

WITHIN THE AXIS: TOWARD A NEW LITTLE ENTENTE, 1941-1943

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Rezumat. După aplicarea celui de al doilea arbitraj de la Viena (30 august 1940) și proclamarea independenței statului croat, în 1941, între București, Bratislava și Zagreb au început să apară proiecte de colaborare diplomatică, politică, economică, militară și culturală, unele dintre ele puse în practică. Deși acțiunile celor trei state vizau, îndeosebi, consolidarea defensivei față de Ungaria și politicile ei regionale, niciunul dintre ele nu a pus în discuție apartenența la Axă sau alianța strategică cu Germania. Colaborarea tripartită româno-croato-slovacă a nemulțumit profund Ungaria care, la Roma și Berlin, a acuzat eforturile de recreare a Micii Înțelegeri interbelice. Afirmații categorice în acest sens, dar și profund antimaghiare, se regăsesc și în discursurile lui Mihai Antonescu și Ante Pavelici. Germania a tolerat activitățile comune ale celor trei state atâta vreme cât a obținut susținerea necondiționată a acestora pentru războiul din Răsărit, împotriva U.R.S.S. După 1943, odată cu înfrângerea de la Stalingrad dar, mai ales, după prăbușirea regimului fascist italian, colaborarea tripartită a început să slăbească, sfârșindu-se în mod oficial la 23 august 1944. Textul de față relevă eforturile liderilor de stat și al diplomaților din România, Croația și Slovacia pentru consolidarea unui punct comun de vedere în fața Germaniei, dar și a Ungariei, și pentru conturarea unei colaborări ce putea să conducă la încheierea unei alianțe politice și militare în conjunctura geopolitică regională controlată de la Berlin.

Abstract. After applying the second Vienna Award (August 30, 1940) and the Croatian state independence in 1941, from Bucharest, Bratislava and Zagreb began to appear collaborative projects diplomatic, political, economic, military and cultural, some of them implemented. Although the actions of those three states aimed, in particular, strengthening defenses against Hungary and its regional policies, none of them questioned the membership of the Axis or Germany. The tripartite collaboration strategic alliance with Romanian-Croatian-Hungarian Slovak deeply unhappy at Rome and Berlin, has accused the Little Entente recreation efforts wars. Categorical statements to that effect, but also profoundly anti-Hungarian, is found in the speeches of Mihai Antonescu and Ante Pavelici. Germany's joint tolerated so long as the three states obtained their unconditional support for the war in the East, against URSS. After 1943 with the defeat at Stalingrad, but especially after the collapse of the Italian fascist regime, began to tripartite cooperation weaken, formally ending 23 August 1944. The present work reveals the state leaders and diplomats from Romania, Croatia and Slovakia to strengthen a common point of view in front of Germany and Hungary, and to outline a collaboration that could lead to political and military alliance clot in controlled regional geopolitical situation in Berlin.

Keywords: Second War, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Little Entente, Axis, Germany, Mihai Antonescu, Ante Pavelici, Tiso

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1. Exploring the newborn Little Entente. Relationships with Hungary, 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 millenaria Kingdom.² In very short time, on April 4, 1939, at highest expression of German foreign policy aims, Hungary and Slovakia officially signed a Peace Treaty, which enforced the *status-quo ante bellum*.

The surrender of the Slovaks, together with Hungarian threats against the so-remained little neighbour, influenced in the strong sense the coordinates of Bratislava foreign policy and the attitude of President Josef Tiso, the most significant points submitting in search of alliances and friendships - in political sense - with which the modest territorial state can demand its claims and required for preserving its own security.

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.

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.

³ See: Ioan Chiper, *Obiective, mijloace și metode ale diplomației române în anul 1941*, in "Revista Istorică", 3-4, 1991; Florin Anghel, *O alternativă de colaborare în interiorul Axei. Spre o nouă Mică Înțelegere, 1941-1944*, in "Revista Istorică", 3-4, 1996, p. 233-257; Gheorghe Zbucnea, *Problema maghiară în relațiile bilaterale: tentativa de refacere a Micii Înțelegeri și de stabilire a unei granițe comune*, in Constantin Hlihor editor, "Structuri politice in secolul XX", București, 2000, p. 384-411.

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. Hungary launched, immediately after Zagreb Independence Act, a rapid military action in Vojvodina and Croat oil fields region Medjmurie, with 97% Croats in ethnic sense. 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 1941-1943.³

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: at the beginning of September, Ivan Milecz became Slovakia's plenipotentiary Minister in Bucharest and, at the same time, D. Hiott became the first Romanian Minister in Bratislava, on September 30, 1939.⁴ The increasing geopolitical Marshal Antonescu's influence in South-Eastern Europe requested a very fast diplomatic recognition between Romania and Croatia: May 6, 1941⁵, 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).⁶ 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*".⁷

⁴ Milică Moldoveanu, *Statul independent slovac*, in Viorica Moisuc editor, "Regimurile fasciste și totalitare din Europa", III, București, 1983, p. 25.

⁵ On April 5, 1941 just before the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia, Ante Pavelić read a speech at a Italian radio station for be broadcasting in Croatia. "*Rise, the moment of our liberation has come, arise to cleanse our homeland from enemies and to establish our freedom in our own house, in a sovereign and Independent State of Croatia, in which all Croatian lands will be united. Our victory is assured*", said Pavelić. See <http://www.pavelicpapers.com/documents>

⁶ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relații germano-române, 1938-1944*, București, 1994, p. 163 and 361.

⁷ On April 16, 1941 Ante Pavelić himself proclaimed as Head of State and named his closest advisors as State Ministers: Andrija Artuković, as Minister for Internal Affairs, Mile Budak, as Minister for Religion and Education, Marshal Slavko Kvaternik, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Minister for Home Army. See: <http://pavelicpapers.com/documents>

⁸ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, București, (quoting after AMAE), fond 71/1920-1944 Croația, vol. 1, p.60. See also Ioan Chiper, *op. cit.*, p.7.

⁹ Ibidem.

2. Projecting new Little Entente: diplomacy and focusing policies

One of most significant documents, from Regent Mikos Horthy's staff, on November 1941, concluded Hungarian main diplomatic strategy into the Balkans. Romanian, Slovak and Croatian common interests and policies both imposed a real challenge in Budapest and generated, last but not least, a diplomatic project of new Little Entente, an alliance within the Axis. Hungarian quoted document expressed Germany's willing to get Hungary as a "supervisor" of the whole Balkans because, in Horthy interpretation, Danubian kingdom represented "the sole state which maintains order and trusting in the all European South-East".⁸ Also, the Regent argued total Hungarian control for railways links, from Budapest to Fiume, via Zagreb and from Belgrade to Salonic, via Niš. In the meantime, Budapest document answered it doesn't exist any ethnical and historical Romanian reasons for claiming Serbian Banat (in Vojvodina), raised from former Yugoslav Kingdom to Hungary because its "appartenence at historical heritage of the Millenaire Kingdom of St. Steven".⁹

Banat territorial controverse threatened Romanian-Hungarian relations. As exemple, a confidential report of the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mihai Antonescu, from June 14, 1941 mailed to Romanian Minister in Zagreb, underlined that, for Romania, "one of the main Balkans objectives must be the establishment of a common Romanian-Croatian frontier. That means the gaining of Serbian Banat to us and getting the solidarity with Zagreb against Hungarians."¹⁰ In Zagreb, Marshal Slavko Kvaternik, Commander-in-Chief of Croatian Army, and Mladen Lorković, Minister for Foreign Affairs, both sustained the Croatian necessities to gain the trust in Rome and Berlin in favour to a kind of regional security formula and, as well as it gets, to transfer Serbian Banat to Romania.¹¹

Poglavnik Ante Pavelić, in one of his confidential meeting with the Romanian Minister, Dimitrie Buzdugan, on November 4, 1941 underlined: "the interests of the both our countries are the same and we have a common enemy. Our hate against it (Hungary) is older even than your hate".¹²

Closest mistrust in Hungarian regional leadership and threats toward the powerful Nazi Germany, which insisted in support Serbian autonomist government from Belgrade, led by General Milan Nedić, induced both in a official propose towards Marshal Ion Antonescu. Nedić invited to a dynastic union between Romania and Serbia, with Mihai I (1940-1947) as king. In the same, Serbian General noticed that a Romanian military occupation and administration in Serbia requested a unanime support in Belgrade.¹³

Immediately after anti Soviet war debut, in the front to search a Hungarian military intervention in Transylvania and, in the meantime, to reduced Budapest propaganda,¹⁴ which claimed another territorial compensations in Serbia in order

for Hungarians actions in the Eastern front war, Romanian government started a very expensive -in a diplomatic sense- strategy for strengthen relationships with both Croatia and Slovakia. On July 17, 1941 Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mihai Antonescu, insisted to its Legations in Bratislava and Zagreb that: "from this moment, concluding Croatia and Slovakia, we are starting a strong and direct strategy because of the new challenges in South Eastern Europe".¹⁵ Most radical comparing his homologue,¹⁶ Mladen Lorković totally followed Romanian proposal: Croatian Minister for Foreign Affairs declined all "Hungarian duplicity policies" and firmly condemned "wildest repression toward non Hungarian ethnical minorities".¹⁷ On August 25, 1941 Ante Pavelić himself was in concordance with the quoted diplomats: *Poglavnik* offered to Hungarian Minister in Zagreb an opened advertisement and pleased to notice that the three-state alliance within the Axis it sprang from the parte of Hungary's unfriendly attitude: "Yes -it recognised Pavelić to the Hungarian- it exist a new Little Entente but not creting by us, Croatia, Slovakia and Romania. You, the Hungarians, aimed and founded it, with your attitudes and policies towards us".¹⁸ On the same time, also in summer of 1941, Slovak Minister in Bucharest, Ivan Milecz, claimed to Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mihai Antonescu, a "common action for a common frontier", against Hungarian regained territories.¹⁹ Supporting the named policy, Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vojtech Tuka, argued that Romania, excepting Germany, became the sole allies in which Slovakia must trust in order to get an efficient and essential aid.²⁰

¹⁰ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol. 512, p.143.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 146. Also, Eugene Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period, 1919-1941*, New York, 1993, p. 299-310.

¹² AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol. 512, p.174.

¹³ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 Iugoslavia, vol. 30, p.212.

¹⁴ Cătălin Calafeteanu, *Misiunile contelui Banffy Miklos în România (1943)*, in Iulian Oncescu, Silviu Miloiu editors, "Istoria în căutarea unui nou mesaj", Târgoviște, 2005, p. 261-283.

¹⁵ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol.6, p.297.

¹⁶ On August 14, 1941 was launched in Zagreb one of the most manic decrees to emerge in the early days of the Independent State of Croatia, *Legal Decree on the Croatian language, its purity and spelling*, initiated by Ante Pavelić and Mile Budak, Minister for Education. "The Croatian language is the public welfare of the Croatian people, and therefore nobody should distort or deform it" (art.2); "It is forbidden to give non-Croatian names and identifiers to shops, companies, associations or any kind of institutions"(art.3). See at <http://www.pavelicpapers.com>

¹⁷ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol.6, p.274.

¹⁸ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol. 512, p.289.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p.7.

²⁰ Ibidem, p.132.

²¹ Ibidem, p.46.

From Berlin, any kind of such separate projects of alliance within the Axis were understood with critical tone until the summer of 1942. Generously preoccupied just by the war against Soviet Union -in which had unconditionally support of Romania- Germany was not interested in preservation or in making of a new diplomatic crisis. Nazi officials -as Goebbels, in January 1942- closely defined that the Reich had no opposition at a Romanian-Croatian-Slovak military collaboration.²¹ Some economic and geopolitical remarks can be made: Germany considerably was able to follow a Romanian defining policy towards the new Little Entente because three main aspects. Both military and politically, Romania regained, in July 1941, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and settled administration in most important neighbouring territories such as Odessa, Transnistria and Russian Black Sea coast. And, last but not least, Romania prevailed a lot of oil and fuel for Germans *Reichswehr* and economy.

Despite the attitude toward Romanians, Berlin officials didn't use any diplomatic pressure to gain the control. From 1942, Slovakia from its part cannot find resources to rebuilt the cooperation with Romania and Croatia. Bratislava officials proposed just bilateral excellent partnerships with the both, in order it be an evidence that from summer-autumn 1942 Berlin should not accept a tripartite political and militar alliance. In this sense, in 1942-1943 Romania and Slovakia has signed a lot of diplomatic, economic and cultural agreements.²² Meantime and secretly, Slovak Minister for Defense, General Ferdinand Čataloš, together with Romanian military attaché in Bratislava expressed their fully intention to manage an army attack project against Hungary for obtaining a strong and rapid counteroffensive from Budapest. Slovak and Romanian armies projected a local "*blitzkrieg*" action against Hungarians which it must be stopped just after the entire military occupation of Budapest.²³

Meanwhile, relationships between Romania and Croatia followed strictly geopolitical interests, into the Danube region and, also, in the Balkans. There were signed bilateral commercial treaties in August 1941²⁴ and December 1942²⁵: Romania promised to export 100,000 t oil per year, 25,000 t gas and oil derivatives per year, animals, grains and fruits. From Croatia it mentioned imports of aluminium and electric machines. Also with Romanian main materials economic reviriment of Croatian economy never happened: a very confidential report of Romanian Minister in Zagreb to its superiors revealed that Croatian emergent city prepared to became the most expensive capital from Europe.²⁶

A very predictable tripartite military alliance pushed Budapest into defensive: from the summer of 1942, Hungary urged Germany and Italy officials to eliminate all possibilities to reborn Little Entente within the Axis. Since the first half of 1942, Hungarians gradually started to move against the new Little Entente and, in this way, they launched a propaganda in the most important Axis capitals. On December 15, 1942 Romanian military attaché in Bratislava, Colonel C.

Ștefănescu, received rumours about Zagreb government decision to close up, until the end of 1942, Croatian military attachés offices in Bucharest and Bratislava.²⁷ In Romania, Marshal Ion Antonescu distinctively had a very irritating attitude about Zagreb renegation and remarked that it must be perceived just as Italian and German decision, at Hungarian suggestion. Having been raised into a continuous state of war with Hungary, Croatian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mladen Lorković, insisted toward Ion Antonescu, on December 23, 1942 that Zagreb government cannot oppose the no-named „pushes” and never doesn't want unilaterally eliminate military attaché office in Bucharest. „Romania became a respectable military power in the new Europe”²⁸, declared Lorković, and because of this Croatia must sustain regional politics of Bucharest. Also, the Minister knew and informed Bucharest just that „Italy did not agree a reborn Little Entente and even did not accept an alliance against Hungary”.²⁹

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*”.³⁰

²² Ibidem, p.142. *Cultural Convention*, February 1943; *Commercial Treaty*, April 14, 1942; *Diplomatic Confidential Protocol*, April 14, 1942.

²³ Paper of Pavol Šimunič, *Slovakia between 1939-1944*, at National History Museum of Bucharest, May 9, 1995. See also Florin Anghel, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

²⁴ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol.512, p.334. *Commercial Treaty between Croatia and Romania*, Zagreb, August 7, 1941.

²⁵ Ibidem, p.546.

²⁶ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol. 1, p. 328-332. In July 1942 a very high level salary, as Romanian Minister in Zagreb one, of 83,000 kuna monthly, was not enough for domestic, common life. A very ordinary room, in a also ordinary hotel, as “*Esplanada*” in Zagreb, costed 310 kuna daily, more expensive like the very luxurious “*Athénée Palace*” in Bucharest or “*Ritz*” in Budapest. A kilo of white wheat was 120 kuna, 1 kilo of animal fats- 250 kuna, 1 kilo of sugar- 160 kuna, 1 kilo of potatoes- 45 kuna (everything at so-called black market).

²⁷ Ibidem, vol.6, p.522.

²⁸ Ibidem, p.428.

²⁹ Idem, vol. 7, p.24.

³⁰ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol.512, p.193.

³¹ Liviu Rebreanu, *Note de drum (1942-1943)*, in Idem, *Opere*, vol. 18, edited by Niculae Cheran, București, 1998, p. 60-66).

³² Ibidem, p.68.

³³ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol.7, p.46.

³⁴ Ibidem, p.68.

Members and also official partners of Marshal Antonescu regime officially visited Croatia and Slovakia in 1942-1943. Liviu Rebreanu, manager of National Theatre in Bucharest and member of Romanian Academy, wrote very interesting memories about *Ustaša* Croatia.³¹ In March 1942, at Zagreb, Rebreanu noticed in not favourable manner about a dishonourable city because the lacks in all ordinary domains (food, electricity, oil, transport), camouflage and domestic cartels. Despite these, he had the feeling of finding an very friendly image of his country in media and elites milieus. Ante Pavelić, Mladen Lorković and Marshal Slavko Kvaternik made closely remarks about Romania and its policies. *Poglavnik* confessed to Rebreanu, in a unusual long meeting, that in Croatia „Romania had all the sympathies” because of its policies in South Eastern Europe and against bolshevism.³² Minister for Propaganda, Nichifor Crainic, spent some time in Zagreb at the beginning of June 1943³³ pursued- one in all- the prepare of the *Cultural Agreement*, signed in Bucharest on July 7, 1943.³⁴ According to this official bilateral document- sprang from October 1942 Romanian Minister for National Culture project- Croatians from Romania can freely used their language in Croatian primary schools and also in Catholic churches from Caraşova, Nemet, Iabalcea, Clocotici, Lupac, Votnic, Ratnic (in Caraş county), Checea and Recaş (in Timiş-Torontal county). Croat professors demanded to be paid by the Romanian authorities.³⁵ Between 1941-1943 Romanian propaganda towards Slovakia and Croatia was quite important comparing other Axis capitals (Berlin³⁶, Roma, Sofia, Budapest, Vichy). Radio Zagreb and Radio Bratislava managed, each other, a „*Romanian Hour*” program and media from the two capitals insisted in promotion of Romanians cultural and political values. At University of Bratislava, inside Romanian Language and Literature Department, exceptional cultural events were focused, means most important figures from Bucharest elites: musician George Georgescu and his National Philharmonic Orchestra (in October 1941), pianist Dinu Lipatti, writer Liviu Rebreanu, historians Victor Papacostea and Ioan Lupaş.³⁷ At the same time, in Zagreb was printed a monumental corpus titled *Hrvatska Enciklopedija* (in 1941-1943), with large and generous excerpts about Romania and its elites.³⁸

On the level of „*beaux gêtes*” on the front of diplomatic and political milieus, Bucharest and Zagreb regimes supported each other a lot of symbolic events, induced solidarity and common interests. Just two weeks after the opening of Romanian Legation in Zagreb, *Poglavnik* Ante Pavelić received the high Order *Carol I*³⁹ and, in August 25, 1943, Ion Antonescu the Order „*Crown of King Zvonimir*”.⁴⁰ Same Croat title was offered also to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mihai Antonescu, on January 26, 1943.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol. 485, p.256.

³⁶ For Romania propaganda in Berlin in 1941-1944 see Horia Stanca, *Fragmentarium berlinez (1942-1945)*, Bucureşti, 2000; Dumitru Cristian Amzăr, *Jurnal berlinez, 1938-1980*, Bucureşti, 2005; Mioara Anton, *Propagandă și război, 1941- 1944*, Bucureşti, 2006.

³⁷ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol.512, p.120. Also, Florin Anghel, *Poloni și slovaci în Bucovina, 1939-1944. Manipularea identității etnice în timpul crizelor politice*, in “*Revista Istorică*”, 3-4, 2003, p.90.

³⁸ *Hrvatska Enciklopedija*, Zagreb, 1941, I, p. 174, 198, 491; Zagreb, 1941, II, p. 52, 53, 131, 233, 340, 447-449, 771; Zagreb, 1941, III, p. 31, 235, 245, 497-498, 598, 623-624.

³⁹ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 România, vol. 512, p.221.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p.230.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p.241.

3. Failure's sources of the new Little Entente: owner interests and divergent geopolitical policies

Rapprochement between the three capitals -Bucharest, Zagreb and Bratislava- and not only, together with excellent bilateral relations in 1941-1943 concluded that a new Little Entente was in making-up projects. Doctrinal dimension of the emergent alliance within the greater one- Axis- was clearly statuated by Mihai Antonescu, on October 14, 1941 in a long confidential meeting with the Minister of Croatia in Bucharest. „*Relationships between Romania and Croatia- insisted M.Antonescu- as relationships between Romania and Slovakia had nothing to do with the old regional solidarity system called Inter War Little Entente and it means no hostility toward Hungary. There is more than this.(...) The so-called Holly Crown of St. Stephen is just a doctrinal and ideological expression that must cover a biological tendency of a warrior mentality. So, the alliance between Romania, Croatia and Slovakia is something natural, sprang from geographical community of interests and from defensive instincts.*”⁴²

The Little Entente within the Axis, as it was concluded in the three capitals, cannot have an offensive project: there were no common frontiers between the three partners. The main aim of the alliance was to regain all that Hungary seized in 1939-1941. After the Rome *coup d'état* against Mussolini, Croatia in fact became a real German protectorate, after the Slovakia one. Because of the disagreement with this political way in Zagreb, Marshal Ion Antonescu decided, on October 1943, to back Minister Dimitrie Buzdugan from his Legation. Later Romanian Minister in *Ustaša* Croatia, M. Mitilineu, arrived just in March 1944.

⁴² Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol.7, p.495- 496. Integral document was published by Gheorghe Zbucnea, *op. cit.*, p.395-396.

⁴³ AMAE, fond 71/1920-1944 Croatia, vol. 2, p.292-293.

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, Zagreb and Bratislava.

Since the end of 1943 it showed a clearly and speedily rapprochement between Croatia and Bulgaria, that really seized any efforts in focusing Little Entente project. Also, in Bratislava, at the end of 1943 and first half of 1944, intentions of self-governement of Slovak authorities were disappeared more and more. Just in June 1944, at a fastuouse ceremonies dedicated in Zagreb to Bulgarian Tsar Simeon II (1943-1946), *Poglavnik* Ante Pavelić and Minister of Bulgaria concluded that both countries were inspirated just for „identical interests on the Balkans”⁴³ and advised together a possible „union of the southern Slavs”.⁴⁴ Also, Yugoslav king Petr II Karageorgević demanded, soon on April 1943, a *Balkan Federation* which must included „even countries which are now within the Axis, such as Bulgaria and Croatia”.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, fond 71/1920-1944 Iugoslavia, vol. 17, p.288.