion, constitute the price for Bulgarian access to the planned agreements aimed at counteracting the Third Reich's expansion in the Balkans."; E. Znamierowska-Rakk, "Sprawa Tracji Zachodniej w polityce bułgarskiej (1919–1947)", Warszawa 1991, p. 154. E. Znamierowska-Rakk, "Uregulowanie kwestii dobrudżańskiej w stosunkach Bułgarii z Rumunią w okresie II wojny światowej" [in:] "Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej", vol. XLIII, Warszawa 2008, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> G. Ciano, "Dziennik 1937–1943", transl. & ed. by T. Wituch, Pułtusk 2006, p. 455; B. Koszel, "Rywalizacja niemiecko-włoska w Europie Środkowej i na Bałkanach w latach 1933–1941", Poznań 1987, p. 311; A. Kastory, "Rozbiór Rumunii w 1940 roku", Warszawa 2002, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, it must be reminded that on 19 October 1939, Turkey concluded a treaty on mutual aid with the United Kingdom and France; W. Rojek, "Rola Turcji w antyniemieckich planach mocarstw zachodnich (marzec – październik 1939)" [in:] "Niemcy w polityce międzynarodowej 1919–1939", vol. IV: "Na przełomie pokoju i wojny 1939–1941", ed. by S. Sierpowski, Poznań 1992, pp. 143–144.

would willingly see an amicable deal in the case of Dobruja, without taking any initiative in this respect, and without exposing Romania, as a consequence, to accepting Hungarian revisions”<sup>12</sup>.

On that day, Ambassador Sokolnicki managed to obtain important additional news from a French source. He was told that:

I. After Minister Saracoğlu<sup>13</sup> returned from Moscow, he replied to the enquiry from the Soviet government “[...] that in the event of a Romanian-Soviet conflict, Turkey will strictly execute the commitments of the Straits Convention”<sup>14</sup>.

II. The Turkish government couldn't extend the commitments of the Balkan Pact due to the still unknown position of the Allies and Italy, and due to the need of having such new commitments approved by the parliament, which would be of an anti-Soviet nature.

III. Already on 19 October, General Maxime Weygand touched upon the issue of military agreements in the aspect of Soviet aggression against Romania<sup>15</sup>. The Chief of Turkish General Staff, Marshal Mustafa Fevzi Çakmak, was fairly favourable about this concept<sup>16</sup>. This did not change the fact that officially the Turks carefully avoided specifying their position.

The new year did not bring an easing of the situation. On 10 January 1940, Minister Gafencu told Ambassador Raczyński “[...] that the Soviets made a sharp demarche due to favourable tone of the Romanian press for Finland, which allegedly infringes neutrality. At the same time, G[afencu] pointed to positive results for Romania from the meeting between Csáky – Ciano”<sup>17</sup>. This did not exactly reflect the actual state of affairs, as during the exchange of ideas in Venice Minister Csáky only declared that Hungary would not take any steps in the Balkans without the approval of both Germany and Italy. This made Minister Ciano conclude that the policy of Hungarian threats against Romania would be continued.

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<sup>12</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 69.

<sup>13</sup> Minister Saracoğlu visited Moscow on 26 September; at the time, Peoples Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Vyacheslav Molotov demanded that, apart from failure to follow the provisions of the aforementioned Montreux Convention, Turkey should agree to the conclusion of bilateral pact on non-aggression, which in fact was to be an introduction to a closer cooperation between Kremlin and the possible block of neutral states in the Balkans; “Survey of International Affairs. The Middle East in the War”, ed. by G. E. Kirk, London 1959, pp. 444–445; D. J. Tallin, “Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy 1939–1942”, New Haven, Conn. 1943, pp. 109–111.

<sup>14</sup> Article 19 of the Convention stated:

“In time of war, Turkey not being belligerent, warships shall enjoy complete freedom of passage and navigation in the Straits on the same terms as stipulated in Articles 10 to 18.”

“Prawo międzynarodowe i historia dyplomatyczna. Wybór dokumentów”, ed. by L. Gelberg, vol. II, Warszawa 1958, doc. No. 116, p. 411.

<sup>15</sup> G. Ciano, op. cit., pp. 455–456.

<sup>16</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 71–72.

<sup>17</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 87.

In this context, he politely shared the opinion of his interlocutor that Budapest could not agree to an agreement that would not give them full satisfaction<sup>18</sup>.

While completing the report, the counsellor of the Polish Legation in Budapest, Mieczysław Chałupczyński, reported: “[...] the initiative of the Csáky – Ciano meeting is on the part of Italy. Ciano previously was to probe in Bucharest the real limit of Romanian concessions to Hungary in return for the favourable neutrality of the latter and Italian aid in the event of Soviet aggression. Details still unknown. There are rumours about a further shifting of the borders near Satu-Mare and about the national status for Székelys excluding territorial autonomy. The press indicates that Italy reserved with the Hungarians the right of selecting the right moment to execute this plan”<sup>19</sup>. Thus this was not the news that would be very optimistic from Bucharest’s point of view.

Next, between 2 and 4 February 1940, another session of the Balkan Entente Council took place in Belgrade<sup>20</sup>. When the Romanian delegation went to the meeting, Ambassador Raczyński reported “Gafencu left for Belgrade in a bad mood.

I. One has to note the weakening of Romanian’s position within the Balkan Entente due to smaller chances of Turkish support and Turkey’s pressure on concessions to Bulgaria, as well as simultaneous Yugoslav suggestions for concessions to Hungary.

II. The English Legation communicated to us in confidence that the Romanian Ambassador in London [Viorel Tilea] received a note warning that in the event of too far-reaching economic concessions to Germany<sup>21</sup>, England would be forced to suspend the export of a number of products to Romania.

III. News is coming from various sources, as well as from the German occupation and Slovakia, stating that German officers generally speak of attacking Romania early in spring. Analogical rumours come from Lvov”<sup>22</sup>.

When analysing possible consequences of the meeting in Belgrade, the Polish Minister in Belgrade, Roman Dębicki, reported on 5 February that the importance of the Balkan Entente was not about the agenda, which was principally to strengthen

<sup>18</sup> Both ministers met on 6 January 1940 in Venice; the course of the meeting is described by Ciano briefly: “Csáky assured me that Hungary would not take any actions in the Balkans to extend the [war] fire, [...]”; G. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 464; more literature on this subject; B. Koszel, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>19</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 89–90.

<sup>20</sup> Also referred to as the Balkan Pact.

<sup>21</sup> In this context, it must be reminded that already on 23 March 1939, in Bucharest, a commercial treaty between Germany and Romania was signed, which in fact guaranteed far-reaching privileges for the Third Reich in the economic sphere, allowing it to supervise the economy of the other party; “Współczesna Europa polityczna. Zbiór umów międzynarodowych 1919–1939”, ed. by W. Kulski, M. Potulicki, Warszawa – Kraków 1939, pp. 528–530; H. Batowski, “Europa zmierza ku przepaści”, Poznań 1977, pp. 250–251; I. Stawowy-Kawka, “Ekspansja gospodarcza Trzeciej Rzeszy w Jugosławii i Rumunii (1929–1939)”, Kraków 1993, pp. 105–107; Henryk Batowski also recorded some benefits this document brought to Bucharest: “Romania gained this much that, having achieved their goal, the Nazi discontinued their intrigues in Budapest and Sofia”, *ibidem*, p. 251.

<sup>22</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 130–131.

the joint striving for neutrality and remaining away from the conflict, “[...] but in the improved situation in the Danube and Balkan region owing to the mediation of Italy and Yugoslavia in issues concerning Romanian-Hungarian declarations, and Turkey’s declarations to Bulgaria.

Hungary agreed to abstain from territorial claims against Romania for the period of the war on condition that Romania would not voluntarily give away any of its territory to the USSR. This equals to non-aggression commitment. Hungary did not determine the limits of its future claims. Yugoslavia hoped that Hungary will accept, and Romania will concede the belt of territory along the eastern bank of the Prut River with three major towns with about half a million Hungarians.

I suspect that Italy will also continue in this direction. There are no major hopes for success in this matter.

The talks of the Turkey’s Minister of Foreign Affairs with the Bulgarian Prime Minister [Georgi Kjoseiwanow] are aimed at strengthening Bulgaria’s intentions, already publically defined as the will to achieve territorial aspirations in a peaceful and neighbour-friendly manner.

I learn that the USSR has submitted to the Hungarian government an official assurance that they consider the Carpathians as a definitive border<sup>23</sup>.

The actual interpretation of this meeting, however, was not so optimistic for Bucharest. Yugoslavia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aleksander Cincar-Marković, while opening the session, stressed the importance of enterprises aimed at observing peace in the Balkans. In this context, he considered the previous policy of countries in the region fully justified. Minister Gafencu on his part pointed out that countries belonging to the Balkan Entente did not have territorial claims against their neighbours. However, he clearly stressed that the possible revision of the border in Dobruja could only take place after the war. In this context he reminded of the efforts to restore trust in relations with Sofia. Elżbieta Znamierowska-Rakk interprets this as a clear playing for time. At the same time, no specific measures were taken then to bring Bulgaria closer to the Entente. Agnieszka Kastory points out that the wording contained in the final communication that it is in the interest of the countries in the block to “[...] preserve the right to the national territory by each of the states.” Henryk Batowski perceives this issue differently, writing: “It must be principally noted that the [final – W. R.] communication does not speak of the inviolability of the borders existing in the Peninsula and territorial integrity of the Balkan Pact states, although section 3 mentions «national territory». Yet the last term seems not to exclude possible revisions of some borders in the event of an amicable agreement<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, the bad mood – in Ambassador Raczyński’s opinion – of Minister Gafencu going to Belgrade was in fact fully justified.

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<sup>23</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 136–137.

<sup>24</sup> H. Batowski, “Rozpad porozumienia bałkańskiego (1939–1940)” [in:] *Ibidem*, “Z polityki międzynarodowej XX wieku. Wybór studiów z lat 1930–1975”, Krakow 1979, p. 91; A. Kastory, *op. cit.*, p. 153; E. Znamierowska-Rakk, “Uregulowanie...”, pp. 122–123.

Much more optimistic about the situation of the Balkan states, including Romania, in line with his hosts, was Ambassador Sokolnicki, who reported on 8 February that Turkish circles positively assess the results of the conference in Belgrade and perceive in it:

“I. Actual, if not formal, establishment of a consultation among the Balkan states in the event of aggression from outside.

II. Avoidance of the primacy of Italy in the Balkans and relying on their security from the south, in consequence on an Anglo-French front”<sup>25</sup>. It is easy to notice how vivid were still the illusions that Italy could play an independent role in this region of Europe.

In turn, Bucharest’s anti-Soviet fears were still vital. On 19 February, Ambassador Raczyński reported that “[...] in each conversation, Gafenco returns to the Soviet issue, expressing anxiety that the allies are insufficiently oriented in the entire problem and the need to break Russia into components, which after the victory over the Germans could be the only guarantee for the stabilisation of peace in Europe. He points to the need of exerting pressure on the allies in this direction, fearing the impact of white [Russian] émigrés”<sup>26</sup>.

This pessimistic assessment of the situation was, in Ambassador Raczyński’s opinion, supported by the conclusion, on 12 March, of the peace treaty between Finland and the USSR. Two days later, before his leave, Ambassador Raczyński paid a visit to “Gafenco, who stated that Romanian public opinion is disheartened with the peace forced on Finland. The Romanian government, lamenting over this Soviet success, does not, however, fear direct threat to Romania believing that: 1) the Soviets will not take a new offensive after the Finnish lesson, which would, anyway, be presently contrary to the vital interests of Germany; 2) the allies have sufficiently understood the situation so as to, after the Finnish experience, grant immediate aid to the victim of every new Soviet aggression.”

At the end, as the Ambassador stated, Minister Gafencu stressed the government’s favourable interest in the political initiatives of Prime Minister General Władysław Sikorski and the Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski, and returned to the issue of joint tasks for Poland and Romania in the east, particularly in the Ukraine, expressing hope for further positive cooperation with Poland. Ambassador Raczyński added from himself that Minister Gafenco was not alone in the optimistic assessment of the situation, as the Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest “[...] analogically assesses the issue of the threat to the Balkans”<sup>27</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the second half of March 1940, the Romanian government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, intensively aimed at calming down the situation, principally to mitigate the Allies’ fears. On 24 March, the First Counsellor of the Polish Embassy in Bucharest, Alfred Poniński, reported: “Gafencu informed us

<sup>25</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 141–142; H. Batowski, “Rozpad...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91.

<sup>26</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 161–162.

<sup>27</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 193–194.

personally that the news of the local Reuter's correspondent about the alleged German terms for Romania are completely unjustified. Considering that the repeated biased alarms on ultimate German claims are highly harmful to Romania, he intends to demand immediate expulsion of Reuter's correspondent." He concluded that the above methods used by Reuters were very harmful to the cause of the Allies in Bucharest<sup>28</sup>.

In turn, on 27 March, counsellor Poniński informed Angers that Minister Gafencu had communicated to him officially that he had received assurances as to Italy's continuing previous friendly policy in the Balkans. The meeting at Brenner<sup>29</sup> did not cause a change in this respect. Gafencu also ascertained the existence of severe frictions on the German-Soviet front as regards further plans against Romania. At the same time, he added that he had not received and had not envisaged proposals of German-Soviet guarantees. He considered a separate German guarantee as impossible, as the Soviets seemed to have warned Berlin they would consider this as an unfriendly act. Moscow continued to neglect Bucharest and did not make any advances. He explained that Romanian-German economic negotiations took a normal course, without political pressures. As a result, the government assessed Romanian's general situation as better than a few months before, and excluded any surprise. The talks of the Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki in Rome, who adopted a balanced position over the Tiber, and removal of Soviet Ambassador Jakov Suric from Paris, made a very good impression here<sup>30</sup>.

In the first half of April, Romanian assessments of the situation changed as in a kaleidoscope. First, on 8 April – as a special courier from Moscow – arrived the counsellor of the Romanian Legation bringing a very calming assessment of Soviet intentions as regards Bucharest. He claimed that the Soviets would continue the policy of pseudo-neutrality and would not agree to an arrangement with the Allies. In his opinion, the mood in Moscow were calm and passive, one could not feel the tension that usually preceded Joseph Stalin's major movements. At the same time, the extension of the war to Norway and Denmark gave Bucharest the impression of further playing for time and the hope that at least the main warfare would take place in the north<sup>31</sup>.

The next day, however, Counsellor Poniński found Minister Gafencu dispirited. He did not conceal his pessimism and anxiety. According to the Minister, after the invasion in the north, the concept of neutral states in a way ceased to exist. While continuing this thought, he claimed that the fact of German involvement in Scandinavia did not exclude Soviet initiatives in the Balkans, "[...] as Soviet

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<sup>28</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 210.

<sup>29</sup> This refers to the meeting of Benito Mussolini with Adolf Hitler on 18 March 1940. G. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 489; H. Batowski, "Rok 1940 w dyplomacji europejskiej", Poznań 1981, pp. 165-166; B. Koszel, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-314.

<sup>30</sup> Prime Minister Teleki was in Rome between 23 and 28 March 1940; IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 213; G. Ciano, *op. cit.*, pp. 496-497.

<sup>31</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 236.

policy cannot be treated only as a function of German policy; to the contrary, the Soviets showed that in such cases they are willing to seek compensation by themselves. The Soviets remain the main threat to Romania. Allied negotiations with the Soviets can even bring this threat closer. The balance of Soviet, German and Italian forces in the South-East of Europe, so favourable to Romania, was distorted by German action in the north. Romania's situation thus automatically deteriorated. In such conditions, quick and effective response of the Allies to save Norway will have a decisive impact on further shaping of the mood in the Balkans. Strengthening of the will to resist will largely depend on determining, on this example, of the Allies' capacity to oppose the German war tactics."

In this context, Counsellor Poniński suggested that pro-German elements would strive to use in Romania the results of the swift German action against Denmark and Norway to spread a defeatist mood even among the government. Simultaneously, in his opinion, the opinion was prevailing that Hungary would behave in such a case similarly as Denmark. He added that the Romanian fears were increased "[...] by alarmist attitude of the local Yugoslavian spheres. Nevertheless, in the entire Romanian government, they continue to stress the decisive will of defence against any invader. Among other things, this was stated to us yesterday by the Minister of Propaganda, Constantin C. Giurescu, who was officially leaving for Italy. The visit is gaining a special importance. This is probably about explaining Italian intentions after Brenner in view of growing local scepticism about the reality of Italian aid in case of Soviet aggression"<sup>32</sup>.

In mid-April, counsellor Poniński reported that the underground Soviet action in Bessarabia was increasingly broader despite energetic counter-action by the Romanian authorities. Sporadic peasant actions became numerous. The moods in villages near the border were usually bad, and favourable to the Soviets. Polish diplomat claimed that the authorities' attempt to organise the Russian minority under the mono-party – National Revival Front caused an unpleasant response of the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires, Pavel Kukolev, due to which it was delayed. Russian activists in Bessarabia devoted to the Romanian government assessed the situation as very severe, and were prepared for the possibility of Soviet aggression<sup>33</sup>.

Even more pessimistic reports reached Angers on 24 April. Counsellor Poniński claimed that the tension between Italy and the Allies negatively affected the consolidation of Romania's policy in the direction planned by the king. Persistent Italian statements as to the possibility of German victory caused disorientation among the more fearful Romanian factors, as he called them, which had already showed submissiveness to Germany, with the stress on observing the official policy of neutrality. Poniński concluded that Italy's involvement in the war "[...] would abolish the entire previous tactics and internal and external policy

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<sup>32</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 238-240; A. Kastory, "Złowrogie sąsiedztwo. Rosyjska polityka wobec europejskich państw ościennych w latach 1939–1940", Kraków 1998, p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 250.

doctrine of Romanian governmental spheres based on the axiom of the positive role of Italy as a factor of order and balance in this part of Europe. Looking back at Italy was always considered here as a reasonable and purposeful policy of security, hence the harsh criticism of the tactics adopted by the Ally press, principally on the part of France, who disregards Italy. This is believed to be grist for Germany's mill, as they aim to achieve such a situation between Italy and the Allies where Mussolini would not be able to go back, considering that, in the breakthrough moment of the war, he must ensure some specific gains for his country." This absolutely did not mean that Romania neglected relations with Rome. This was markedly testified to by the trip to Italy of the Speaker of the Senate Constantin Argetoianu, "[...] whose visit with a delegation of senators has been the third official Romanian trip to Italy since February"<sup>34</sup>.

In the second half of April, the tension kept growing. On 26 April, Poniński had an appointment with the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Cretzeanu, who confidentially communicated to him that Romania had categorically rejected Hungarian proposals as to have the Iron Gates guarded by an international police force, as this would mean the introduction of German monitors there. Romania counted on Yugoslavia's support. Romania motivated its position by: a) fresh Belgrade agreement<sup>35</sup> and its positive effects; b) general principles of international law, stating that protection belongs exclusively to a particular coastal state; c) fundamental duty of neutral states not to permit armed units of parties in the state of war on their own waters. According to Poniński, the Romanian government perceived the Hungarian initiative as a very worrying symptom of submissiveness to Germany, which was preparing a direct path to the Balkans via Hungary. He concluded that "They increasingly fear here the repetition of the Danish precedent with Hungary, which could be an introduction to aggression against Romania"<sup>36</sup>.

In the meantime, Ambassador Raczyński returned to Bucharest and, on 4 May, conferred with Minister Gafencu, who, under the influence of talks with the visiting American Ambassador from Moscow, Laurence A. Steinhardt, believed one should not expect any surprises on the Soviet part for the time being. In the last days, however, Romania concentrated further conscripts and extended the mobilisation orders. Minister Gafencu informed his interlocutor that he had received news from Belgrade stating that Yugoslavia had obtained the assurance of aid from the Allies in case of aggression. In fact, this was not supported by the facts<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 262–263.

<sup>35</sup> Document adopted on 17 April 1940 by representatives of Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia; it only permitted for traffic of ships transporting people and civil goods; transit of war materials required the approval of the countries in the Danube Region; A. Kastory, "Żegluga dunajska w polityce międzynarodowej w XX wieku", Kraków 2011, pp. 148–149.

<sup>36</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 265–266.

<sup>37</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 278–279; M. J. Zachariasz, "Jugosławia w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii 1940–1945", Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańk – Łódź 1985, p. 10.

Romanian mobilisation orders also resulted from the growing tension at the border with Hungary. On 14 May, Vice-Minister Cretzianu informed Ambassador Raczyński that Hungarian Minister László Bárdossy had come to Minister Gafencu and had solemnly stated that the recent Hungarian military orders were not addressed against Romania. He stated with conviction that drafting new classes had not been suggested by Germany, and resulted from the Hungarian government's will to train human material from the newly recovered provinces, namely southern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia<sup>38</sup>, and to strengthen their preparation in view of the general international situation. The Hungarian *démarche* probably was due to the fact that already on 22 May Romania made the decision to strengthen the protection of its borders, both with the USSR and Hungary. Ambassador Raczyński, however, stressed that despite such assurances, Romania was in an alarmist mood and the situation was uncertain<sup>39</sup>.

On 30 May, unexpectedly for political and diplomatic circles, Minister Gafencu resigned, as Ambassador Raczyński wrote: "on the initiative of the Palace", and was replaced by former Minister of Labour and Communication Ion Gigurtu, who often travelled to Berlin and, as an economist, was known for opting for friendly relations with Germany. In Ambassador Raczyński's opinion, this change was explained with the will to have – upon the Reich's military successes and Italian threats – a person who would be able to negotiate with the Germans. Ambassador Raczyński stressed that Gigurtu had until now not been involved in politics, particularly on the international arena. It was assumed that he would strive for further economic and financial concessions to Berlin. At the same time, there was speculation that as regards the topical political-diplomatic issues, the influence of Vice-Minister Cretzianu would increase. Ambassador Raczyński pointed out that the press bid farewell to Minister Gafencu "in a cool manner"<sup>40</sup>.

On 4 June, Ambassador Raczyński had an appointment with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, who optimistically assessed the temporary situation of Romania and expressed a belief that "[...] due to Germany's involvement in the West and the conflicting interests, he does not expect a direct threat either from Germany, or Russia". The Ambassador pointed out that the minister was completely hypnotised with the power of Germany and Berlin's successes so far<sup>41</sup>. Three days later, Ambassador Raczyński informed that the development of the German offensive in France had caused a sudden shift in Romania towards submission to German demands. This is principally reflected in the Romanian authorities' attitude to the escape of Polish military officers to France, while in the broader aspect in the evacuation of Polish citizens to the West. This report ended with the information that further changes in the government, favourable to the Third Reich, were not excluded<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Details cf. H. Batowski, "Europa...", pp. 65–83, 229–244.

<sup>39</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 300; A. Kastory, "Rozbiór...", p. 152.

<sup>40</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 347–348; A. Kastory, "Rozbiór...", p. 193.

<sup>41</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 354.

<sup>42</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 362–363.

Worrying news arrived in Bucharest on 15 June. The Polish Minister in Budapest, Leon Orłowski, reported that after the declaration of war on the part of Italy, which occurred on 10 June 1940, Hungary was entirely within the policy of the Axis powers. The government assumed this group would achieve the final success. Therefore, Budapest counted on Germany's aid with the execution of its territorial claims against Romania and Slovakia<sup>43</sup>. From Romania's point of view, the situation further deteriorated after the conclusion of the German-French armistice on 22 June. Three days later, Ambassador Raczyński informed his Ministry that "French capitulation caused a thorough shock here, whereas presently Germany's victory is considered almost inevitable. The previous game of balancing between Germany and the Allies is turning towards a game where German and Soviet influences are winning, and with a clear pro-German propensity. Reliable sources claim that they still want to observe neutrality and that despite pro-German manifestations Romanian policy will try to maintain possibly the best relations with the Soviets.

In this context, the king took the management of the ruling party in his hands<sup>44</sup>, changing its name and giving it a nationalist-totalitarian character. He entrusted the organisation to the Minister of the Court Ernest Urdăreanu, who became a member of the government and directed the action principally to the younger generation and supporters of the Iron Guard. A more thorough reconstruction of the government is expected, as a result of which the dignitaries supporting France and opponents of the Iron Guard will be removed<sup>45</sup>.

On the same day, Ambassador Raczyński also reported that the Germans were informing Romanian nationalist spheres that immediately after the pacification of France they would commence diplomatic preparations to enforce the new organisation of Europe on federation terms, without the participation of Russia and Turkey as Asian countries. Within this broad concept, under the aegis of Germany, the following federations were to be formed: Scandinavian and Romanian-Hungarian, whilst the Balkan federation would be led by Italy<sup>46</sup>.

On 27 June, Ambassador Raczyński drew attention to the German policy, as rumoured about in Bucharest. According to such unchecked information, Germany was to strike in the Middle East principally due to the need to counteract against the naval embargo pending in Europe. This would give them access to sources of raw materials, and would also prevent the Allies from having their fleets supplied via the Suez Canal. Ambassador Raczyński claimed that the only serious inhibition is the unclear position of Soviet Russia. In this context, he excluded the possibility of the USSR's attack on the Third Reich, as the USSR was to limit itself to taking

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<sup>43</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7a, k. 384.

<sup>44</sup> On 22 June 1940 Charles II announced the establishment of the Party of the Nation and introduction of totalitarian dictatorship; "A History of Romania", ed. by K. W. Treptow, Iași 1997, p. 469.

<sup>45</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 3.

<sup>46</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 4.

over Bessarabia and – together with Bulgaria – South Dobruja. In this context, he stressed that it was in the interest of Moscow “[...] that Germany and the United Kingdom would exhaust themselves further.” At the same time, he argued that it would be a convenient pretext for Berlin’s intervention in the Balkans to use Budapest’s territorial claims against Romania, “[...] which Hungary are willing to execute at any moment with silent consent of Germany”<sup>47</sup>.

In the meantime, German victories in the West, in particular the capitulation of France, caused the Kremlin to make efforts to occupy Bessarabia and Bukovina. The Soviet party informed the Ambassador of the Third Reich, Friedrich von Schulenburg, thereof already on 23 June. The extension of Soviet claims on Bukovina – as compared to the secret document annexed to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact – irritated the German party so much that Stalin decided to limit his claims exclusively to the northern part of the province with Chernivtsi. On the same evening, People’s Commissioner of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov summoned the Romanian Ambassador Gheorghe Davidescu and handed him an ultimatum demanding the ceding of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The Romanians hesitated at first, but on 27 June, in the morning, clear suggestions came from Berlin to accept Soviet claims. Finally, on the next day, the Romanians accepted such demands<sup>48</sup>.

In the meantime, already on 27 June, Ambassador Raczyński reported that the Romanian government, after a two-day session of the Royal Council, accepted the Soviet ultimatum of handing over Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, asking for the time and place of the meeting of both parties’ representatives. Germany and Italy on their part exerted pressure on Bucharest’s unconditional acceptance of Soviet claims, stating they could not help Romania. The country was full of anxiety whether Hungary would not push forward their claims in the coming future.

Simultaneously, he informed Angers that, according to recent reports, Moscow considered Romanian’s response unsatisfactory and expected an immediate evacuation of the lands claimed. Raczyński also asked the Ministry for recognition – if possible – of potential Hungarian intentions, as the Romanians had introduced some protective measures against Budapest’s intervention<sup>49</sup>. Raczyński’s reports arriving in France thus indicated that the ambassador did not know the Russians had at first demanded the entire territory of Bukovina. In turn, on 28 June, Minister Orłowski stated that the occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina by the USSR was a move forestalling Germany and taking up a position in case the latter enforced the plan of occupying Romania<sup>50</sup>.

The Soviet move did not, however, diminish the tension about Romania. On 29 June, Minister Orłowski reported that Minister Csáky had stated to him that if

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<sup>47</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 10–11.

<sup>48</sup> A. Kastory, “Rozbiór...”, pp. 197–206; A. Kastory, “Złowrogie...”, pp. 163–172; B. Koszel, *op. cit.*, pp. 315–316; H. Batowski, “Rok 1940...”, pp. 194–196.

<sup>49</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 13–14.

<sup>50</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 14.

Bucharest were not to defend Bessarabia, Hungary would be forced to enter Transylvania. The day before, the Hungarian authorities commenced diplomatic preparations to this move. Namely, Prime Minister Teleki summoned the German Ambassador Otto von Erdsmannsdorff and Italian Ambassador G. Talamo wishing to get acquainted with the official positions of their governments. Minister Orłowski presumed that if both Berlin and Rome had exerted pressure on Romania regarding Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, as they wished to avoid a conflict with Soviet Russia, and would not agree to Hungarian intervention in Romania, which – in his opinion – was not conclusive for the future. “At present, however [Orłowski concluded – W. R.], any move on the part of Budapest in this respect without Berlin's consent is impossible”<sup>51</sup>.

On 1 July, Ambassador Raczyński reported that both the handing over and the chaotic evacuation of the lands taken over by the USSR undermined, at least temporarily, the position of King Carol II. It was suspected that the Russians intended to use local incidents or riots, either immediately or later, against the Romanians, making new claims, and not limiting their aspirations to the territories occupied at the time. As a result, in governmental circles, the tendency prevailed to further submit to the Germans, whereas left-wing spheres and the opposition wished to abolish the dictatorship and the created mono-party.

On the same day, Ambassador Raczyński paid a visit to the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Argetoianu. After this conversation, he informed Angers about his impression that the government was disoriented and not really in control of the situation. The Romanians claimed that the incidents during the evacuation led to more tense relations with the Russians. At the same time, on the Hungarian and Bulgarian border, there were also cases of unrest. According to the Ambassador, governments of those countries did not, in fact, have anything to do with these events, but it still caused problems to the government in Bucharest. In the broader perspective, this caused a possibility of adverse interventions. Ambassador Raczyński's general conclusion was brought down to the statement that the position of the previous political authorities was eroding quickly<sup>52</sup>.

To conclude, in 1939/1940, Romania was in a very difficult international situation, which was unfavourable from its point of view. Already in the summer of 1939, it became the object of a game between Germany and the USSR, which was reflected in the aforementioned secret document attached to the non-aggression pact concluded on 23 August that year. After the defeat of Poland, Romania was in fact isolated, and tried to balance between Berlin and Moscow. In turn, the Germans played this game very skilfully, preventing the infringement of the fragile *status quo*. They purposefully did not support either Bucharest or Budapest. While adopting the role of actual arbiter in local disputes, they effectively blocked possible interventions by Paris and London<sup>53</sup>. In this state of affairs, the Romanian party

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<sup>51</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 17.

<sup>52</sup> IPMS, A. 26. I/7b, k. 22–23; A. Kastory, “Rozbiór...”, pp. 207–208.

<sup>53</sup> B. Koszel, op. cit., pp. 310–311.

attempted to revive the Balkan Entente, which functioned only formally, simultaneously relying on anti-Soviet declarations of its other members. Indeed, Bucharest took measures which would allow it for waiting through the unfavourable situation.

Polish diplomats accredited in this region of Europe were fully aware of this. Their reports rather precisely reflected the course of events. Considering the international situation of Poland, it is understandable that their role was limited at the time to careful observation of the events. What is only surprising in this context is the fact that the Polish reports neglected the concept that was popular in the second half of 1939 and in January 1940, namely the concept of creating a block of neutral states in the Balkans, whereas this idea was at the heart of the interests of both Italy, which hoped for a hypothetical leadership of the group, and of the countries in the region, which thought this was the way to preserve greater independence from the powers.