

# **T**he issue of territorial integrity of the Romanian State in the preliminaries to the Act of august 23rd, 1944

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## **Abstract**

Romania's exit in an Honorable way from the campaign against the Soviet Union and, implicitly, from the war against the United Nations, it has preoccupied both Marshal Ion Antonescu, and opposition grouped around the young King Michael. For this purpose diplomatic negotiations have been started on several channels, the most important being at Cairo and Stockholm. The central problem for the Romanians was to ensure that at the planned peace conference the problem of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina will find a favorable resolution. Our study aims the manner in which the issue of territorial integrity of the Romanian State was put in these negotiations who prepared the act of august 23, 1944.

**Key words:** Negotiations, Besarabia, Bukovina, Transsylvania, armistice, august 23rd, United Nations.

Entered in the Second World War on June 22nd, 1941 with the goal of recovering Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina abducted by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940, shortly Romania will be in a tricky position to fight against traditional allies Great Britain and the United States. Things were going to further complications after the American and British leaders, meeting at the Conference of Casablanca, will announce via press release of January 24, 1943 that for the German satellites will not apply anything else that the principle of unconditional surrender (<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1943/430124a.html>).

Anglo-American decision was also welcomed by the Soviet Union, as evidenced by the exchange of diplomatic notes between Moscow and London on June 7 and July 19, 1943 (Volokitina, 2015: 59-60). As the situation on the Eastern Front evolve increasingly clear to the Soviet Union side, Marshal Ion Antonescu and also the opposition led by Iuliu Maniu - which was also endorsed by King Michael - understood more clearly that it is time for the start of secret talks with the Allies, the main purpose being to get the best guarantee for Romania's postwar status. The most important objective for the Bucharest was linked to the future of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.

With the tacit consent of Marshal Antonescu, Iuliu Maniu tried to explore the Allied position by appealing to its privileged relations with Great Britain. An important role was reserved for the diplomatic channel from the Turkish capital. On September 15, 1943, Alexandru Cretzeanu, an young diplomat closed to Maniu was named Minister Plenipotentiary in Ankara by the foreign minister Mihai Antonescu. Very interesting, also in September, Frederic Nanu was appointed to Stockholm (Cretzeanu, 1998: 28). After a month spent in Istanbul, Cretzeanu was received on October 16, by President İsmet İnönü, to whom has presented his credentials (ANIC, fund MPN, informații, file 932: 4).

Cretzeanu's mission promises to be difficult because the Anglo-Americans seemed determined to respect the principle of Casablanca and, especially, not to open secrets negotiations with a satellite state without the involvement of the Soviet Union. Gafencu's diary, found in Switzerland at that time, is eloquent. On October 17, he note the disappointed that his efforts of and those of Raoul Bossy in relations with the Americans received the answer:

"The only form of proposal that the US government may be taking seriously considering is an offer of unconditional surrender".

Next day Gafencu add:

"The American response, so cold, it fits with the attitude that the US Embassy in Ankara keeps towards Cretzeanu, which was commissioned by the government and the opposition to make contact, and if it's possible to deal with the Anglo-Saxons. US will not

compromise their shaky alliance with Russia. Therefore, it is best to seek contact with Moscow." (ANIC, fund Gafencu, file 290: 257-258).

Moreover, Maniu illusions that it will only negotiate with Western powers will dissipate rather quickly. Responding to a digits telegraphic message from November 3, 1943, submitted by the Romanian opposition leader to the Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Coposu, 2014: 301), the English will specify, on November 9, to Alexandru Cretzeanu that negotiations should be held with all Allies and the Romanian emissary should be empowered to sign the unconditional surrender (Cretzeanu, 1998: 137-140). Obviously, this position was likely to deter the Romanian side.

More pragmatic showed to be the Soviets. Suddenly, on december 21, 1943, Ambassador Frederic Nanu was contacted at Stockholm by some "Bulgarian businessman" who was present as Goranov, to announce him that Moscow wanted to start negotiations with the Romanian side for a future ceasefire (Nano, 1952: 240). Noteworthy is that Stalin ambassador accredited in Sweden, Alexandra Kollontay (Duca, 1985: 54) has a great experience, which gives special importance to Goranov's proposal. Also, to suggest the Kremlin pragmatism must be stressed that Soviet diplomats in Stockholm had no problem in negotiating both with Ambassador Nanu and George Duca, his first deputy and the man of the Oppositon.

Following the proposal of Goranov, Frederic Nanu have to inform the Foreign Ministry on January 4, 1944, to present the most important elements of the meeting he had had with the charge d'affaires of the Soviet Union, Semenov (Mocanu, 1994, d. 46). Through this movement were practically started negotiations on the Stockholm diplomatic channel, which will be held in parallel with those of Cairo.

In the Swedish capital, secret talks between Nanu, Duca and Kollontay materialized into concrete proposals that the Soviet side was doing to Mihai Antonescu, implicitly to Marshal Antonescu. Moscow's initiative was fully in line with the Archibald Clark Kerr

note sent on January 16, 1944, to Molotov's deputy, V. G. Dekanosov, which stated that:

"The Soviet government will play the leading role in defining how they will be the conditions of the armistice with the Romanians."(Volokitina, 2015: 67).

On April 11, 1944, Semenov presented to Frederic Nanu the Soviet Union's first concrete proposals related to Romania's withdrawal from the alliance with Germany. It was a time when the military situation was favorable to the Red Army, so the Romanian had every interest to respond promptly to the offer made by Kremlin. On the other hand, Marshal Antonescu seemed yet to have sufficient forces for an important resistance, which explains the terms of the truce proposal. The document cited show:

"We prefer to deal with the current government of Romania and we are prepared to help him to free the country of the Germans, if it's able to organize resistance to the Germans ...

It is not true that U.S.S.R. has any intention to form a new Romanian government, led by Constantinescu or Groza (it's talking about Professor Petre Constantinescu-Iasi, met with communist views, respectively the head of the Plowman's Front, Petru Groza - o.q.) ...

As for the new Romanian government, which can be driven by Maniu or Bratianu, it can be installed in Iasi or Galati, which will soon be occupied by Soviet troops." (Nano, 1952: 247)

Specifically these are the proposals made by Moscow, presented and published later by Frederic Nanu in his memoirs also:

- A number of 13 Romanian divisions from the front Soviet to made a surprise attack on the Germans armies;
- Returning to the 1940 borders, so Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina remained to the Soviet Union;
- Romania to compensate the Soviet Union for damage caused during the three years of war;
- The exchange of war prisoners (Nano, 1952: 250, Duca, 1985: 77-78, Mocanu, 1994, d. 73).

The proposals made by the Soviet Union to Antonescu government led to response that Frederic Nanu was authorized to transmit to Alexandra Kollontay on May 29, 1944. Speaking on behalf of Mihai Antonescu, the Romanian Ambassador to Stockholm would show that the government in Bucharest is ready to accept the Soviet offer but with the following conditions:

- Granting a period of 15 days for the Wehrmacht to leave Romania, and only in a negative response to establish a collaboration between the Romanian Army and the Red Army;
- Ensuring areas where Romanian government to function freely;
- The final solution on the problem of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to be postponed to the end of the war;
- Reducing the debt amount for the damages caused in the Soviet Union territory (Vолоkitina, 2015: 73-74).

The Romanian counter proposals were received only in part by the Soviet Union, stating that it would be willing to concede only in reducing the amount of debt and the establishment of a free Romanian government, but in the Red Army controlled territory. On June 2, Frederic Nanu cabled to Bucharest to announce that Alexandra Kollontay told him that Moscow would agree that Romania would remain neutral if "the impossible happens and the Germans evacuated Romania in 15 days." It was also agreed to the proposal that a Romanian delegation of Romanian to be accepted in the Soviet Union (Nanu, 1952: 252).

In the same time with the discussions in Stockholm that Soviets conduct with Antonescu's government, started the talks with all three Allies in Cairo. The mission was entrusted to veteran politician prince Barbu Știrbey which had also family ties with the British. Interestingly, although he was sent as an emissary of the opposition led by Iuliu Maniu, he had also the agreement of the Marshal.

Barbu Știrbey was received in audience by the Marshal al January 11, 1944, at 16,30, on the Sangov Villa of the Head of State (ANIC, fund PCM, Military office Ion Antonescu, file 204/1944: 7).

After that on February 1, 1944, Alexandru Cretzeanu was briefed by British Intelligence Officer Ted Masterson, from the Middle Orient

Headquarter, that the Allies are ready to receive an envoy to Cairo, provided that he have a mandate to sign the unconditional surrender (Cretzeanu, 1998: 139-140), on February 17, prince Știrbey left the country (Coposu, 2014: 306-307). The secret mission of the Romanian diplomat was quickly unveiled on March 14, when radio B.B.C. and the famous news agency Reuters announcing Știrbey arrival in Cairo, as the envoy of the opposition, but with the consent of the Marshal Antonescu (Nano, 1952: 245).

After a preliminary discussion on March 16 with British Colonel Ted Masterson (Mocanu, 1994: 59), Barbu Știrbey started negotiations with representatives of the Big Three next day (Cretzeanu, 1998: 141), precisely when the Red Army reached the Dniester River (Mourin, 1963: 402). After three weeks of sterile talks, on April 7, Novikov informed the British counterpart, Lord Moyne, with the Soviet conditions for the armistice with Romania. Broadly speaking, they correspond to those offered by Alexandra Kollontay to the Marshal Antonescu in Stockholm. These were:

"1. Breaking with the Germans and after that Romanian troops to joint struggle with the allied troops, including Red Army, against the Germans, in order to restore the independence and sovereignty of Romania.

2. Restoring the Soviet-Romanian border from 1940.

3. Compensation for damage caused by military actions and occupation of the Soviet Union territory by Romanian troops.

4. Return of all Soviet and Allies prisoners of war including those hospitalized.

5. Ensure that the Soviet and allied troops could move freely in Romania in any direction, if this is required by the military situation, while the Romanian government have to support multilateral by its means of communication by land, water and air.

6. Soviet government agreement on canceling the Vienna arbitration ruling regarding Transylvania as unjust and helping to release the Germans and Hungarians in Transylvania, to complete the Romania's objective of returning the entire Transsylvania or the most part." (Volokitina, 2015: 68-69)

These proposals were considered sufficiently hard by the Power and the Opposition in Bucharest. Basically, it was enshrined the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, and sovereignty over the whole of Transylvania was not fully clarified (Volokitina, 2015, 1969). That is why, on the night of April 9, Iuliu Maniu was invited secretly to Snagov by Marshal Ion Antonescu for discussion. Maniu called for a quick armistice, while the Head of State believed that he could still obtain better conditions. Finally, the only concrete result of the meeting was the sending of an envoy to Cairo to sustain Prince Știrbey, on the person of the diplomat Constantin Vișoianu (Coposu, 2014: 348-349).

Following the agreement of the Three Allies, on April 12, prince Barbu Știrbey was able to submit to Maniu their encrypted proposals for an armistice with Romania (Coposu, 2014: 349-350). These were discussed at a new secret meetings in Snagov, in the night of April 16, by Antonescu and Maniu:

"After discussing of the conditions, the Marshal told Maniu that he refuses to accept the terms, but if Maniu considers that their receipt or the acceptance of Soviet clauses as a basis for discussion that would serve the country's interests, he Antonescu is ready to withdraw from the political leadership, keeping only the military leadership and to gave responsibility to Maniu ...

Maniu replied that for the moment the Marshal duty is to remain at the helm and avoid any action which could arouse suspicion to the Germans. At the same time, you must avoid rejection of the proposal and to try to obtain some improvements ... " (Coposu, 2014: 352-353).

Following the discussions between Maniu and Antonescu, as the Allies were expecting an immediate acceptance of the proposals from April 12, and the Romanian delay to accept, on April 27, from Cairo was sent an ultimatum for both Marshal Antonescu, and to Maniu, which It gave three days to a clear answer (Volokitina, 2015: 71). The one who responded was the president of the National Peasant Party. On April 29, Maniu announce that he sent instructions with the opportunity of sending Constantin Vișoianu in the Egyptian capital

and that he decided to remove Ion Antonescu from the head of the government (Volokitina, 2015: 71).

The big novelty of this telegram is, of course, about the deteriorating of the relations between Antonescu and Maniu. Marshal position differed more and more from that of the Opposition, hoping it that an effective military resistance on the front could improve the conditions of the armistice. The fact is confirmed by the transcript of the government meeting from May 6, in which occasion Antonescu said that "the situation on the Front is very good" and that "the war on the Eastern Front can not be lost by the Germans or us." (Ciucă, 2008, d.1). Therefore, the Opposition has begun preparations for the overthrow of Antonescu, grouping itself around the Palace and attracting and the communist into the National Democratic Bloc founded on June 20 (ANIC, fund NDB, file 2: 1-2).

However, the opposition does not make any concrete step to accepting the conditions of the armistice. In the meanwhile, noting that the terms of the Cairo and Stockholm had become identical, on July 4, Alexandra Kollontay was instructed by Moscow not to take any action, indicating only that the Allied response will be given to Cairo (Volokitina, 2015: 74).

The latest important initiative of the Opposition was to send an emissary over Soviet front lines, specifically General Aurel Aldea, to negotiate directly the Romania's withdrawal from the war. In this regard, on August 8, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești cabled to George Duca in Stockholm, to probe Alexandra Kollontay's position (Duca, 1985: 94-99). Acting on the basis of instructions received from home, the ambassador did not give a concrete answer, instead asking for details about King Michael's role within the opposition and the position of Gheorghe Tătărescu (Buzatu, 1990: 20). It was not until the fateful day of August 23, 1944, that Alexandra Kollontay have to send to George Duca the news that the Soviet government accepts the mission of General Aldea (Duca, 1985: 98).

The success of the act of August 23 had permit the passage of Romania in the Allied camp at the last hour. The lack of a prior agreement before Antonescu's overthrow has nothing that a negative

impact on the truce that had been delayed too large and is signed until the night of 12/13 September 1944 at a time when Soviet troops were in control of the situation prevailing in the country. In these circumstances, the problem of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina could not be raised, the only territorial satisfaction at the peace conference coming through the cancellation of the Vienna Diktat from August 30, 1940, and the return to whole Transylvania to the national territory (Onișoru, 1995: 419-428).

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