

TRUCE OR DICTATORSHIP? ON SIGNING THE TRUCE CONVENTION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND THE GREAT POWERS ON THE 12TH OF SEPTEMBER 1944

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Abstract: *The formula for the “unconditional surrender” adopted in Casablanca on the 24th of January 1943 was meant to acquaint the governments of the states at war with the United Nations with the treatment and the terms of their countries would have to take, no matter when or why they might withdraw.*

As far as Romania was concerned, the terms of surrender included, among others, demobilisation and disarmament, handing over war materials, amends etc, all of which were to be imposed on by the three great powers and had been thought mainly to secure safety and to carrying on the warfare against Germany. These objectives were considered to have deep political implications.

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The Truce Convention concluded by Romania, on the one hand, and the United Nations, on the other hand, was not the document that the Romanian opposition and the authorities had been waiting for during the secret negotiation in Cairo, Ankara or Stockholm. The formula for “unconditional surrender” adopted in Casablanca on the 24th of January 1943 was meant to acquaint the governments of the states at war with the United Nations with the treatment and the terms their countries would have to take, no matter when or why they might withdraw.

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mainly to secure safety and a carrying on of warfare against Germany. These objectives were considered to have deep political implications¹.

In the first few days right after the blow at the palace on the 23rd of August and after changing sides and turning against Germany, Romania's international political standpoint was that of *an independent state waging war against its former allies and siding with its former enemies*, part of its territory being seized from a military point of view. On entering Bucharest, the Soviet army was to find here an independent government which was both able and willing to conclude the truce and could easily take pride in having drawn upon its own resources to neutralise German troops and to set free a significant part of the national territory². If the Soviets had, by any chance, made different plans³ for Romania⁴, they were to be overthrown by king Mihai who had managed to change the course of history by having the marshal arrested. What the new Romanian authorities intended to do was to sign an agreement with the United Nations as soon as possible in order to prevent the Red army from taking military control of the whole country.

The assignment of the new government was all the more pressing as the Soviet armies, particularly their leading bodies, used to regard the country as if the territory had been occupied through fighting. Initially, the Soviets also wanted the truce to be concluded as soon as possible, for they were aware of the strategic advantage represented by the direct threat on Hungary in what was to be known as *the most important movement of front translation in the history of World War II*. Subsequently, the situation would change: Russian troops having already occupied the whole Romanian territory and the Soviet government becoming aware of the

¹ *August 23rd 1944. Documents*, vol 1, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, pp. 66-70.

² Official news released by the Soviet army mentioned fighting to set whole regions free, including the capital city, thus taking credit for something which had already been accomplished by the Romanian troops. It is also true that after Anglo-American allies had set Paris free, the Russians tried to impress by the liberation of Bucharest.

³ The scenario of taking control of Central and South-Eastern European countries was, to a great extent, similar in all *countries that had been set free by the Red army*. They would have to accept the coming to power of communist parties supported by the Soviet Union. Further reference, Sperlea, Florin, *Aparatul politic în armatele țărilor Europei Centrale și de Sud-Est (1944-1947)*, R.I.M no 1/41-1997, p. 47.

⁴ Establishing groups of *volunteers*, the constant involvement of the Moscow representatives of the Communist Party in Romania and the existence of the *volunteer* division "Tudor Vladimirescu" were enough to suggest what the true intentions of the Soviets were. The Soviet Union was taken aback by this move; they would now have to take the longer path and rely on the terms of the Truce Convention to make Romania a Communist country.

advantages that military control over Romania, the Soviets would no longer rush towards concluding the truce.

At the basis of the truce were actually the terms offered to Romania in April and reiterated on the 25th of August in the statement made by Molotov, the commissary in charge with foreign affairs on behalf of the Soviet Union. These terms were to be discussed in Moscow, where the Soviets would have a great say during negotiation with the Romanian representatives¹.

Shortly after the 23rd of August, the representatives of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union would make haste in the matter of concluding and signing the truce based on the text that had already been approved of in April 1944². The negotiation asked for further explanatory notes and annotations in the draft Truce Convention³, that is why the final text was not concluded and made known to the Romanian party until the 10th of September 1944.

The Romanian authorities would go to great lengths to conclude the Truce; to this purpose, they sent to Moscow a group made of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Ghiță Pop, Dumitru Dămăceanu, Ion Christu, who were all specialists in economic matters and international law. Unfortunately, the talks carried out in Moscow by representatives of the Romanian government and representatives of the Allies did not touch upon negotiating the suggested terms, despite the fact that the Romanian party did object to several aspects; most of their objections were overlooked by the Soviet Premier V. Molotov who was the chief negotiator of the Allies.

Despite the Soviet refusal to grant any favours, the Anglo-Americans would come to the conclusion that *the Romanians headed back home feeling that they had got off cheap*; what they found to be of greater importance was the way in which *the Soviets would interpret and bring into operation the truce terms*. The application practice to the Truce Convention signed on the 12th of September 1944 would only prove that the concern voiced by the Romanian group was only rightful; up to that

¹ Ibidem. The negotiation in which the British, the Russians and the Americans participated took longer than expected, as the allies had difficulty agreeing upon certain provisions of the Truce Convention

² Mihai, Bărbulescu, Dennis, Deletant, Keith, Hitchins, Serban, Papacostea, Pompiliu, Teodor, *Istoria României* (The History of Romania), București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1999, p. 469

³ Dennis Deletant, op. cit., p. 40. The British had in mind establishing an Allied Commission for Control, much like the one that had already been established in Italy, whereas the Soviets' proposals were either frail (fight against Germany) or, in a somewhat obscure way, less favourable to the Romanian government (the taking over of the country by the Soviet army). Thus, the idea of an autonomous area where Soviet armies would not have access was overlooked.

moment, the Romanian group had been closely and specifically informed by the government in Bucharest about the behaviour of Soviet troops and their treatment of the civil and military authorities and of the civilians. Aware of the importance of Romania's taking part in the war, the Romanian authorities would do their best to lay as soon as possible the foundations of a future co-operation with the commanding structures of the Red Army. To this end, the Romanian Department of Military Structures would even draw up a document called *Detailed Norms to ensure collaboration with the Soviet army*¹.

Unfortunately, with the signing of the Truce Convention on the 12th of September 1944, the subordination of the operative structures in the Romanian army became official; the first article read: *all enterprise against Germany and Hungary undertaken by the Romanian army, naval and air forces here included, will be supervised by the Allied (Soviet) High Command*². It was the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission, subject to the same Allied High Command, that had to supervise how the Truce provisions were brought into operation³.

During truce negotiations, the government led by Stătescu took a firm stand on the issue of war prisoners and deported persons; before leaving for Moscow, the members of the Romanian delegation were thoroughly instructed to take all necessary steps towards their release.

On the 28th of August, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Grigore Niculescu-Buzești let the Romanian Legation in Ankara know that *the Romanian government was pleased to receive the official acknowledgement of the statement made by Molotov on the 25th of August*, but its observance was conditioned by the following: *Romanian troops should no longer be disarmed, whereas the troops that had already been disarmed should be armed again and placed at the disposal of the Romanian government to take action against Germany*⁴. The directives of the Romanian minister also had in view the Romanian fleet in Constanta. But on the 1st of September the problem was still unsolved, at which point the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs sent a telegram to the same Legation in Ankara and let them

¹ Archives of the Defence Department, fund 948, file 856, p. 124

² The complete text of the Truce Convention in *România, marele sacrificat...*, op. cit. pp. 311-314.

³ In fact, by resorting to the text of the convention and by enjoying almost complete control of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission, the Soviets would try to get total control over the internal political situation, claiming that they wanted to secure *peace and order beyond the front*. They were practically free to take any course of action they wanted, as long as they could loosely interpret and bring into operation the Truce provisions.

⁴ Archives of the Defence Department, fund 71/1920-1944, Turkey, Telegrams, Ankara, pp. 134-135

know about the occupation regime set up by the Red Army and the fact that there had been delays in establishing direct contact with the Soviet commanding structures¹.

As for the condition of the Romanian troops, it was mentioned the fact that *the disarming process was not as extensive as before, but it was still going on*, pointing out that the measures taken by the Red Army could only damage the country's sovereignty and independence². The topic would occur over and over again in the newspapers the authorities in Bucharest would send to the Romanian delegation. As they kept presenting how difficult was for them to efficiently communicate with the commanding structures of the Soviet armies which had set up an occupational regime, the Romanian government would also try to bring to attention again their desire that every effort should be made in order to respect the Soviet statement made on the 25th of August. They insisted upon the important part played by the Romanian army on the 23rd of August, thus asking for another major problem to be solved: the release of the Romanian military who had been captured on the front in Moldova after the 23rd of August and who were now essential and could be sent to fight back German and Hungarian troops that were preparing offensive attack. Nobody doubted the Red Army's operational skills, but the return of the Romanian military was likely to further stimulate and raise the spirits of Romanian soldiers and officers; thus, Romania could take a more active and efficient part in the cause of the United Nations. As for the disarmament of Romanian troops, mention was made of the fact that *an agreement had been reached with General Tolbukin, who declared that disarmament would never be heard of again*. Unfortunately, Romanian authorities had been informed that the disarming process had not come to an end; it was still going on, especially in some areas in Muntenia. Therefore, the Romanian government was confident that all these problems would be dealt with upon the signing of the Truce documents³ – an event which kept being postponed.

The commanding structures of the Romanian army, that is the Romanian Department of Military Structures and its head, General Gheorghe Mihail were to pay special attention to this problem and to take the course of action that the Romanian party had hoped for, shortly after the 23rd of August. Their will was voiced by their representative in the Romanian delegation, General Dumitru

¹ *Ibidem*, vol. VIII, p. 186

² *Ibidem*. Obviously, the specification was nothing more but a reiteration of what had been stated in the telegram sent on the 28th of August: the problems and the solutions envisaged were much the same.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 241

Dămăceanu, who brought up the difficult situation of the Romanian troops that had been prevented from leaving the concentration camps in Moldova¹. At some point previous to the signing of the truce convention², in an attempt to synthesise the steps taken towards the Soviet military authorities, the Department of Military Structures would let all Romanian military know that *all efforts had been made towards the release of the officers and of the troop that had been disarmed and were arbitrarily held hostages by the Soviets*³.

The arrival of the Romanian delegation at Moscow did not automatically mean concluding the truce, the content of which was only presented as final text on the 10th of September 1944. The delay can hardly be accounted for and it resulted in the Convention being signed on the 12th of September. During Truce negotiations, the Romanian party brought up again the problem of Romanian war prisoners taken by the Red Army on the front in Moldova. On behalf of the government in Bucharest, the delegation requested that the disarming by the Red Army cease and they justified their request by stating that on the 24th of August, at 4 a.m., the Romanian Department of Military Structures had put an end to warfare against the Soviet army, and the official state of war had been made public by the Romanian government on the 25th of August⁴.

Despite the fact that the Truce had not yet been signed, Romanian representatives felt that Romanian troops were entitled to their armament, as they were actively taking part in fighting against Germany. The common cause could not be supported by disarming and confining Romanian soldiers and officers, *consequently, it was essential that Romanian armies that had been disarmed to be armed again as soon as possible to enable them to take action against Germany*⁵. The Romanian party also took into account the officers and crew in the Danube Delta and on the Black Sea which were forced to surrender by an ultimatum delivered by the commanding structures of the Soviet fleet⁶.

By supporting with arguments the proposals made by the Romanian party, the Romanian military representative, General Dumitru Dămăceanu, would insist

¹ Archives of the Defence Department, fund M. St. M., section 3, file 2876, p 23. Dumitru Dămăceanu, who had just been promoted to the rank of general, had been instructed ever since the 27th of August to ask for the Romanian troops *to be sent to an unoccupied area*.

² *Ibidem*, fund 948, file 1478, p. 244.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 205-206.

⁴ This would have tremendous impact on the German troops, as General H. Friessner stated that German troops *were in utter chaos*.

⁵ Apud Oșca, Al., Chirițoiu, Mircea, *Armistițiu sau Dictat (Truce or Dictate)* in R.I.M, no 2/1995, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibidem*

upon the precarious strategic condition of the Romanian army which, at the time, only had at its disposal *one armed division, since the others were meant for inland and the ones that had been withdrawn from Moldova had been deprived of military equipment by the Soviet Union*¹. Mention was also made of the body of troops 5, 6 and 7 which had been disarmed by the Soviets after the 23rd of August and it was suggested that the armament be handed back in order to provide the necessary equipment to the 12 Romanian divisions that were to leave for the West front, in keeping with the terms of the Truce Convention.

In the matter of the Romanian prisoners who had been in the Soviet Union from the beginning of the war to the moment when hostilities between the Romanian and the Russian armies ceased, the members of the Romanian delegation had definite, clear suggestions to make. Although they admitted that the proposal was not intended as a commitment for the Soviet government to hand them back their arms, the Romanian delegation emphasised that if this happened, it could only benefit the fight against Germany and it would help the Romanian party bring into more efficient operation the provisions of the Truce Convention². By declining, the Soviet party would thus state that the problem is within the scope of military technicians, of little present interest, despite the urge voiced by the Romanian representatives.

By going over V. M. Molotov's conversational notes on receiving the Romanian delegation on the occasion of the truce being concluded, one thing becomes transparent: the Soviet party was well aware of the fact that Romanian military were prepared to start solving military problems. This argument was rejected by the Soviet representative, who argued that *the war had been going on for three years, and now they only needed a few weeks to move on and embrace the new conditions*³. The Soviet high official also stated that, for military reasons, the proposals made by the Romanian delegation would only be analysed and dealt with *in accordance with the extent to which the Romanian government would become*

¹ Further reference The Shorthand Report of the sessions to conclude the truce between the Allied Powers and Romania, in *România, marele sacrificat*, pp. 297-309

² The issue of repatriating or of releasing the Romanian military captured by the Soviets either before or after the 23rd of August was not to be taken up, in terms of international law, before the Peace Conference in Paris in February 1947, whereas Romania was bound by convention to set free all the allied prisoners captured by the Romanian army. The Soviet Union would show no benevolence until after the 6th of March 1945, when the government led by Petru Groza and controlled by the Communists came to power.

³ *Misiunile lui A. I. Vâșinski*, Institutul Național Pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 1997, p. 66.

*involved in the war against Germany*¹. Obviously, during negotiation, that kind of statement on behalf of the Soviet party could only provide them with more opportunities to blackmail the Romanian party by consistently delaying a resolution in keeping with the terms of the truce that was to be concluded, that is *sine die*.

The return home of the Romanian delegation, after the Truce had been concluded, would bring about controversy, both within the Council of Ministers and within political parties. Whereas the Communist Party showed gratitude for the “generous” offers made to Romania, the leaders of historical parties were extremely sceptical about how the provisions of the Truce Convention would be applied and interpreted by the Soviets².

During the encounters between the representatives of the Romanian delegation with members of the government, General Dumitru Dămăceanu was to confirm that he had taken particular interest in the matter of Romanian war prisoners. His proposals envisaged grouping them into two: on the one hand, the prisoners taken between the 22nd of June 1941 and the 24th of August 1944, on the other hand, the prisoners were taken after the 24th of August, 4 a.m. The demands made by the Romanian military man included *releasing in the shortest time possible the Romanian prisoners taken before the 23rd of August and then handing back all Romanian units and formations alongside with their equipment and ammunition dumps, including the war ships on the Danube and the Black Sea, that had been captured and disarmed after the 24th of August, 4 a.m.*³ The answers the Romanian military man received from the homologous parts as representatives of the Allies suggested, once again, that the problem was to be solved in accordance with *the military co-operation and assistance Romania would offer against German and Hungarian forces*⁴. Consequently, the Truce Convention would stipulate nothing about the condition of Romanian war prisoners who were kept in camps by the Soviet Union; mention was only made of *releasing the allied prisoners* taken by the Romanian army. The only part the Convention played was that of wearing away the effects of the *coup d’Etat* on the 23rd of August 1944 which posed serious threats to Kremlin’s intentions about Romania’s post-war status.

¹ Ibidem. At the time, the Romanian government had already become entirely involved in the fight against German troops which had not left the country, paving the way for the Red Army, whereas the latter was disarming and preventing Romanian soldiers from leaving the camps along the frontline, despite their having ceased hostilities.

² Further reference, the shorthand reports of the Council of Ministers on the 1st and on the 16th of September 1944, on concluding the Truce Convention.

³ Further reference R.I.M., Al. Duțu, op. cit. p. 47

⁴ Ibidem

The controversy between Romanian representatives and Soviet representatives within the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission would only emphasise that neither party trusted that it was possible to solve the problems raised by the interpretation and the application of the text of the Truce Convention.

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