

# ROMANIA'S ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE SHORTNESS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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## Abstract

*Romania's contribution to the cause of the United Nations would be significant, leading to shortness of the war with about 200 days and giving them significant strategic, material and human advantage. Despite the fact that Romania's economic war effort was figured at the enormous amount of 1,200,000,000 dollars, foreign currency in 1938, this would assure the country an honorable place four in the hierarchy of the United Nations which led the fight against Germany the cobeligeranta status, truly deserved by the state would be refused because of political considerations known only by Great Powers. Among all the states in a situation somehow similar to that of Romania, none made such a huge military and economic effort in defeating the Nazi war machine.*

**Key words:** economic contribution, war effort, claims, convention truce

**JEL Classification:** B10, B30

Romania's participation in the Second World War was driven by political considerations and strategic needs arising from international political developments in the mid-twentieth century. The loss of an area of approximately 1 / 3 of the national territory and that of 6 million inhabitants, in favour of the three neighbors of Romania: the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria would constitute the main reason for Romania's participation to the military operations on both fronts, the east and west during the Second World War<sup>1</sup>.

It can not be said that Romania did not try to avoid at all costs participating to this war. From September 1939 until June 1941, the foreign policy of the state would be subordinated to the idea of nonbelligerent and neutrality<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the beginning of the war would get Romania involved, as a consequence of the sad events of the summer

of 1940<sup>3</sup>, so that, on 22 June 1941 Romanian troops would cross the Prut, as a command of general Ion Antonescu<sup>4</sup>.

The outbreak of the Second World War would get the Romanian army totally by surprise in regard to the requirements of modern war. Romanian military staff, despite its number, lacked in the war modern technique and equipment required by such a conflagration<sup>5</sup>.

"The wall of fire and steel", provided by the country's leaders to the people and the public opinion, presented as a difficult obstacle in the way of invaders, would soon prove to beas the big bluff propaganda of the Charles II royalist authority. In a few weeks, Romania's borders would collapse under the action of the most important

<sup>1</sup> Aurică Simion, Dictatul de al Viena, Editura Albatros, București 1996, passim.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Constantin: România, Marile Puteri și problema Basarabiei, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1995, p 27-41

<sup>3</sup> Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban, Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, Istoria României, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1999, p 449-451.

<sup>4</sup> Flotin Constantiniu, Ilie Schipor, Trecerea Nistrului 1941, Editura Albatros, București 1995, p 163-170.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandru Duțu, Florica Dobre, Leonida Loghin, Armata română în cel de al doilea război mondial 1941-1945, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1999, p 213-214.

<sup>5</sup> G-ral lt (r) ing Tiberiu Urdăreanu, Factorul tehnic în războaiele României Moderne, Editura Militară, București, 1994, p 153-173; 183-258.

political and military forces of the moment, Germany and the USSR and the rule of Charles II would not be able to survive this collapse.

The new leader of the state, Ion Antonescu, began immediately the reconstruction of the army, being aware of the fact that the conduct of the international political events would have given Romanians the chance to rebuild again and borders, bringing in frontiers a single state on all those who were temporarily under foreign domination. Antonescu would engage with the Axis powers in the war against the Soviet Union, firmly convinced of military and political success that they will gain. Campaign military army on the Eastern Front was the main objective of the issue of Basarabia and Northern Bucovina, territories that had been broken body of the country by the Soviet Union following the ultimatum notes in June 1940. Is not less true that Ion Antonescu and hope in a re-evaluation of Romania's position in Germany and the return of Transylvania, which Hungary will send her troops on the Eastern Front, declaring war, the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup>.

Due the alliance with Germany, the two provinces would be issued during the month of July with human sacrifices and great political controversy held on the sidelines of the continuation or not of anti-war beyond the river will burst with fury among opposition political "historical parties and the cabinet of Marshal Ion Antonescu"<sup>7</sup>. Obviously, the head of state will win the question and soldiers Romanian big will fight in Russia, making their special courage evidence, along with the German allies, not once will thank you for the support and sacrifices made<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Florin Constantiniu, P.C.R., Pătrășcanu și Transilvania (1945-1946), Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2001, p 51. "Singurul motiv pentru care am trimis armata împotriva rușilor au fost românii", afirma premierul Ungariei Miklós Kállay, între anii 1942-1944.

<sup>7</sup> Valeriu-Florin Dobrinescu, Ion Constantin, Basarabia în anii celui de al doilea război mondial, Institutul European, Iași, 1995, p216.221.

<sup>8</sup> Constantin Kirișescu, România în al doilea război mondial, Editua Univers Enciclopedic, București 1995, p 187-192.

The loss of the three major battles supported by the Romanian troops alongside Germany at Stalingrad in Crimea and on the front from Iasi - Moldavia - Chisinau, would have the proportions of military disaster, tracing the unfortunate course and end of the military campaign on the Eastern front, which took three years and two months (June 22 1941-23 August 1944). The army's defeat on the front of Moldavia during the Soviet offensive Iasi-Kishinev, in conjunction with the coup d'état and arrest of Marshal and his closest collaborators, would pave Romania's exit from the alliance with Germany, against a country which, with all the blame to have deprived us of an important part of national territory, became a "companion in arms of our traditional allies.

In the new context, the Romanian authorities from Bucharest would succeed in coping with the German's anger, the Romanian troops releasing the single largest part of the national territory, including the capital, and covering the conduct and submission of the Soviet army. Regarding the significance and importance of the act from Aug. 23 along the time, it would change substantially, according to political developments. However, the implementation of the volta-face by the Romanian troops would not be exempted from unpleasant events, spent specifically on the front of Moldavia. As soon as the army units on the front received the order to stop the fire against the Soviet army and withdraw immediately South the fortified line Focsani-Nămoloasa-Braila, unit commanders would obey the order M.St. M., which expressed the sovereign will and would cease hostilities against the Red Army, trying to save what had left from the Romanian army, after breaking the front by the Soviets.

Soviet Commands would not take into account this new situation, ordering to the fronts II and III of Ukraine troops to continue the offensive against the enemy, the result being the capture of a significant number of Romanian soldiers who had stopped fighting and them being made prisoners of war, situation which would be extended curiously, until September 12, and,

sporadically, even after that date. This would be also the case of the fleet crews from the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, bound to cease fire, following the order received from the Romanian authorities, after being forced to land on board the ship and placed in Soviet camps. In consequence, most of the Romanian commercial fleet and, of course, the entire fleet of war would be lost, requisitioned by the Soviets<sup>9</sup>.

Cases where took place the capture of Romanian soldiers by the Soviet troops would continue even after signing the Armistice on September 12, and the curiously, in regions where military operations had not been unfolded between the Romanian-Soviet forces, such as Wallachia. All this took place while the army's soldiers were forced to face and attack the German troops, who received Fuhrer's order to restore the situation in Romania, which threatened to crash the entire German military in the Balkans.

On 23 August 1944 it is ended the Romanian military campaign, but not without heavy losses in terms of the number of people who had disappeared in fighting, not to mention the material losses suffered during the bombardments. Romania was Germany's most important ally on the Eastern Front, possessing in 1942 a number of 26 Romanian divisions, in comparison to the eight Italian ones, 12 Hungarian and a fluctuating number of Finnish military. As a result of this impressive military number, from those 46 allied military units taken by the Germans on the Eastern front, more than half were formed by the Romanians, fact which explains the huge human losses. An information note to the Statistical Service of the army in October 1945, relating to the human losses during the campaign in East evaluated the figure 309,533 troops, mentioning that in this figure included both those who were killed and those taken prisoners on the battlefield, the Romanian General Staff, not having a clear situation about: deceased and prisoners. Important enough would the economic costs be of war with Germany, on August 23 in 1944 when finding the

Romanian economy controlled by the German capital, German claims being calculated at a value of about 1.5 billion German marks<sup>10</sup>. Mobilizing an important military contingent would considerably weaken the capacities of Romanian industrial production forced to maintain the same levels of production with increased efforts. Moreover, the transition of the economy on war footing would create an important financial channel and economic resources which, normally, used to be spent in other purposes, the special costs requiring the maintenance of the Romanian troops from the front. The allied bombardments, carried out particularly on the main economic centers would cause considerable losses to the Romanian economy specially to the oil industry, simultaneously being registered considerable human losses. Among the indirect deficits caused to Romania's economy would be listed, especially, non-equivalent exchange of currencies between the two countries, increasing the German mark artificially in comparison to the Romanian leu, causing an unjustified increase of the imported products price in Germany in comparison with the Romanian goods exported, and also an increased purchasing power of the German soldiers, which emptied the Romanian market of certain products, by artificially boosting the price.

The maintenance of the German troops on Romanian territory, the system of payments, the deductions arising from the activities of transport and communications would be other "hot spots" of the collaboration with the Third Reich in the anti Soviet war. While German military units and firms of import-export were making their supplies with main products at low price goods imported from Germany were totally unrepresentative for the needs of the Romanian market, the prices being much steep. Romania's complex situation on the international plane made it extremely vulnerable to the claims of its German ally, who was aware of the lack of any side effect from such a economic collaboration with the

<sup>9</sup> Arh M.Ap.N., fond 948, dosar 10, 45

<sup>10</sup> N.N.Constantinescu, *Istoria Economiei Naționale*, Editura Economică, București, 2000, vol II, p 60

Romanians. All these considerations, which cast a shadow on the Romanian-German cooperation, resulted from the fact that, once having accepted the participation in the military campaign from the east, the Romanian authorities had overlooked the "little details of the collaboration," although the legal situation of the Romanian state was similar to that of an independent and sovereign state which was fighting against a common enemy. The arms comradeship between the soldiers of the two armies did not result from the terms of a treaty of military or political alliance, Romania participating in the war on its own initiative, in order to liberate Basarabia and Bucovina.

The events of Aug. 23 would radically change the political conditions of Romania, being forced to fight for the same cause, along with its former enemies and against its former allies. This turning of Romania in running the war, besides the considerable advantages brought to the U.S. cause, would be made with enormous costs, the Romanian authorities and the army staff "confronting with the two enemies", fact which cost Romania a large number of taken prisoners by the Soviet troops.

Despite these significant losses of men, material and war technique, Romania would be able to align on 23 August, thanks to a policy of cautious carried by the Romanian General Staff, 5 operational divisions, plus 29 other divisions, made up mostly of recruits and other regular elements billeted to the sedentary services of the troops on the battlefield. The Romanian military units from the front area, being disruptive and largely destroyed as a consequence of the Soviet offensive, the military campaign against the Nazi Germany would be made with these divisions of recruits, maintained constantly in the country by the General Staff.

The Armistice Convention signed between Romania and the United Nations on 12 September 1944 would create the general frame for the unfolding of Romania's military campaign against Germany and its satellites. The implementation of its clauses was the responsibility of an allied Committee (Soviet

of Control, which according to agreements of the Great Three, Romania would be the Soviet Union concern. The brutal interference of the Control committee would decisively affect the internal political events, destroying the state budget by collecting a massive supply, raised in the Convention truce.

Having decided to urgently improve the Romanian-Soviet relations and the issue of Transylvania, the Romanian authorities would send to the front a larger number of military units than the 12 divisions set in the armistice agreement, passing to the fulfilling of the economic tasks of the convention. In regard of the number of Romanian soldiers engaged in the military operations against the German troops, these were about 538,536 soldiers, from a total of 1,100,000 ones mobilized and put at the disposal of the United Nations. Romanian armies covered from 23 August 1944 and 12 May 1945 about 1700 km in an average of 6 km per day, forced 12 water courses, 20 mountain massifs, conquered 3831 localities of which 53 major cities. All these weapons were made with the sacrifice of 169,822 dead, wounded and missing soldiers. Romania's contribution to the cause of the United Nations would be significant, leading to shortness of the war with about 200 days and giving them significant strategic, material and human advantage.

Despite the fact that Romania's economic war effort was figured at the enormous amount of 1,200,000,000 dollars, foreign currency in 1938, this would assure the country an honorable place four in the hierarchy of the United Nations which led the fight against Germany the *cobeligeranta* status, truly deserved by the state would be refused because of political considerations known only by Great Powers. Among all the states in a situation somehow similar to that of Romania, none made such a huge military and economic effort in defeating the Nazi war machine.

Although fluctuating due to signing of the military Romanian-Soviet protocol from October 26, the Romanian military staff remained involved on the theatre of operations, would be situated permanently

over the limits imposed by the Convention truce. Moreover, Romania's contribution was absolute, the population and the authorities making efforts to support the military campaign of the Romanian troops. No military organizations or other type of associations or military units did continued fighting after the return of UN weapons against Germany on 23 August. For example, Italy contributed with 100,000 partisans due to the United Nations, while 5 infantry divisions and 2 escadroane aviation would continue the struggle in Northern Italy against Germany. In the case of Hungary there were 10 divisions, Bulgaria - a division pro-fascist, Yugoslavia - 3 divisions, 9 brigades plus a division of the guard and a cavalry. In France the number of those who continued fighting against the Allies would be up to a division and in Poland at around of 20-25.000 troops. The memorandum submitted by Romania at the Peace Conference in Paris, recalled, beside the war and military effort made our country, the amount of the obligations fulfilled up to 1 July 1945, presented in article no. 3 of the Convention according to which it was amounted the sum of 77 billion, foreign currency in 1938.

The so long desired and hailed defeat of the Nazi Germany by the majority of the peoples of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, will not be an occasion of true joy, because of the alternative communist system, brutally imposed by the Soviet model, would be repudiated in most of the eastern societies, totally confused by the war and the "Red Army liberation." Hundred thousands of people were going to fully feel the "benefits of the Soviet liberation and the consequence their political transformation systems into popular regimes of Soviet inspiration"<sup>11</sup>.

Imposing through violence a new "popular type of democracy" in the states in the from the Central and South-Eastern Europe would contribute to stagnation of their economy, the costs for recovery being paid by all of us even today, after 50 years since the events occurred. No one speaks

about the moral discomfort, personal dissatisfaction or fear that all these people from those countries had to cope with, specially the prisoners of war. They passed from the status of real heroes on the battlefield to that of traders, who could not adjust to the new ideology of the communist regime, being blamed for having fought against the Soviet Union and upset the "Big brother" from East, the European states which would face a social and economic evolution in the communist fashion after the Second World War.

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Fischer Galați, *Europa de Est și Războiul Rece*, Institutul European, Iași, 1996, p 24.

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