

## THE ROMANIAN-TURKISH CONVENTION (1934) – THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE BALKAN PACT –

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*In the context of the conclusion of the Balkan Pact (1934), it was necessary to sign a bilateral secret Romanian-Turkish convention. The convention was based on the strategic-military purpose of Romania, namely the isolation of possible Bulgarian attacks, material conditions, the quality of forces, their concentration, the direction of interventions, but also the solution of the strategic problem of maritime traffic. The discussions on the convention, led by the Romanian delegation with Turkey's, had as main purpose the interpretation of the secret articles, the exchange of information on Bulgaria and the proposals for solving possible problems.*

*Keywords: Balkan Pact; military strategy; Romania; Turkey; Secret Convention;*

### INTRODUCTION

The Balkan Pact, a regional alliance, represented a pillar in shaping and consolidating Romania's foreign policy in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the First World War, the Balkan Peninsula continued to represent an interest on the political-military scene of the great powers. For Romania, the security interests in the Southern European region were increased, a fact caused by the control exercised over the portion of the Black Sea coast and the mouths of the Danube. In the context of maintaining the security of Southeast Europe, on 9 February 1934, the foreign ministers of Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed the *Balkan Pact* in Athens. As part of the Agreement, a series of conventions were negotiated and signed in order to support the goals pursued by the Balkan Pact. The first conventions concluded separately between the powers were bilateral and aimed at the goal of the alliance, according to the annexed protocol of the Pact, which stipulated that, within six months, negotiations should begin for the materialization of the agreement in the military field.

Under the terms of the military regulations of the Balkan Pact, several conventions were drawn up to support and guide the Balkan Pact on the path of security and the fight against aggressive tendencies presented by the certain powers, in order to maintain peace. The main objective of discussions between the diplomatic bodies of the four allied states was to clarify the military aid and the material support that would be offered to guarantee neutrality in the event that one of the allies felt victim to an aggression. They got materialized on 15 May 1934 through a document which confirmed the position of each party in the case of an unprovoked aggression.

### “SECRET CONVENTION” – GUARANTOR OF THE EASTERN BORDER SECURITY

The Romanian Government also paid more attention to the possibility of concluding some military conventions to support them and secure their position (Oșca, Nicolescu, 1994, pp. 56-57). The “*secret convention*”, concluded between Romania and Turkey on 5 June 1934 and ratified in the same year, was necessary in terms of Romanian-Turkish military cooperation with the aim of bringing the Central

and Mediterranean states to a common opinion. For Romania, it represented ensuring the security of the eastern border, given that the relations between the Soviet Union and Turkey would partially solve the problem (Retegan, 1997, p. 138).

In essence, the Convention provided for mutual military aid in the event that one of the component parties became the victim of a military aggression (Ib., p. 139). At the same time, it established the material conditions, the quality of forces, their concentration, the date and direction of interventions, aeronautical and naval collaboration. The convention, signed on 5 June 1934, entered into force, in accordance with Article III, on the day of its signature, being ratified by the ratification protocol signed in Ankara on 30 October (National Military Archives of Romania, Microfilms 948 Collection, Section 3 Operations, file 1449, f. 552-624).

The convention contained three articles, two relating to mutual arguments and the final article with the conditions of ratification. The first article established that if one of the two contracting powers will be the object of aggression from a Balkan state, the other party will also be considered attacked.

The article concerned Bulgaria, as a Balkan state, and Greece was being excluded because it had no common border with Romania, although a Greek-Turkish conflict was possible.

The second article provided for the case of an attack by a non-Balkan state, namely the Soviet Union, against which the foreign minister of Turkey, Tevfik Rustu Aras, said that no military actions would be conducted. The Romanian-Turkish convention represented for Romania a great progress in terms of removing Bulgaria from the case, but with the need to supplement it with a similar Yugoslav-Turkish convention or with a special clause added to the current convention. The Romanian General Staff positively appreciated the conclusion of the convention because it offered a chance to solve the problems of strategic nature that Romania was facing. At the same time, it ensured the passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.

It was necessary for Turkey to assume the commitments of the secret convention and, in May 1935, it was decided to send the Romania delegation to Ankara, so that the general staffs of Romania and Turkey to discuss and prepare the details of the convention. The delegation consisted of Colonel Gheorghe Rozin, Head of the Operations Section and Major Constantin Lupescu, 2nd Section – The General Staff. They contacted the military attaché in Ankara, Lieutenant Colonel Gheorghe Ion, and decided that the duration of the trip and meeting should be over 5 days and it should be done in a discreet manner, without ceremonies (Ib.). On 3 June,

the Romanian delegation arrived in Ankara with great discretion, where the two delegates had a meeting with Marshal Fevzi, the Head of the Turkish General Staff. The activity lasted until 10 June, taking place in an atmosphere of sincerity and cordiality, with a technical discussion, as Eugen Filotti, the Romanian foreign minister, said in Ankara: a working atmosphere (Ib.).

During the discussion held by the representatives of the Romanian General Staff in Ankara, the issue of possible war situations was raised, taking into account the relations existing at that time between powers. The interest of the Romania-Turkish convention consisted in their joint action on Bulgaria, although it was a secondary enemy, it represented for Romania a form of domination of the freedom of action on the common front. There were three situations in which Bulgaria represented a serious threat: 1) the one in which neither Turkey nor Romania was threatened by another power; 2) the one in which one of the two countries was in another war, on another front, while the second country was neither attacked nor threatened; 3) in the case that both countries were already attacked and involved in another war with another country. A Romanian-Yugoslav concentric action against Bulgaria presented serious difficulties and multiple disadvantages because it required a considerable number of forces, without being able to ensure their superiority.

The working program of the delegations focused on the change of information of Bulgaria, which both sides considered the source of the possible conflict. Also, they discussed the importance of controlling the straits for the two sides, which in the case of development of their fortification process by Turkey would have meant a series of benefits, such as ensuring the free transit through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus of the Turkish fleet for the defence of Romanian communications and increasing, considerably and unconditionally, the forces with which the Turkish armed forces would intervene against Bulgaria (Ib., f. 625-626).

Regarding the discussion between the two parties and the conclusions, both the Turkish General Staff and the Romanian General Staff conceptions on co-operation were presented. The conception of the Turkish General Staff on cooperation was based on the domination of the straits, the ties with Asia and Russia, proposing that each state contribute 10 infantry divisions to be able to remove the Bulgarian armed forces from the cause. The question of the number of forces with which the allies should engage formed the object of discussion. In Romania's perspective, without diminishing the strategic importance of Bulgaria, the comparison between Bulgaria and Hungary from a strategic point of view established that Hungary was a much more dangerous enemy. At the same time, the Hungarian armed forces had a great

power of concentration with great possibilities of manoeuvre, while the Bulgarian armed forces were slowly and had little possibilities of manoeuvre. Hungary had a modern armament and at the same time it could receive armament from Austria, while Bulgaria was isolated from its allies (Ib.). As a result, the Romanian delegation requested that the Turkish forces should be concentrated to combat a Bulgarian aggression, so that the Romanian and Yugoslav armed forces could ensure freedom of action in the West. Turkey's point of view was not close to that of Romania, considering the action of the Romanian armed forces on the front east of the Danube as vital (Oșca, 2003, pp. 285-286).

The Romanian delegation tried to mediate the dispute of the political factor, although they did not lead to tension in the Romanian-Turkish military relations. The alliance with the Turks was appreciated, in a statement, by Colonel Rozin, as “solid, the government and the General Staff seem decided to a sincere collaboration” (National Military Archives of Romania, Microfilms 948 Collection, 948, Section 3 Operations, file 1449, f. 627). The friendship and conciliation treaties concluded between Romania and Turkey (1928-1933)<sup>1</sup> were also the basis for maintaining the negotiations, being equally interested in maintaining the general peace and fulfilling the strategic goal of each party. The decision was taken also at the end of the Yugoslav-Turkish consultation (August 1935). Yugoslavia, that was in a similar position as Romania, insisted that the discussions should be held in a tripartite military conference, which would take place in November 1935 in Belgrade.

## CONCLUSIONS

Romania was persistent regarding the strategic-military goal, presenting the objective of joining the Balkan Pact, but also the importance of bilateral agreements. The bilateral military collaboration proved to be essential in case of political-strategic failures, being an alternative in the multilateral alliance system. Romanian-Turkish relations can be positively characterized, over time both countries having a common goal, namely maintaining the integrity of the territories and maintaining state sovereignty.

The creation of “a block of small and medium sized countries” in order to form a system of alliances, posed a question of the strength they had in the face of attacks of the great powers, when it came to maintaining international security

<sup>1</sup> The amicable relations between the two states were materialized in the *Treaty of amity, non-aggression, arbitration and conciliation between Romania and Turkey* for future relations, in order to maintain peace in a common spirit of trust for the resolution of possible conflicts and differences, apud Gh. Zaharia, *Politica de apărare națională a României în contextul european interbelic, 1919-1939*, Editura Militară, București, 1981, p. 373.

and peace. Because of the current revisionist politics, the Turkish General Staff could be justified for the reserved attitude, especially in the conditions in which the main objective was to preserve the Straits. Bulgaria was a dangerous enemy for Turkey, being in the immediate vicinity of the straits, and Italy was second, becoming a real problem only after an alliance with Bulgaria.

In the context of the Balkan Pact, the Convention defined the position of the members and their role in materializing political and military collaboration. For the Balkan Alliance, the Turkish-Russian agreements could become an important tool in stopping revisionist expansion and at the same time guaranteeing the security of the Balkan borders. Based on the ideas concluded by Nicolae Titulescu, “*Romania and Turkey are meant to practice a sincere and active friendship*”, the convention supported the commercial, economic and military commons.

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