

ROMANIAN-TURKISH NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE SIGNING OF MILITARY CONVENTIONS – NEW APPROACHES IN VIEW OF THE PROXIMITY TO THE BLACK SEA –¹

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The military collaboration between Romania and Turkey became imperative, especially after 1933, when the general revisionist trend became apparent. In broad terms, the course of the discussions in that regard was intricate, beginning with talks for a bilateral military arrangement, followed by joint negotiations with other partners in the Balkan Pact, during which bilateral discussions between Romanian and Turkish military planners continued, and concluding with bilateral support commitments after Yugoslavia's defection and the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Both parties had their own objective defence needs, but also shared goals such as discouraging revisionist tendencies in the Balkan region or beyond.

Keywords: Romanian-Turkish negotiations; Straits Convention; military collaboration; military conventions; Balkan Pact;

INTRODUCTION

The need for Romania to articulate consolidated political-military alliances in the Balkan region near the Black Sea became imperative after 1933, when the general revisionist trend became apparent.

Simultaneously, the victorious powers in the recent war were transitioning to a policy of concessions towards the former defeated powers. Although there were legal “loopholes” in the League of Nations Covenant that allowed for “legal” revisions of treaties in well-established domains and methods, revisionist states sought to evade them and implement a *policy of fait accompli*. Thus, the League of Nations found itself in the position of formally condemning acts of aggression and adopting formal sanctions for which it did not possess powerful instruments.

Against this backdrop – and in such a context – the exception emerges in the form of the appeal made at the beginning of 1936 by the Turkish state, requesting the League of Nations to revise the Straits Convention in the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923) “by legal means” (in the sense that this “course of action” was provided for in the Covenant of the League of Nations). The League’s leadership responded positively, but to ensure the success of its diplomacy, Ankara aimed to convince partner countries of the justness of its request before the start of the debates.

Surprisingly, the diplomacy in Bucharest displayed reluctance toward the appeal of its ally (there was a bilateral treaty between the two states from 1933). Moreover, Turkey and the Kingdom of Romania were signatories of the Balkan Pact of 9 February 1934.

Nicolae Titulescu’s reservation did not pertain to Turkey’s request itself – which he considered justified –, but rather to the danger that Romania perceived, believing that it would open a “Pandora’s box”; other states dissatisfied with treaties could request similar revision procedures on other issues, including territorial ones².

Understanding the legitimacy of his ally’s appeal, Titulescu stated: “Anything that affects Turkey’s security affects Romania’s security, and anything that concerns

¹ This paper includes documents also used for: Alexandru Oșca, *Managementul crizelor regionale. Modelul balcanic interbelic*, AISM, București, 2003.

² Romania was concerned about the modification of the Straits’ regime because there was a risk that the new regulations would affect its security and defense interests; the Soviets could turn the Black Sea into a “Russian lake” and the allies had no way to help the Romanians.

*the Black Sea is of the utmost interest to my country, given that our only access to the open sea is through the Black Sea and the Straits. I would say that the Straits are Turkey's very heart. But they are at the same time Romania's lungs. When a region is, by its geographical situation, the heart of one nation and the lungs of another, the most elementary wisdom dictates that these two nations should unite and form a whole. Romania and Turkey understood this*³.

Ultimately, the Montreux Conference was organized, allowing for the reinstatement of Turkey's sovereignty over the Straits and their remilitarization.

This is the event I refer to in my communication to demonstrate that it unlocked the Romanian-Turkish military negotiations within the framework of the Balkan Pact.

ROMANIAN-TURKISH MILITARY NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN THE BALKAN PACT

Let us review some key points from the Romanian-Turkish discussions on military cooperation. The collaboration became necessary, especially after 1933. In broad terms, the course of the discussions was intricate, beginning with talks for a bilateral military arrangement, followed by joint negotiations with other partners in the Balkan Pact (during which bilateral discussions between Romanian and Turkish military planners continued), and concluding with bilateral support commitments after Yugoslavia's defection and the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Both parties had their own objective defense needs, but also shared goals such as discouraging revisionist tendencies in the Balkan region or beyond.

As it is often the case in military negotiations, each side started from its own needs, sometimes disregarding the needs of the other. The young Turkish Republic felt its European borders exposed, especially since it did not exercise sovereignty over the Straits – which were an obstacle to manoeuvring large units from Anatolia in case support was needed for European Turkey. That was the reason why Turkish planners insisted that the rejection of a possible aggression from the Balkan space against them should be primarily resolved through the contribution of Balkan allies, especially the Romanian Armed Forces. The Turks were convinced that Romania had the most consolidated position obtained through peace treaties.

In contrast, Romania felt threatened at its expanded borders, where three of the most ardent promoters of revisionism were located, which naturally pertained to Romanian territories: to the East – the USSR, to the West – Hungary, and to the South – Bulgaria.

³ "Declaration of Nicolae Titulescu regarding the navigation regime through the Black Sea Straits (Montreux, 22 June 1936)", in Vianu, Bădescu, 1976, p. 242.

After the war, the Republic of Turkey, with a population of 14 million people and a vast territory, had limited armed forces but many security needs. However, Romanian military planners had information that reinforced their belief that, after a decade, Turkey had regained its balance. Therefore, they hoped that Turkish staff officers would assume the main role in thwarting a hypothetical Bulgarian aggression against a Balkan ally. That way, the bulk of Romanian forces could be distributed to other dangerous areas.

Romanian-Turkish military relations took shape more precisely in early 1935 and were solidified through the adoption of two military conventions within the Balkan Pact (the Three: Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, and the Four: Romania, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece). After signing the conventions, efforts were concentrated on concrete multisectoral collaboration among the allies, which was dense, ambitious, but very short-lived and interrupted/halted by the outbreak of war in September 1939.

For the sake of clarity in this communication, I will separate, as much as possible, the Romanian-Turkish bilateral military discussions from those within the conventions into three or four sections.

In the Romanian-Turkish military negotiations for adopting a convention, it was evident who the common enemy could be – Bulgaria. However, Turkish military strategists expressed reservations about the value of the forces to be brought to the European part of Turkey to counter a hypothetical Bulgarian aggression. In practice, the Turkish military argued that the corridor of the Straits divided the territory of the state into a European part and an Asian part. On both sides of the Straits, a demilitarized zone was established as imposed by the Lausanne Convention (Article 6), which was effectively removed from Turkey's sovereignty (Cojocar, 2008)⁴.

⁴ Ionuț Cojocar, *De la războiul greco-turc la conferințele de la Lausanne și Montreux/From the Greek-Turkish war to the Lausanne and Montreux conferences*, in the *Analele Universității Spiru Haret, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, Year II, no. 2, 2008, Note 17. The Lausanne Convention (24 July 1923) established:

1. Full freedom of navigation for all merchant and warships, under any flag, with any cargo, in time of peace; conditions remained the same in wartime if Turkey remained neutral.
2. In time of war, if Turkey was a belligerent, it had no right to stop the passage of the ships of the states through the Straits, it was not allowed to send warships into the Black Sea that exceeded, in terms of capacity, the fleet of the most powerful neutral littoral countries.
3. Warships could pass freely through the Straits, both by day and by night, regardless of flag, with the restriction that the fleet introduced by a foreign country in the Black Sea should not exceed the fleet of the most powerful littoral state and reach a maximum of 30,000 tons.
4. Submarines crossed the Straits floating on the surface.
5. Warships did not have the right to station in the Straits.
6. It was decided to demilitarize the Straits and to set up the International Commission of the Straits – made up of representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia – which supervised the fulfillment of the provisions of the Convention. This commission was under the control of the League of Nations.

What conclusions can we draw from the military arrangements of the pact?

1. An asymmetry in reciprocal support obligations was created among the allies. Romania accepted the Russian clause (where Turkey informed its partners that it would remain neutral in a conflict involving the Soviets⁵) and the Greek reservation regarding Italy.
2. For Romania, the Pact “... results from the need to ensure the security of the eastern front...”. As we can see, it had no security gain by assuming obligations within the new alliance, neither on the eastern border (it could not rely on Turkish intervention!), nor on the southern border where, technically, the Convention of Defensive Alliance was in force with Yugoslavia (and the Military Convention of 1922).
3. Romania did not invoke any clause, committing without reservations to come to the aid of an aggressed ally from within the Balkan space, supported by an extra-Balkan power (especially Italy was targeted).

On 17 October 1933, a Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation, Non-aggression and Arbitration was concluded between Romania and Turkey. A secret convention in general terms was also signed (on 5 June 1934, ratified on 30 October 1934). Meanwhile, on 9 February 1934, the Balkan Pact was signed in which Turkey and Romania were signatories. As a result, Section 3 Operations Bureau of the Romanian General Staff specified that the document must be supplemented as soon as possible with a convention within the Pact (AMR, 948 *Section 3* collection, file no. 1449, pp 7-52).

For this purpose, the Romanian General Staff sent a delegation made up of Colonel Gheorghe Rozin and Major Lupescu to Ankara (Idem, Report no. 141 on 13 May 1935) to negotiate the terms of the military convention. The negotiations were extremely difficult, the Romanian officers were surprised by the stubbornness of their Turkish colleagues: the Turkish officers had advanced solutions that, if applied, would have made the Romanian plans inoperable⁶. For the time being, the claims of the parties had been taken into account while waiting for the necessary concessions.

⁵ Mihai Retegan, *În balanța forțelor*, București, Editura Semne, 1997, p. 137. The Soviet ambassador in Ankara asked for clarification about the nature of the Pact. As a result, the Turkish government made a special reservation to the Treaty: “On behalf of the government of the Republic of Turkey, I have the honor to declare that under no circumstances will Turkey admit to considering itself committed to take part in any acts directed against the USSR”.

⁶ Idem, pp. 88-115, Report on the mission in Turkey, signed by Colonel Gheorghe Rozin, head of Section 3 Operations Bureau.

There were two issues that each of the parties had in mind:

- a. Romania tried to persuade Turkey to concentrate more forces in Thrace to counter a Bulgarian aggression against Romania. Romanian planners proposed that a possible Bulgarian aggression should be countered with the following forces: Turkey with 15-16 infantry divisions and 1-2 cavalry divisions, Romania with 3-4 infantry divisions. Yugoslavia was also expected to participate with 3-4 infantry divisions.
- b. Turkey insisted that if the Bulgarian army were to aggress against it, Romania should decide to concentrate its main forces east of the Danube, in Dobrogea⁷.

Romanian military staff initially did not understand the strategic reasons invoked by their Turkish counterparts regarding the zone of concentration of Romanian forces. Moreover, that request, repeatedly made, raised suspicions. General Gheorghe Angelescu, the Romanian Minister of Defence, cautioned: “...we must be cautious and try, in particular, to understand whether the unyielding claims of the Turkish General Staff regarding the zone of concentration of our troops are not related to suggestions they may receive from another power by concentrating our forces where it is insistently requested”⁸. The Romanian Minister referred to the USSR, given the close relations between Turkey and this power.

The delays continued until the summer of 1936 when, suddenly, the Turkish General Staff abandoned the conditionality of signing military conventions on the Romanian commitment to concentrate the majority of its troops in Dobrogea. It was evident that a new factor had intervened, changing the previous approach. That event was undoubtedly the Montreux Conference (Ib.), which recognized Turkey’s sovereign rights over the Straits and eliminated the demilitarized zone around them.

The path to the adoption of the Military Convention accelerated, and at the Chiefs of Staff Conference in Bucharest in November 1936, the Convention documents were adopted.

Bilateral military collaboration between Turkey and Romania was reactivated after Yugoslavia’s defection (Yugoslavia signed a treaty of “eternal friendship” with Bulgaria without the approval or notification of the allies in the Pact) when direct

⁷ Idem, file no. 1488, pp. 139-147, Report of Section 3 Operations Bureau with reference to the history of the Romanian-Turkish dispute on the subject of the military convention.

⁸ Apud: Mihai Retegan, *op.cit.*, p. 144. The author quotes from Collection 948/RSS 3, file no. 1488, p. 30.

contact between Turkish and Romanian military officials were resumed based on the secret Convention from 5 June 1934⁹.

Essentially, it provided that if one party became the victim of aggression by a *Balkan state, whether allied or not with an extra-Balkan power*, the other party committed to going to war against the aggressor in the Balkans. Article 2 also allowed for coordinated action against a *non-Balkan aggressor*, meaning the non-attacked ally was obligated to declare war on the aggressor state (AMAE, *Înțelegerea Balcanică/Balkan Pact* collection, vol. 36, pp. 25-26).

In the new context, Romanian leaders hoped they could obtain Turkish cooperation based on a military convention that would contribute to the *“solution of the Romanian external military problem”* (AMR, M.St. M./Great General Staff collection, Section 3, file no. 443, p. 17).

After discussions in Ankara, Colonel Gheorghe Rozin assessed: *“The alliance with the Turks is solid; the government and the General Staff seem determined to have sincere collaboration”* (Ib., file no. 1488, p. 148). That commitment became credible after the Montreux Conference on 20 July 1936¹⁰.

The Romanian General Staff sent a military delegation to Turkey, led by Colonel Gheorghe Rozin, the head of the Operations Section, for further discussions after the Permanent Council session in May 1936 in Belgrade. Upon their return, the officer reported that the Turkish General Staff had postponed finalizing the discussions until after the Montreux Conference in June-July 1936. A protocol was signed, resolving both the Romanian and Turkish reservations made earlier (AMR, M.St. M., Section 3, file no. 1608, p. 159).

⁹ At the same time, a secret convention was signed between Turkey and Yugoslavia.

¹⁰ The conference was held between 22 June-21 July in Montreux. The participant countries were: Turkey, USSR, Great Britain, France, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, Australia and Japan. A Convention was adopted, which essentially established:

- If Turkey took part in the war, commercial ships of neutral states could pass through the Straits, provided they did not collaborate with Turkey's enemy.
- The maximum tonnage of the warships of non-littoral countries was not supposed to exceed 30,000 tons.
- The maximum stationing period of vessels in the Straits should not exceed 21 days.
- If Turkey had been neutral, the warships of the non-belligerent states had the freedom to pass through the Straits; the belligerent countries, under the conditions of a neutral Turkey, could cross the Straits only if they respected the obligations arising from the Covenant of the League of Nations and the special pacts of mutual assistance in which Turkey was a party.
- If Turkey had been belligerent, the passage of military ships belonging to neutral states through the Straits was left to the discretion of the Turkish government. The submarines of the littoral states could enter the Black Sea floating on the surface. Civilian aircraft could fly over the area of the Straits, military ones not having that right.

A set of discussions referred to the number of forces each party could make available to counter an aggression in the Balkans. The other point of contention – the concentration zones – was resolved through concessions made by Romanian military planners at Montreux. They agreed to concentrate a significant number of forces in Dobrogea, but only under the condition that Romania was not engaged on another front and only if *the bulk of Bulgarian forces* were engaged against Turkey.

In the view of Turkish military planners, Bulgaria was the most dangerous enemy for Turkey: *“An Italian action against the Dardanelles can only succeed if Bulgaria is united with it”*. Bulgaria became the most important pillar even in the following scenario: *“So even if Turkey fears Italy, it is still Bulgaria that, by its immediate proximity to the Straits, will determine the decision in Thrace and the region of the Straits. Therefore, the defence of the Straits can only be achieved by keeping the Bulgarians as far away as possible. Not a single kilometre should be ceded to them to the southeast”*¹¹.

It was agreed that the documents would be signed at the Chiefs of Staff Conference in Bucharest in November 1936, which coincided with the first foreign trip of Turkish Marshal Fevzi Pasha.

The Marshal arrived in Constanța on Tuesday, 3 November, on a warship (the cruiser *“Hamidie”*), accompanied by Colonel Ismail Hakki Akoguz, Colonel of Aviation Sefik Çakmak, Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff Yusuf Adil Egeli, the first secretary of the embassy Faik Zihni (head of department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and Mehmet Sabri, police commissioner. The old marshal was impressed by the reception given by Romanian authorities in Constanța and Bucharest. Upon his return to Turkey, the marshal was visited by the President of the Republic and Prime Minister Ismet İnönü and gave a two-hour presentation to the Council of Ministers.

Unfortunately, the events in the vicinity of the outbreak of the war negatively influenced the functionality of political and military cooperation within the Pact. Attempts were made from various quarters to dislocate the alliance or diminish its role. Romanian diplomats in the Turkish capital learned of Bulgaria's attempts to dislocate the Balkan Bloc through political manoeuvres. Invited by Turkish officials

¹¹ Ionuț Cojocaru, *De la războiul greco-turc la conferințele de la Lausanne și Montreux, op. cit.*, note 54: According to Turkish General Staff, the most important theatre of operations for the Turks is Thrace and the Straits, because losing them means for the Turks *“throwing”* them into the wasteland of Anatolia and implicitly removing them from the sphere of European interests, which Turkey cares so much about. In the hypothesis of Italy's collaboration with Bulgaria against Turkey, it would create serious problems for Turkey because a Bulgarian action in force in Thrace combined with an Italian action on southern Thrace would be very dangerous for Turkey.

to join the Bloc, Bulgarian officials stated: *“Bulgaria conditions its entry into the bloc on the satisfaction of certain territorial claims at the expense of Greece and especially Romania”* (AMR, M.St.M. collection, file 1608, p. 14).

The direct meeting between İnönü and Kiosseivanov was monitored by Romanian diplomats. They reported the pressure from Kiosseivanov, who asked Turkish leaders to ensure the Bulgarians about the *“satisfaction of territorial claims from the Romanians”* (Ib.). The Turkish-Bulgarian friendship treaty was invoked, by which Turkey made certain commitments, in no case those invoked by the Bulgarians. The Romanian attaché reported to Bucharest a dynamic scene that took place during the İnönü-Kiosseivanov dialogue: *“Kiosseivanov asked: <What will be Turkey’s attitude if Romania were engaged in the West, and the Bulgarian government, forced by public opinion, would enter Dobrogea?>. That time Mr. İnönü answered promptly: <Je marche contre la Bulgarie>. < But if – Kiosseivanov asked again – one of the members of the Balkan Agreement – for example Yugoslavia – does not respect the Pact and remains neutral?> İnönü replies: <Je marche toujours>. <But if Greece is not with you either>, Kiosseivanov insisted”* (Ib.). According to the story of the Romanian military attaché, the President of Turkey would not have hesitated: *“En allie fidel et loyal de la Romania, je marcherai quand meme contre la Bulgarie”*. (Ib.)

Romanian military staff asked Colonel Teodorescu (the Romanian military attaché in Ankara) to find out the official Turkish military position in the new European context. After consultations, the military attaché reported: *“In case Italy attacks Greece and Bulgaria intervenes, we, Turkey, will reach Plovdiv in two days”* (Ib., file 1706, p. 46); *“We have no doubt that the armies of Turkey and Romania will not take long to occupy all of Bulgaria (...) Please note that Turkey relies heavily on us in action against Bulgaria, and it no longer speaks of Yugoslavia, whose intervention against Bulgaria they consider doubtful given Yugoslavia’s current situation”*. The Romanian military attaché concluded that *“Turkey was the only Balkan country on which Romania could confidently rely”* (Ib.).

Strategic cooperation between Turkey and Romania became essential in the period that followed. In a note prepared after the Romanian-Turkish meeting in February 1937 (point 3), it was stated: *“A possible defection of Yugoslavia in a Balkan conflict necessitates a closer approach to Turkey. It is closer to us, and therefore, military cooperation, mutual influence on operations, and free passage through the Straits necessitate us to be able to rely on them from a military perspective”* (Id.,

file no. 1536, p. 4). A few months later (August 1937), the Chief of the Romanian General Staff, General Sichițiu (accompanied by General Iacobici, Colonel Șteflea, and Lieutenant Colonel Cernăianu – a renowned theorist), visited the Turkish armed forces and participated in exercises of Turkish units. Later, in 1939, Romanian military staff was informed by their Turkish counterparts about British and French plans in the Balkans.

General Weygand of France, appointed commander of the Eastern Front, insisted in lengthy conferences with Turkish military officials on their engagement in a different concept from the one desired by the Turkish General Staff, which wanted to maintain involvement only in the event.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

A study conducted by the Romanian General Staff on 11 April 1939 (Id, file no 1703, p. 27), regarding the recent events in Eastern Europe, warned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that after the fall of Czechoslovakia, Romania could no longer rely on the Military Convention between Romania and Yugoslavia from 10 January 1922. New consultations and a new bilateral convention between the two countries were deemed necessary. The study assessed the behaviour of allies in a certain situation and posed questions such as: *“To what extent can we still rely on Yugoslavia within the Balkan Alliance (...) Can we count on cooperation with Turkey against Bulgaria, even when it is threatened by Italy?”* (Id., pp. 28-29).

The Chief of the Romanian General Staff concluded with the following resolution in the study: *“The only sure part is the firm connection with Turkey”* (Ib.)

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