

THE ROMANIA FACTOR AND THE BRITISH – TURKISH NEGOTIATIONS FOR ABANDONING NEUTRALITY AND JOINING ALLIED SIDE (1943)[1]

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Abstract: Among neutrals states, Turkey played an important role in the strategies of both United Nations and Axis Powers. Both of them tried, through various instruments, to obtain Turkey's participation at the war. During the long talks, especially between British and Turkish heads of Foreign Affairs departments, Romania came into discussion. Turkish side argued that they cannot enter into war if Soviet Union postwar plans include a total domination of Balkans and cannot suggest to Romania to capitulate to Soviet Union. It remains open to debate if this stance was adopted only as another pretext for rejecting the Allied pressures or was an honest attitude, emerged from the real fear about Soviet future intentions. We believe a combination of both is the real truth because, after all, discussing Romania was, in fact, discussing about future Soviet hegemony in this area.

Keywords: neutrality, Soviet domination, negotiations, Romania's future

1. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT TURKEY NEUTRALITY

In the evolutions of what we called *Second World War*, the Neutral States positions and the initiatives of *Axis/United Nations* for bringing them by their side, disregarding the form of collaboration, was topics which were analyzed by the scholars[2].

Turkey are included in this situation. Ankara's authorities, following the Mustafa Kemal political commandments[3], developed strategies of which goals was to keep the country out of the war, as it was surrounded by German-Soviet Union alliance and Bulgaria adherence to *Three Party Pact* (March 1st, 1941). The disappearance of first diplomatic construction, as a consequence of *Barbarossa Operation* launching, at June 22nd, 1941, and subsequent join of Soviet Union to the *United Nation Coalition* didn't diminished the historical fear and mistrust to the great and (powerfull Northern neighbor).

Turkey had to frame its foreign policy strategies first of all depending of South-East European evolutions, in which Romania, at its turn, played an important role.

Maintaining neutrality imposed a combination of concession and firmness and the ability to use the word and the meaning of written document, in order to decline commitment, in any form, in the great conflagration. We believe that four moments are the *basis of Turkish neutrality*: 1. *The British-French-Turkish Treaty* (for mutual assistance) signed at Ankara on the 19th of October 1939 by Ambassador Sir Hughe Knatchbull - Hugessen and General Sir Archibald Wavell, chief-in-command of the British forces from Middle East, Ambassador René Massigli and General Maxime Weygand, chief-in-command of the French forces from Middle East and Prime-Minister Refik Saydam[4]. Great Britain and France pledged themselves to give “all assistance which stays in their power” against a European State attack. In its turn, Turkey must help their partners in the case of an aggression in Mediterranean area. The third article mention the Turkish cooperation in fulfilling the French-British guarantees for Greece and Romania[5]. The second protocol contained the reserve assumed by Turkey, in its relation with Soviet Union: „commitments assumed by Turkey, through this Pact, cannot force this country to an action having as effect involvement in a armed conflict with Soviet Union”[6]. Moreover, the treaty contain other two reserves: *ratio temporis*, through which Turkey take part at the guarantees only if they are in force and, the second reserve, French-British guarantees must have a beginning of execution[7]. 2. *Turkish-Bulgarian Declaration* from February 17th, 1940. The two states agreed, on 17th February, “on the decision to remain, as a firm bases of their foreign policy, aside from any sort of military conflicts”[8]. It didn't commit with anything (and Bulgaria will broke the understanding, through joining to *Three Party Treaty* and accepting, on its territory, of German troops but Turkey used

this declaration for rejecting British demands for implication in Greece and Eastern Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Turkey communicated Greece, at the end of October 1940, that, if Bulgarian Army marched into Greek Thrace, Turkey will attack Bulgaria. Following this declaration, an armoured division was sent at the Greek-Turkish border (Usun - Kopra)[9]. 3. *The Non-aggression and Friendship Treaty* signed on the 18th of June 1941 by Turkey and Germany. According to this, the two states agreed on mutually respecting their sovereignty and state's integrity and abstain from any sort of activity that could directly or indirectly affect the other party. The treaty doesn't mentioned the German troops and military equipment passage through Turkey, a stipulation for which Germany pressed hard in the negotiations but Turkey rejected with same strength, having the moral advantage of pro-German Iraq rebellion failure. 4. *The British-Soviet declarations from spring and summer of the year 1941*. On the 25th of March 1941 a *Declaration of mutual assistance* was signed between Turkey and USSR. The two countries declared their reciprocal neutrality, in case one of the covenanters was assaulted by a third Power the parties could rely on „full understanding”. This last phrase was interpreted as “meaning a kind of sympathy for the Turkish cause and seems to imply a moral help which is very appreciated by the Turks, with or without justification”[10].

Soon after *Barbarossa Operation* outbreak, Turkish Ambassador in Moscow stated its country neutrality[11]. In reply, at August 10th, Soviet Union Ambassador in Ankara, Serghei Vinogradov, reminded about March 25th, 1941, declaration and demand as, in the context of German propaganda, which was serve to the purpose of provoking tensions between Soviet Union and Turkey, an exchange of views between those two Governments take place[12].

In the same day, Great Britain Ambassador (Sir Hughe Knatchbull - Hugessen) and Soviet Union Ambassador (Serghei Vinogradov) in Ankara stated to the chief of Turkish diplomacy that „His Majesty Government confirm the loyalty toward Montreux Convention and assure the Turkish Government that he hadn't any aggressive intentions[...]toward the Straits. His Majesty Government and, also, the Soviet Government are prepared to observe with utmost scrupulosity the integrity of Turkish Republic”[13].

As one could easily notice the US is missing from this frame for Turkey security. The American authorities, not part of the conflict until December 7th, 1941, had a divergent view from Turkey's multilateral strategy. The treaty with Germany was negatively received by Washington. The State's Department believed that Ankara Government “didn't behave very well lately” and proposed, at least temporarily, blocking the assistance and the export licenses to Turkey. Despite of some pro-Turkish stands, the State's Department didn't modify its position and the United States aid remain suspended a month. The situation was released by the end of the year; on the 3rd of December, President Roosevelt declared that

Turkey's defense was vital for the American security and extended *Lend-Lease Act* over this country[14].

In the following year, Turkey find its place, either in *strategic analyses* (“it is in United Nations military, political and economical interest that Turkey goodwill and trust to be maintained, through approving the demands for moderate amounts of materials, needed for Turkish economy”, as it was stated into a *Joint Chiefs of Staff* report, from May 1942[15]), in *Lend – Lease* program, in *informational activity* (special offices was opened, in main Turkish cities) or in *diplomacy field* (here is to be mentioned the trip to Ankara of personal emissary of the President, Wendell Wilkie, at the beginning of September 1942).

The Turkey's power to bring a major contribution to the Allied war effort begin to be more substantial analyzed since Casablanca Conference (January 14th-23rd, 1943). Winston Churchill was the main voice which sustained the necessity to involve Turkey into war, either as a full participant or through making available for Allies of some military facilities, especially those for air forces. British Prime-Minister efforts developed at all Allied high level reunions, either in *two* (with President Roosevelt) or in *three* (with Roosevelt and Stalin), at Casablanca, Washington, Quebec, Cairo, Tehran. Also, in the meetings with the participating of the highest Turkish leaders, as it was the case of second Cairo conference. The outcome is all known: neutrality didn't end, formally, until February 23rd, 1945, a week before the deadline to which World States could declare adhesion to United Nations and became founding members of United Nations Organization. The approaching process begin, in Summer of 1944, as a result of United States-British pressures, in the whole context of France landing, in West, and Soviet Union constant penetration into the South-Eastern area. The reasons put forward for delaying of such decision was various: lack of the enough amounts of armaments, the unsuited weather, the possibility that German air forces, based in Bulgaria, destroy in short time Istanbul and not only this city; lack of cooperation in *political preparation* of future belligerency.

An important aspect, in our opinion, included in last of the mentioned reasons, is those of future Soviet intentions. Regarding Bulgaria, Turkish leaders was assured about Soviet Union immediate intervention against this country, in the case of a conflict between Turkey and its Balkan neighbor (this assurance was offered by Stalin, during Tehran summit). However, the potential Soviet „design” about South-Eastern Europe future raised at least concern in Ankara. This feeling was made known much better at he level of the chiefs of diplomacies and subordinated structures. In this context, reaching to the main point of our demarche, *Romanian situation* could be taken into consideration.

2. ROMANIA AS A FACTOR WHICH PREVENT TURKISH BELLIGERANCY

Allied with Germany, since Autumn 1940, after heavy territorial losses (imposed, in a way or another, also by Germany), Romania (different of Bulgaria, also allied with Germany) take active part to the *Barbarossa Operation*, initiated at June 22nd, 1941. Regainig of the lost territories, as a consequence of Soviet ultimatum from June 26th-28, 1940 acceptance, may seem a right option of General Ion Antonescu, at this moment effective ruler of the country. But passing the Dniestr river, no matter how justified was from military point of view, had little suport, if any, from the *national interest* view but very serious consequences in the field of legitimacy, and affected even the right of regainig of what was obviously Romanian and was certified by history and ethnic reality (for example, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine). The rightness of this operation disappeared, practically, by the decision of carry on the war, beyond Greater Romania frontiers.

„Embarked” in German war machine, Romania will begin to find its place, in the first half of 1943, in some United States analysis. In January, William C. Bullitt, Assistant of Naval Department Secretary, proposed an invasion of Europe, through Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, in order to place British and American forces in Central and Southern Europe and to impede the predictable Soviet advance[16]. His idea was noted, President Roosevelt himself asked J.C.S., in May, to analyse, from the military point of view, the possibility of launching an attack against Germany through Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey[17]. The debate are part of the *Balkan Plan* concept, sustained by the Winston Churchill (sometimes, even more then *Overlord*) but, for the United States side, it didn't overcome the phase of a simple projection; the policy makers and the militaries placed the whole weight on the Western Europe second front plan and opposed, vigorously, to any attempt of relocation – and limitation, in consequence – of the resources destined to the main objective, through periferical operations. British pushing knock at the closed doors, as it is very well illustrated by the head of British Imperial Chiefs of Staff, Sir Alan Brooke, in his notes: „when I look to the Mediterranean, I realise to well how much I failed. If I had enough strength to persuade those American Chiefs of Staff to see the reality, how differently the war could be. We had entire Balkans in flames, until now, and the war could end in 1943. I blame myself for this, however, I doubt if it was possible, humanly speaking, to change the American point of view, much more then I done myself. And what I done cannot be possible without Dill help (Army Marshall Sir John Dill, first chief of Imperial Chiefs of Staff then, since 1941, chief of the Imperial Chief of Staff Mission at Washington, and then most important British representative in Combined Chiefs of Staff), his close ties with Marshall, his deep knowledge and my strong trust in him”[18].

Romania's presence in the puzzle of arguments against involving in war, put forward in various times by Turkey, became more consistent starting with Autumn of 1943. Significant seems to us the Anthony Eden and Numan Menemencioğlu talks from Cairo, between November 5th and 8th. Chief of the Foreign Office had the mission to made known to its colleague the Allied demands: joining to the United Nations until the end of 1943, granting to the Allies of some military facilities (first of all, airfields). These requests were included in the protocol signed by Vyaceslav Molotov and Anthony Eden at November 1th, 1943[19] and to which United States adhered, through the disposition sent by Franklin Roosevelt to Averell Harriman, at November 8th[20].

The head of the Turkish diplomacy criticized Eden for not bringing from Moscow (where, between 19th and 30 October a conference of the three Allied Foreign Ministers take place) decisions relating to Iran, Iraq and Balkans. In consequence, the chances of reaching to a common view was very small. More specifically, Turkish Minister stated, in several moments of these talks, fear for the Soviet interests in Balkans. Eden firmly deny his colleague information regarding the compromise between the opening of the second front in Europe in exchange for the Soviet “free hands” in Europe[21]. Numan Menemencioğlu insisted, bringing into discussion the Romania situation, of which peace offer wasn't accepted by Great Britain. At the Eden reply, that Allies would discuss the peace with Romanians only on the unconditional surrender condition, Menemencioğlu replied, trenchant, that Turkey will never suggest to Romania to surrender without conditions to Soviet Union[22]. And the Turkish Foreign Minister continued, stated that he want assurances that Soviet Union didn't follow upon territorial aquisitions and/or military bases in Balkans or, in the final, the establishment of their own hegemony in that region. This position made Eden to report that Menemencioğlu was very suspicious toward Soviets and very worried about their potential advance in Balkans.

As it result from a conversation with Romanian Minister in Ankara, Alexandru Cretzianu, the head of Turkish diplomacy express his skepticism regarding the fact that territorial problems doesn't be discussed at Moscow, which could mean, in the same time, that “no veto was formulated against Russian demands”[23].

On his turn, Eden tried to use this topic as an pressure tool, drawing attention to Menemencioğlu that his country could find „in a undesired position toward Russians, in the case of declining British demands”[24].

The tone of conversations mounted, Eden warning his colleague about the predictabel consequences of Turkish refuse to meet Allied demands.

Next day, the last meeting between Eden și Menemencioğlu take place, this time in a more mutual understanding atmosphere, except the topic of *Soviet intentions and Romanian destiny*.

Though Eden underlined the opportunity which open for Turkey, to establish good relations with its greater Northern neighbor, on solid bases, for the next quarter of century[25], his companion stated that a positive answer to the British demands could be taken only by Government. But a hint as to the predictable position could be made. In Menemencioğlu opinion, Turks was very disturbed by the Stalin referings to Moldavia and Transylvania and it would be extremely difficult to explain to Great National Assembly a situation in which Turkey assistance would help to the Soviet Union establishing in Romania and Bulgaria, under the pretention that it would be in the both nations interest[26]. For Menemencioğlu, Eden seems to be a speaker for Soviet Union, without nominating, clear and loud, what is to be expexted from Turkey, on what Allied cooperation could rely this country and what assurances could be given as to the political implications of Turkey abandoning neutrality. In this context, “for its own safety, Turkey must be worried about situation from Balkans as previously was worried for the freedom of Straits”[27]. To the end of reunion, Turkish Foreign Minister stated that, for taking into consideration a possible positive answer, the main burden lay upon *political not military conditions*[28].

Turkish-British exchange of views regarding Balkans[29] destiny was also known by the Romanian diplomacy. Numan Menemencioğlu had conversations, at December 12, with Minister Alexandru Cretzianu and bring to Romanian diplomat attention some considerations made by Anthony Eden, which affect especially Romania. His British colleague had a virulent reaction, of lack of interest, as for an enemy. Eden deny the knowing of a Soviet intention, according to which a “Socialist Autonomous Republic” must be created, in which Bessarabia, Bukovine, Moldavia and Northern Transylvania was to be included “in order to establish a more intimate connection between Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia”[30]. According to Cretzianu report, Numan Menemencioğlu draw Eden attention over a speech held by Stalin at November 7th, in which he spoke about Moldavia liberation. Turkish Foreign Ministry added: „If, next day after

you leave, Mr. Stalin claimed Moldavia, we could ask ourselves with what demands he will come after a month”[31]. But he don't pursue the subject, „because Mr. Eden doesn't know exactly what is Moldavia and mixed up with Bessarabia”[32]. And referring to the war entry, Menemencioğlu argued to Cretzianu the impossibility of changing Turkey foreign policy, due to the military unpreparedness and, not finally, because of *Russia factor*: “if Russia would achieve domination in Balkans, could Turkey be asked to sacrifice her for hastening the obtaining this outcome?”[33].

Of course, last assertion represent a *political corectness* position, bearing in mind the fact that it was stated in a conversation with a Germany ally but, for our ideatic construction, much mor interesting are the details from the reunions between chiefs of British and Turkish diplomacies, referring to Romania and its possible destiny.

At Tehran, Romania situation appear into discussion only accidental, the accent being on the effects of Turkey belligerency over Axis allies from this area, starting with the predictable collapse of the whole German structure in South-Eastern Europe. Instead, Bulgaria is much more discussed and much more important from the view of diminishing Turkish fears. Not once Soviet Union stated that will declare war against Bulgaria if the last one attack Turkey; however, the Soviet lack of interest toward Turkey belligerency is obvious. It wasn't necessary that Turkey be present in the Grand Alliance, no matter what was the way in which Turkey decide to participate, because Turkey was the country to which, at the right moment, some demands, previously calculated, will be made, which will affect the territorial integrity of this country, Finally, at the second conference of Cairo, Romania almost disappeared as a *factor*, talks being focused on topics like the war entry schedule, lack of Turkish Army training, lack of mobilisation, lack of political common plans.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The British – Turkish talks are the opportunity in which Romania become a subject, a *factor* into an equation, as we try to underline in the pages above. In our opinion, is the sole moment in which such a „design” is taking into consideration. Until new documents could certified that *Romania factor* was a constant topic in formulating Turkish war strategy, we could conclude that, in above mentioned talks, Romania was „used” as another reasons for which Turkey could not obey to British demands, because Romania was a obvious target of Soviet Union. A some kind of responsibility transfer was made, to the British side, which could not offer, at that moment, nothing solid regarding Soviet intentions for this zone and, of course, for Romania. Behind this transfer, Turkish side made referings to the fact that complying to British requests means accepting future Soviet hegemony and that means at least territorial losses for Turkey neighbor, Romania, which Turkey could not accept. Until a point, this seems a very respectable stand, but we believe that it could not be accepted without connecting, as we explain above, with the general efforts of Turkey to avoid war involvement.

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- [2] Some examples: Donald G. Stevens, *World War II Economic Warfare: The United States, Britain, and Portuguese Wolfram*, in “The Historian”, 61/(1999); *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, edited by Christian Leitz, David J. Dunthorn, New York, Berghahn Books, 1999; Murat Önsoy, *The World War Two Allied Economic Warfare: the Case of Turkish Chrome Sales*, Inaugural-dissertation in der Philosophischen Fakultät und Fachbereich Theologie der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen Nürnberg, 2009; partially, Emanuel Plopeanu, *Politica Statelor Unite față de Turcia între anii 1943 și 1952*, Iași, Institutul European, 2009.
- [3] Peace at Home, peace in the World.
- [4] „Great Britain and France win the biggest victory last week but the scene of succes wasn't neither the military theater, nor in the sea or air, but rather in the distant and quiet Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, at 1600 miles from the Western front arms”. With this words was opened a commentary, headlined *Victory*, in the October 30 number of American weekly *Time*.

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- [10] Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 71/1920 - 1944, Turkey, vol. 66; telegram nr. 961 from March 25th, 1941, from the Romanian Minister in Moscow, Grigore Gafencu, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- [11] *Turkish Ambassador declaration regarding Turkey neutrality*, Moscow, June 25th, 1940, in Alexandru Vianu, Constantin Bușe, Zorin Zamfir, Gheorghe Bădescu, *Relații internaționale în acte și documente*, vol. II, (1939 - 1945), București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1976, p. 94; a similar demarche produced also in Bucharest, at June 23rd (A. M. A. E., Problema 82, Turkey 1859 - 1944, f. 28). Turkey's position was clarified into a conversation between Mihai Antonescu, vicepresident of the Romanian Government and Turkish representative in Bucharest. With that occasion, Turkish diplomat showed that his country „will keep its neutrality, even if it would fall[...]except Germany and Russia, there are other Powers into this war. If it was only Germany and Russia, Turkey wouldn't hesitate because Russia is hated in Turkey, but because the war is also a maritime one, Turkey is compelled to keep its neutrality, even if the advance into Caucasus would create a new situation” (*Ibidem*, f. 30).
- [12] *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, vol. IV, July 1941 - June 1942, edited by Leland M. Goodrich, Boston, World Peace Foundations, 1942, p. 686.
- [13] *Ibidem*, p. 687.
- [14] David J. Alvarez, *Bureaucracy and Cold War Diplomacy: the United States and Turkey 1943-1946*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1980, p. 25; in fact, Turkey received *Lend - Lease Act* help since May, but through Great Britain intermediation (A. M. A. E., 71/1920 - 1944, United States of America, vol. 41, October 1941 - December 1944, f. 292). However, the bureaucratic obstructions and shipping difficulties, together, reduced the acquisitions on *Lend-Lease Act*. Until the end of the war, the value of the equipments allocated to Turkey reached 95 millions dollars, but only half of this value was effectively delivered, the other half being diverted to “more imperious war requirements” (George S. Harris, *Troubled Alliance. Turkish American problems in Historical Perspective, 1945-1971*, Stanford, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace, 1976, p. 13 – 14).
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- [26] *Ibidem*, p. 181.
- [27] *Ibidem*.
- [28] *Ibidem*, p. 182.
- [29] We use the notion in the broader sense in which was used in the above mentioned talks, not in the strictly geographic view.
- [30] A. M. A. E., Peace Conference, Paris 1946 - 1947, Pre-conference Papers, vol. 2, f. 27.
- [31] *Ibidem*, f. 28.
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