
ROMANIAN-CROATIAN FORGOTTEN ALLIANCE: NEW AXIS BOORDERLANDS IN THE BALKANS, 1941-1944

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Abstract: Balkan war, launched in April 1941 after Belgrade *coup d'état* and Italian failure in Greece, noticed the Yugoslavia's disappear. On April 10, 1941 Croatia proclaimed its own Independence and, at the same time, Serbia requested an ordinary German occupied province, with soft autonomy led by General Milan Nedić. The worst political-military attitude toward *Ustaša* régime from part of Budapest sprang increasingly anti-Hungarian perceptions in Zagreb: because them, Croats became most radical and incisive in political-diplomatic *new Little Entente* project, in 1941-1943.

As small and medium-sized powers, Romania, Croatia and Slovakia had a vital interest in their collective security success. The three states focused more attention to their diplomatic relationships: the increasing geopolitical Marshal Antonescu's influence in South-Eastern Europe requested a very fast diplomatic recognition between Romania and Croatia: May 6, 1941, soon after *Poglavnik* Ante Pavelić official recognition from part of Germany, Italy and Hungary (April 11, 1941), Slovakia (April 15, 1941) and Bulgaria (April 22, 1941). On June 1, 1941 Romanian Minister Dimitrie Buzdugan started his diplomatic office in the new Romanian Legation in Zagreb, where he remained until October 1943, soon after the Italian *coup d'état* against "*Il Duce*".

Meanwhile, relationships between Romania and Croatia followed strictly geopolitical interests, into the Danube region and, also, in the Balkans.

It is a very truism that Croatian authorities made, since the second half of 1941, a large propaganda in favour of Romanian leadership in the region. All Croatian media presented large excerpts from Romanian history, culture and civilisation and *Poglavnik* Ante Pavelić induced to its collaborators that a strong support for Romania can be able to cut Fascist Italian influence in Zagreb, especially concerning *Ustaša* internal affairs. On February 23, 1942 in a speech in a Parliament, Mladen Lorković urged the sustaining of Croatian political elites in the way of building a „perfect agreement” with Romania. Lorković argued that the quoted ally represented "*the greatest nation in all European South-East, with an army which followed just general and common interest of the whole new Balkans*".

Members and also official partners of Marshal Antonescu regime officially visited Croatia in 1942-1943.

Political radical challenge in Romania, on August 23, 1944, together with Red Army occupation of the Northern Balkans, at the very beginning of the Autumn of 1944, entirely stopped all negotiations between Bucharest and Zagreb.

Keywords: Romania, Croatia, Little Entente in the Second World War, alliance, Balkans.

1. Exploring new Balkans in Romanian reader, 1939-1941

The Romanian-Hungarian relationships made a new climate of permanent insidious tension till military confrontation, soon after the August 30, 1940 Second Vienna's Arbitrage and, also, after the two countries became officially allies, within the Axis, in the autumn of 1940. Cession of North Western Transylvania to Hungary cannot be the best opportunity to act as an inter-link between Budapest and Bucharest, the two states established a full diplomatic tension each other. After the Second Arbitrage, Bucharest government concluded that the sole solution must be a *status-quo ante* in its confrontation with Budapest and, for realizing this project, developed more diplomatic decision makers.¹

Few days after the Independence Act, on March 14, 1939, Slovakia had already signed an Alliance Treaty with neighbouring Germany: the reciprocal support between the two countries included a strong "yes-men" attitude from part of Bratislava concerning foreign policy and military relations. On March 23, 1939 Hungary launched a fast and violent military campaign against the new Slovakia, pursuing its political aims to occupy and integrate the South Slovakia in Horthy's millenaire Kingdom.² In very short time, on April 4, 1939, at highest expression of German foreign policy aims, Hungary and

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¹ See: Daniel Csátari, *Dans la tourmente. Les relations hungaro-roumaines de 1940 à 1945*, Budapest, 1974; Ottmar Trașcă, *Stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri al Ungariei din 22, 28, 29 și 31 august 1940 referitoare la al doilea Arbitraj de la Viena*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj Napoca", XXXVII, 1998, p. 177-200; Idem, *Planul de atac al armatei maghiare împotriva României (30 august 1940)*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj Napoca", XXXVIII, 1999-2000, p. 219-230; Corneliu Mihail Lungu, Ioana Alexandra Negreanu coord., *România în jocul Marilor Puteri, 1939-1940*, București, 2003; Stelian Mândruț, *Arbitrajul/Dictatul de la Viena, în istoriografia românească actuală. Etică „versus” Istorie (1989- 2010)*, in „Satu Mare. Studii și comunicări”, XXVII/II „Suplementum. Al II-lea Arbitraj de la Viena din 30 august 1940. Antecedente și consecințe”, Satu Mare, 2011, p. 9-26; L. Balogh Béni, *Erdély kérdése a román éa a magyar külpolitikában 1940- 1944 között*, in *loc. cit.*, p. 167- 177.

² Martin Sokol, chairman of Slovak Parliament on 1939 noticed, in his political memoirs, that just Adolf Hitler pushed and also decided Slovak independence. Quotation at Rudolf Chmel, *The Slovak Question in the 20-th Century*, in "Scepticism and Hope. Sixteen Contemporary Slovak Essays", edited by Miro Kollar, Bratislava, 1999, p. 80. Classic but complete analyse at Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1939- 1945*, East European Quarterly, Boulder, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1976.